

SC proves dominant in region

By C.J. Risak
staff writer

Components of a championship team: 1. Talent. 2. Coaching. 3. Experience. 4. Timing.

All are necessary. The first three are self-explanatory. The fourth, however, is often confused with luck. It shouldn't be, although a certain amount of luck has its place on even the best of teams.

Coaches will say that the best teams create their own luck. That takes timing — or a team's ability to raise its level of play to the situation. Which is precisely what Schoolcraft College's volleyball team did last weekend at the Region 12 tournament at Kalamazoo Valley CC.

THE LADY OCELOTS have proven themselves to be the best team in the state and were ranked fifth in the NJCAA. At the regional tournament, they were seeking their second-straight title and the NJCAA tournament berth that accompanied it.

All of which concerned SC coach Tom Teeters. His team would surprise no one this year. Indeed, the 14 other regional teams would be taking dead aim at the Lady Ocelots.

Teeters' concern proved unwarranted. SC devoured its regional foes, winning all four of its matches and the region championship while losing just one game.

"I envisioned we could take it," said Teeters, who was voted the region's coach of the year. "But I thought that we could play a poor match and lose it, too. As it turned out, we only played one poor game, and only part of that game — our serving — was poor."

"All around, it was our best tour-

nament ever."

The triumph gave the Lady Ocelots just what they wanted: another shot at the NJCAA championship. A year ago they were the surprise team. They finished fifth. Teeters figures this season's squad to be even better, and has both his and their sights set higher.

THE NJCAA tournament begins Monday with pool play at Miami-Dade South CC. Each team in the four-team pools will play three best-of-three matches; the top two in each of the four pools will qualify for a double-elimination tournament on Tuesday and Wednesday.

"We're starting to prepare for it," said Teeters. "We're going in with the attitude of nothing to lose. We did that last year and we were real loose, and we knocked off Utah Tech in the first round."

SC will face a similar challenge in its pool this year. The Lady Ocelots are seeded second in their pool. No. 1 is Barton County (Mo.), a team that defeated them earlier this year 15-9, 16-14. BC is ranked fourth in the nation.

"I think we've caught up with them," said Teeters of BC. "I thought we should have beaten them earlier this year."

Teeters also figures Miami-Dade South, the tournament host and the top-ranked NJCAA team, isn't much better than the Lady Ocelots. SC lost 15-16, 16-4, 15-7 earlier to Dade. Joining BC in SC's pool are Chowan (N.C.) and Genesee (N.Y.).

"It's going to be tough," said Teeters. "Any one of the top eight teams can win it. If you're off just slightly, you can get beat."

WHICH IS a factor that could be

in the Lady Ocelots' corner. If they can once again raise their level of play to meet the challenge, they did just that at the regional tournament, persevering even when a segment of their game broke down.

Teeters was impressed with his team's performance, particularly in defeat. "We missed 14 serves and were still in the game," said Teeters. SC lost the game 17-15 to Southwestern CC in what proved to be the tournament's final match Saturday. They bounced right back to win three straight games, 15-7, 15-4, 15-8.

It was their second-straight win over SCC. Earlier, the Lady Ocelots put SCC into the losers' bracket with a 15-2, 15-5 victory. SCC got back to the finals by beating Lake Michigan CC, the team Teeters thought would challenge for the title.

Kim Relyea and Sue Cyrus sparked the final match victory. Relyea, who had a sub-par performance — by her standards — on Friday, rebounded to dominate both matches against SCC. In the final, Relyea collected 28 kills in 56 attacks with two errors, six block assists, one solo block and 39 digs with one error.

Cyrus added 21 kills in 58 attacks (four errors) and 33 digs (three errors) in the final. Jill Ehler also excelled with 11 kills in 38 attacks (two errors) and 20 errorless digs.

SC's TWO matches prior to the final, though, may have set the tone

for the tournament. Teeters called the first win over SCC "our best match of the year," thanks mainly to Relyea. She had 12 kills in 18 attacks without an error and a solo block.

"When you have that high a (kill) percentage, it can turn a team right off," said Teeters of Relyea's dominance. "They can't even get started."

Relyea wasn't at her best Friday, but it didn't matter. In what Teeters termed the key match of the tournament, SC overwhelmed LMCC 15-11, 15-1. "After we beat them 15-1, they just dropped," said Teeters. "You could see it in their faces."

Amy Lotero was LMCC's foil, serving 11 consecutive points in the second game. In 18 serves she had five aces. "She took them right out of the tournament," said Teeters.

Cyrus, who played steadily throughout the tournament, had six kills in 15 errorless attacks. Relyea had six kills in 19 attacks (one error) and Diana Dietz added five kills in 13 attacks (one error).

IN SC's 15-5, 15-1 tournament-opening win over Macon CC, Patti Kozicki's serving proved decisive. Kozicki served eight aces in 13 serves. Cyrus had eight kills in 13 attacks (one error). Ehler had six kills in 15 attacks (one error) and Dietz had five kills in 17 attacks (one error). Relyea managed just two kills in 14 attacks (one error).

Relyea and Kozicki were each nominated for all-America honors



ROB REED

Patti Kozicki (left), from North Farmington, has enjoyed a superb season as Schoolcraft College's setter — good enough to earn all-American nomination.

after the tourney. Both were selected to the all-conference, all-state, all-region and all-regional tournament teams. Cyrus also earned all-conference, all-state, all-region and all-regional tournament team hon-

ors, and Ehler was honorable mention to the all-regional tournament team. All-America honors will be announced after the NJCAA tournament.

OU to face Gannon

By C.J. Risak
staff writer

A month ago, what has become reality for Oakland University's soccer team would have only been wishful thinking.

Which illustrates just how far the Pioneers have come since a humiliating 4-0 loss to Akron, an NCAA Division I power. They are 5-9-1 since, including Saturday's 1-0 overtime win over Lock Haven in their NCAA Division II tournament opener.

"After the Akron loss, I thought it was still possible for us to get in," said OU coach Gary Parsons. "But I thought we were going to have to win the rest of our games to do it, and the way we had been playing I didn't think we could."

But something happened to the Pioneers. All season long, there was little doubt they possessed the talent to succeed. But they were young and inexperienced, with eight new starters on the field for some games.

"I saw a big change in attitude in practices the next few days," recalled Parsons. "We talked about a few things, and I think they started to realize some of the things that were doing and some of the things they weren't doing. They took a hard look at themselves."

WHAT THEY saw they couldn't have liked much. A team of promise was mired at 7-5-2. "We hit rock bottom in that (Akron) game," said Parsons. "It was the real turning point of the season for us."

And now that OU has turned its season around, nothing would be better than going back and correcting a few early-season mistakes. Like a 1-0 loss to Gannon University Sept. 21 in the National Invitational Tourna-

ment at OU.

That game launched the Knights on a crusade to the No. 1 ranking in Division II. They have since dropped to No. 4 after losing their season finale to Davis and Elkins.

The two teams will stage a rematch in Erie, Pa., at 1 p.m. Saturday in the Division II quarterfinals. Parsons outlined his team's "needs" to beat OU and advance to the Division II semifinals as:

- "We need to shoot from 25 yards out and in."
- "We need to get the ball wide, take it to the end line and cross it into the box."
- "We need to work on our free kicks and our set-up game."
- "We need to counterattack well."
- "We need to play good, tight defense."

If all that sounds like standard, not-too-daring strategy, consider the opposition. OU is "not a very wide-open, attacking team," said Parsons. "Their strength is the fact they keep their people back, play well in front of their net and have a good keeper."

These types of games are low scoring. Mistakes are few. Everyone plays it pretty tight."

PARSONS DOESN'T figure to get many breaks from the well-disciplined Knights. That's why he's been working hard on counterattacking well. "We'll get scoring chances by winning the ball in our own end and breaking out fast" — and on executing their set plays.

"It usually comes down to who executes their set plays well in these games," he said. That's just what happened in OU's win over Lock Haven.

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