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Mustangs win league title over Marlins

BY DAN O'NEARA
STAFF WRITER

VOLLEYBALL

The game of volleyball all hinges on the ability to execute two seemingly simple aspects of the sport — serving and serve-receive.

Birmingham Marian did both better than Farmington Hills Mercy Thursday, and that's why Marian is the 2003 Catholic League champion.

The Mustangs served and received serves more efficiently in the first and third games, Mercy the second.

The end result was a 15-11, 10-15, 15-2 victory for Marian in the tournament final at Madonna University in Livonia.

"When our passing is there and we're able to use all of our options, we're tough," Marian coach Anne Vondracek said.

"We have five hitters who can swing and a setter who can get the ball there. All we have to do is pass."

"It's such an important part of every match. If you can't pass the ball, it doesn't matter how good your hitters and setters are."

The Mustangs bolted to a 4-0 lead to start the match and increased their lead to 7-1 and 13-3.

It looked as if they had the game wrapped up, but the Marlins managed to make it interesting.

Mercy rallied for seven straight points behind the serving of Chloe Kraft and Anne Roosevelt to make it 14-11.

Marian used a timeout to break Mercy's momentum, and Courtney Paszkiewicz served up an ace for the winning point when play resumed.

The comeback by the Marlins only served to mask the poor defense that

them at such a disadvantage in the first place.

"I got frustrated because some players play out of their minds and then make the silliest errors," Mercy coach Ed Ruhl said.

"It's everything we work on in practice. Then we don't execute when it comes game time. We just need to get back to passing well. That's all we need to work on."

"When we ran the show, they couldn't stop us; when they ran the show, we couldn't stop them. It all comes down to serve and serve-receive."

Marian again led early in the second game, 4-1, but this time Mercy rallied sooner and managed to get the lead.

But it was always a tenuous lead of just several points (7-4, 9-6, 11-7 and 12-9) until the Marlins clinched the win with Kraft serving the final three.

Marian tried to break her momentum with a timeout, too, but the Mustangs couldn't handle Roosevelt's desperation, two-handed return that fell in the middle of the court.

"We weren't very efficient; we weren't there in the second game," Vondracek said.

"In the third game, we were really on fire. We came back with our heads on straight and played great."

Kraft served an ace to start the third game, but it was all Mustangs after that. Mercy's defense and serving faltered, and Marian re-asserted itself with 6-foot-1 senior hitter Sarah Kreher leading the way.

Despite many sideouts, the Marlins couldn't get anything going, and the Mustangs gradually built their lead.

Kreher (University of Toledo) served the last four points,

including an ace for the 15th.

"Sarah is a really big part of our team," Vondracek said. "When she's on, she's just unstoppable. She's a senior and it's her third year on varsity. She didn't want the streak to be broken on her watch."

It's the third consecutive league title for Marian.

Vondracek and her sister, Marian assistant coach Sarah Poglits, helped Livonia Ladywood win nine in a row (1992-2000). Their younger sister, senior Erin Poglits, is the Marian setter and will play at St. Johns University in New York.

"My sister and I won the championship every time we played in it, and we expect nothing less from the girls," Vondracek said.

"They know what it takes to win it, and we know how hard they've worked to win it. We needed to come in and get it done and we did."

Mercy senior hitter Tessa Kuykendall (Rice University) was a standout for the Marlins with many kills and blocks.

"Marian adjusted well and did stop Tessa, but she didn't get the sets where she needed them," Ruhl said. "It's not all the setter's fault. We served like scared kids."

"In the first game, it's 11-1 and then 11-15. After the game is out of reach, we play like superwomen."

Mercy, which lost all six matches with Marian last year and is 0-3-1 this season, is still fighting the Marian mystique, too.

"One more time we're going to see them," Ruhl said. "We should both make it to the regional final."

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