

Churchill coach has low-key style



Brad Emmons

THE COACH OF the newly-crowned state Class A volleyball champion was standing, to some unfinished business late Monday afternoon, in his office.

"What are you doing there at this hour?" I asked him over the phone around 5:30 p.m.

Mike Hughes replied: "We've got a conference coming up on Russian history. I had to catch up on a few things. Remember, I wasn't in school on Friday."

Most of the time Hughes considers himself a social studies teacher, not a coach.

"Teaching is my love, that's what I do best," he said. "Coaching is something I enjoy, but it's not nearly as important."

But over the weekend, Hughes' coaching job could not be ignored.

After 14 years, Hughes reached the mountain top, guiding Livonia Churchill to three straight victories, including a 15-12, 15-10 victory Saturday over Temperance-Bedford in the final at Kalamazoo's Nazareth College.

In 1977-78, Hughes and Churchill reached the state quarterfinals before losing to Warren Cousino. In 1978-79, Cousino toppled Churchill again in the finals.

SO WAS IT time to let loose, do a little dance and parade the state championship trophy around the gym -- right?

No, it's Hughes' style.

If his players do the celebrating, treating the conquest as just another match.

Pack the balls in the bag and head home.

It was the same way six weeks ago when his Churchill team, unbeaten and untested, left a path of destruction against a field of state-

nice if I took over, even though I didn't know much about it. She went to work in the Peace Corps. She's been in the Philippines and Colombia. The last time I talked to her was two years ago. I have a great deal of respect for her."

Hughes received on-the-job training and attended as many coaching clinics as he could, soaking up valuable tips.

APPARENTLY he was a quick learner, leading Churchill to the titles after only three years on the job.

In 14 seasons he has only had one losing record. His overall mark is 399-116-32.

This year's team broke the school record for wins, finishing 47-11.

On paper, the Chargers are not impressive, their tallest player being only 5-foot, 9-inches.

Temperance-Bedford marched into Nazareth's gym as the overwhelming favorite with a 65-0 record, but when it came all over, many fans and coaches in the stands admitted the tenacity and teamwork displayed by Hughes' club.

After Friday's 15-7, 15-6 quarterfinal win over Grosse Pointe South, Hughes and his girls scouted the rest of the competition and came away convinced they could win it all.

"It was an honor to be there, but they believed they could beat the other teams," Hughes said. "Wayne State, Eastern Michigan, Western Michigan, Holland, West Ottawa to the limit (a 12-15, 15-15 final score). There was no question in their minds they could play West Ottawa. They felt they were the best team."

THE SCOUTING report on Churchill: Small team, scrappy, good defensively.

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The Mustangs did pull within two points at 5-7, but the Wolves staged a four-point run enroute to an easy victory.

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Storin finished the match with 14 kills. Teammate Trina Govan added seven kills. Tanghe finished with a 16-16 serving performance, including one ace.

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