Vikings rally to beat Maples, win regional tourney title

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VOLLEYBALL

Birmingham Seaholm's volleyball team left the court Saturday knowing it let a precious opportunity slip through its fingers.

The Maples were four points away from earning a trip to the Class A quarterfinals, but instead they watched Walled Lake Central stage a stunning comeback. The Vikings overcame a substantial deficit in the final game and the result was a 17-19, 15-10, 15-12 regional final triumph at Birmingham Groves.

"I just told my girls there is a window of opportunity in every match, and you either jump through or you don't," Seaholm coach Kerri Morrison said. "And we simply didn't take advantage. There were times we had opportunities to win that match, and we didn't take advantage of those opportunities."

It was a disappointing finish to what was otherwise a tremendous season for Seaholm. The Maples (44-7-3) won the Oakland Activities Association Division I title with a 12-0 record and captured their first district championship in seven seasons.

As for Saturday's regional competition, Seaholm and Central both recorded convincing victories in the semifinals. The Maples outlasted OAA foe Troy 15-4, 15-8, while the Vikings knocked off Farmington Hills Mercy by a 15-6, 15-9 count.

Troy, which enjoyed a fine season under first-year coach Bob Perkins, finished with a 35-11-2 record; coach Ed Moeller's Mercy Marlins exited the tournament at 31-18-1.

The Seaholm-Central match was a battle from start to finish.

The Maples scored four unanswered points – junior Elizabeth Green's tip kill set up the game-clinching run – to erase a 17-16 deficit and win a long and emotional first game.

But the momentum didn't carry over to Game 2 as Central built an 8-0 lead and held on despite watching its lead shrink to 11-10.

"You think it would be an advantage to win 19-17, but I find a lot of teams are emotionally spent even though they win those games," Morrison said. "And I thought we came out pretty flat that second game."

The Maples regrouped and took control early in the deciding game, establishing leads of 5-1, 9-4 and 11-6, behind the strong play of Green, junior Lauren Burke and seniors Amy Hasler and Lisa Townsend. But their power game suddenly disappeared and errors began to pop up.

Heather Lippert's solo block brought the Vikings within 11-8, but it was the 6-foot-1 junior's two serving aces shortly thereafter that closed the gap to 11-10 and gave the Vikings a huge emotional lift. That's because Lippert was serving for the first time this season.

"She's been working on it real hard and for her to come in and do that is like a fairy tale kind of thing, and I think it was a big pick-up for the kids," Central head coach Mike Lindstrom said. "The girls all put it on the floor when it had to be there, and I think it kind of took the wind out of Seaholm there at the end.

"Momentum is so crazy in this game; it really is. It was a chance, but we needed to get Heather around to the front again and when she did it was big-block time."

Central forged ahead 13-12 before Lippert and senior setter Colleen Saldana combined on blocks that produced the final two points of the match.

"We should have closed it down (at 11-5) and we didn't," Morrison said. "I'm sure if you had a videotape and could reconstruct what happened at that point, you could see that it was mistakes, mistakes, mistakes.

"We thought we had an opportunity to do really well here and it's disappointing. We're not quite there, not ready to take our game to the next level. Taking your game to the next level means executing the basics."

Senior outside hitter Christina Tudor had 26 digs and went 36-of-39 attacking with 20 kills in the final for Central. Lippert, who finished 3-of-3 serving with two aces, contributed 17 kills on 26-of-26 attacking and eight blocks and Saldana registered 48 assists and five blocks. Henzie went 41-of-49 attacking with 18 kills and 14-of-15 serving.

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