

Churchill passes test at S'craft

By Brad Emons
staff writer

Livonia Churchill entered Saturday's 18th annual Schoolcraft Volleyball Invitational undefeated, but untested.

After an exhausting 13-hour day, the Chargers were still undefeated and getting A-pluses for their performance. They eliminated Wayne Memorial in an all-Oakland final, 15-5, 15-17, 15-5.

Churchill ran its record to 30-0 by winning all eight matches at the 29-school event. The Chargers were unbeaten in pool play and whipped through four elimination rounds, including an impressive 15-1, 15-6 semifinal win over state-ranked Livonia Ladywood, following a 15-5, 15-1 victory over defending Schoolcraft champ East Kentwood. See special summary.

"You can't be ranked until you beat teams that are ranked," Churchill coach Mike Hughes said. "They've talked about being ranked, but they understand why they weren't."

Hughes admitted the Chargers had played a suspect schedule, despite winning tournaments at Howell and Wayne State.

BUT AFTER SATURDAY'S impressive showing, the Chargers earned their just reward, cracking the top 10 in the Class A coaches poll on Monday.

"We knew we had good athletes, but the question was whether we could play at another level," Hughes said. "The kids played well all day long."

The Chargers' demolition of Ladywood served notice that Churchill meant business.

Ladywood, behind the setting of Mary Jo Kelly and the serving of Keli Haeger, had just come off a stirring 7-15, 15-6, 15-10 quarterfinal win over Livonia Stevenson.

But in the next round the Blazers encountered a buzzsaw in Churchill.

"Consistency is the key for Churchill," Ladywood coach Tom Teeters said. "They're all consistent players and they have a bit of power."

offensively. If you don't match up with them, they'll wear you out."

Ladywood advances in playoffs

Livonia Ladywood swept Dearborn Divine Child (15-8, 15-8) and Harper Woods Regina (15-4, 15-4) on Monday to gain a spot in Wednesday's Catholic League A-B Division volleyball finals against favorite Farmington Hills Mercy. (Results of the final will appear in Monday's Observer.)

In the quarterfinal victory over Divine Child, Mary Jo Kelly and Rebecca Willey spearheaded the Blazers with six kills each. Keli Haeger contributed nine assists, while Val Adzima had six digs.

Haeger and Willey each recorded eight kills in the lopsided semifinal win over Regina. Kelly added 12 assists, while Julie Wilson collected eight digs.

Janel Hemme added two solo blocks and two block-assists, while Liz Gunn served three aces.

Ladywood is 36-10-2 overall.



Rebekah King of Farmington challenges Canton's Stephanie Gray (17) and Jori Welchans at the net Monday. The Falcons won in three games.

Senior middle hitters Alyssa Belaire and Christina Garry provided a strong one-two punch for the Chargers.

But equally effective in their roles were Stephanie Speen, Janine Sproul, Keri Hawkins and setter Amy Baron. The Chargers also got lifts off the bench from Julie Campau, Kristi Szymanski and Ellen Lesig.

BELAIRE, who at 5 feet, 7 inches, plays an all-around game, served nine points to beat Wayne in the opening game of the championship, 15-5. Hawkins added four service points.

The Zebras, also out to prove they were for real, came storming back in the second game behind the hitting of Brandy Caineross, the 6-foot senior bound for Ferris State.

Playing with two pins in her right pinky resulting from a broken finger, Caineross was given clearance by her doctor to suit up for Saturday after missing the last couple of matches.

And behind the serving of Kathryn Corwin and Gerri Ruffing, along with the defensive play Denise Walsh, Wayne was able to win the second game, 17-15.

With the score deadlocked at 15-

all and Churchill serving, Wayne Junior Dana Walls made the play of the game, saving a ball well behind the back row and turning it into a point when ball grazed the net.

Vicki Rohraff then served the final two points to pull Wayne even in games at 1-1.

"THERE ISN'T a lot of luck involved in volleyball, but at that time the momentum had turned against us," Hughes said. "But we had some lucky things happen to us earlier in the day, too. It all balances out. We were just glad to have a chance at another game."

Churchill left little doubt about the final outcome in the decisive third game.

Garry, a 5-8 senior who hits a heavy ball, registered one block and five kills that went for points. Baron served four points, including an ace, as Churchill captured its first Schoolcraft title ever.

"What we do well is play defense because we're not very big," Hughes said. "We block well for kids our size. That's just comes from desire."

"And we have six senior athletes that are just outstanding. They have experience and that's why they're able to play well. Four were varsity kids as sophomores. They've been

volleyball

SCHOOLCRAFT INVITATIONAL VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT RESULTS

Championship: Livonia Churchill defeated Wayne Memorial, 15-3, 15-17, 15-5.
Semifinals: Churchill def. Livonia Ladywood, 15-1, 15-6; Wayne def. Farmington Hills, 15-5, 15-11, 15-10.
Quarterfinals: Churchill defeated East Kentwood, 15-5, 15-1; Wayne def. Dearborn, 15-9, 15-10; Dearborn def. Farmington Hills, 15-7, 15-5; Ladywood def. Livonia Stevenson, 7-15, 15-6, 15-10.
Elimination round: Stevenson def. Dearborn, 15-3, 15-5; Churchill def. Harper Woods Regina, 15-1, 15-6; Dearborn def. Grand Blanc, 15-7, 15-9; Marian def. Farmington Hills, 15-7, 15-9.

POOL RECORDS (top 2 only)

Pool A: 1. Ladywood, 8-0; 2. Farmington Hills, 7-1.
Pool B: 1. Churchill, 8-0; 2. Grand Blanc, 6-2.
Pool C: 1. Farmington Hills, 3-5; 2. Dearborn, 2-6.
Pool D: 1. Dearborn, 7-2; 2. Stevenson, 6-2.
Pool E: 1. Wayne, 7-1; 2. Dearborn, 6-2.
Pool F: 1. Dearborn, 6-2; 2. Dearborn Heights Bishop Foley, 0-6.
Pool G: 1. East Kentwood, 0-1; 2. Marian, 0-2.
Pool H: 1. Dearborn, 4-4; 2. Dearborn Heights Bishop Foley, 0-6.
Pool I: 1. Walled Lake Central, 0-1; 2. Dearborn, 0-2.
Pool J: 1. Farmington Hills, 2-7; 2. Lansing Catholic Central, 1-6.

excellent. They've played well all season and they're awfully good people. They're good students and that makes a difference."

Wayne coach Ann Kolnits, whose team is 27-5-1, was impressed with the way Churchill played.

"THEY HAD ALL six playing in this match (the final) and we did not have all six," she said. "They don't make mistakes. No play is impossible for them. They play with a ton of confidence."

Wayne also can play confidently, especially when Caineross, the area's most feared hitter and blocker, gets on a roll.

"She (Caineross) did great," Kolnits said. "We put her through two tough practices and it (the finger) doesn't hurt at all."

Wayne also served notice in pool play that was ready for bigger and better things, topping No. 4 Grand Rapids Forest Hills Central and splitting with Stevenson.

In the semifinals, Wayne ousted always-tough Temperance-DeFord, 15-6, 15-11, 15-10.

"This was a stepping stone, I thought," Kolnits said. "I think we learned that we can play with more than the teams we see in the Wolverine (League)."

Stevenson tops rival Chargers

By Brad Emons
staff writer

Livonia Churchill apparently couldn't stand prosperity.

The 30-0 state-ranked Chargers, fresh off their conquest Saturday of the prestigious Schoolcraft Volleyball Invitational, came crashing down to the earth Monday, losing the first match of the season at home to city rival Stevenson.

In a Western Lakes Activities Association showdown, 15-13, 10-15, 2-15, 15-12, 15-9.

"Give Stevenson credit," Churchill coach Mike Hughes said. "They played excellent volleyball. It was obvious they came into our gym ready to play."

"Their kids should be proud and we don't have any excuses."

Riding the crest of their Schoolcraft triumph, Churchill appeared to have things well in hand, despite losing the opening game, 15-13.

The Chargers, behind the hitting and all-around play of seniors Christina Garry and Alyssa Belaire, took the next two games, 15-10 and 15-2, and were in control during the fourth game, taking a 8-2 advantage before Stevenson got hot.

The Spartans erased the deficit in the fourth game behind the hitting of Teresa Sarno (five kills) and Sue Bell (three), along with the serving of Allecia Smith (six points) and Laura Zatorski (five). Their efforts helped Stevenson post a come-from-behind 15-12 win.

THEN IT WAS no contest in the final game (15-0) as the 5-9 Sarno and 6-1 Julie Martin controlled the net. Collette Rockwell and setter Patty Diamond served six and five points, respectively to leave Stevenson (25-6 overall) as the only unbeaten team in the WLAA.

Churchill might have been more tired than Livonia Ladywood. "It would have been easy for us to lose the fourth game, but our girls hung tough. I think our pool Saturday at Schoolcraft with Forest Hills (Central) and Wayne (Memorial) got us ready."

"Then they started to believe in themselves. We got some hits across the court and to the middle."

The Stevenson coach also made a defensive adjustment. "We played a different defense than we played all day," he said.

"We adjusted our front and back rows. We didn't leave a hole in the middle and we were able to counter their dinks and dumps."

Stevenson neutralized the hitting of Garry and Julie Campau up front, while getting solid defensive plays from Rockwell, who is just returning to the lineup after being out a month with an injury.

"COLLETTE GAVE us a big lift defensively and she's always been a solid passer," Cagle said. "I think in the fourth and fifth games we served with more authority and passed the ball better. And (Patty) Diamond made all the right sets at the right time."

The Spartans were flying high by the fifth game after rallying to win the fourth.

"You just seem to get up quicker and higher on the blocks," said Stevenson coach. "Things just started going right in the fifth game and everything was working."

Churchill, playing before a sizable home crowd, left the court somewhat in shock. Hughes held a brief meeting with his players following the match to calm and reassure his squad.

"It's hard to tell how they'll react," he said. "It's a little bit difficult, but Stevenson was clearly the better team. They passed, hit and set better . . . and they played great defense. They made us do a lot of bad things. And Cagle outcoached me."

Although both teams have their division titles locked up — Stevenson in the Lakes and Churchill in the Western — the match was more than just a WLAA crossover.

"IT'S FOR BRAGGING rights, psychologically it means a lot," Hughes said. "We learned that if we get to the conference (playoffs) championship, it's time to get serious. You have to be on your toes or you'll go home early."

"We just hope to play better in the conference championship," Cagle echoed Hughes' sentiments.

"We both knew this would be very important," said the Stevenson coach. "We really didn't want to face each other on Saturday (at Schoolcraft). This was really important for our seniors because they had never beaten Churchill. It's good for their confidence and their self-esteem. Churchill is a good team and they do things wonderfully, that's why I'm so happy with the win."

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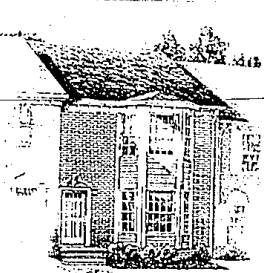
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