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Sports

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OFSAA champs

Abbey Park wins girls' volleyball AAA title

by Herb Garbutt
Oakville Beaver Staff

It was the early stages of the provincial high school tournament when a group of Abbey Park parents overheard coaches from another team talking about the Eagles.

"Where are the weaknesses?" the coaches asked. "How do you beat them?"

Opposing coaches are still searching for that answer after Abbey Park rallied from an opening-set loss in the gold medal game to take the next three and win the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations girls' triple-A volleyball title Wednesday in Kingsville.

Abbey Park clinched the gold in a thrilling fourth set during which the Eagles staved off set point three times and the lead changed hands nine times before the Eagles put away the 29-27 victory.

"They stayed calm and confident out there and they never stopped fighting," said Eagles coach Julie Burr. "They refused to lose."



The Abbey Park Eagles won the provincial girls' volleyball AAA title Wednesday in Kingsville. Members of the team are (back row, from left) Jenny Torrens, Devyn Mackenzie, Tori Gorrell, Sarah Williams, Melissa Langegger, Sydney McIntosh, coach Julie Burr, (front, left to right) Brady Martin, Sarah Scott, Niki Bozinoski and Onaope Egbedeyi-Emmanuel. Missing from photo are Kristen Kirk, Mercedes Hinder and coach Christy Holmes.

| photo by Cathy Young — Special to the Beaver

“They never stopped fighting. They refused to lose.”
Julie Burr
Abbey Park coach

dancing during warm-ups, they were celebrating points during the game. They were having fun,” Burr said. “In the final, they came out a little flat. They weren’t playing with the same energy. They were playing tentative and a few times the ball landed between two of them. They just weren’t communicating.”

Abbey Park had won 14 straight sets at the tournament before suffering its first setback, falling 25-17 to top-seeded Oakridge Secondary in the opener of the final. The Eagles were tied 6-6 in the second set when captain Niki Bozinoski sparked an Abbey Park run with a block, followed by two big kills. The Eagles took 10 of the next 11 points and alleviated any concerns Burr may have had.

“In the semifinals, they were dancing during warm-ups, they were celebrating points during the game. They were having fun,” Burr said. “In the final, they came out a little flat. They weren’t playing with the same energy. They were playing tentative and a few times the ball landed between two of them. They just weren’t communicating.”

“We had that run during the second set and you could see it in their demeanor and their attitude,” she added. “It just kind of clicked.”

Abbey Park evened the match with a 25-17 win and Sarah Williams and Tori Gorrell helped the Eagles carry the momentum into the third set, putting away several points each to build a 15-9 advantage. A string of serves from Sarah Scott and strong play at the net by Onaope Egbedeyi-Emmanuel helped Abbey Park finish off the 25-19 win.

The final set never saw Abbey Park and Oakridge separated by more than three points. The Eagles faced set point — and the prospect of a fifth and deciding set — at 24-23, 25-24 and 27-26, but each time dug down to get the point they needed, finally scoring three straight to close out the match.

“When that last point hit the floor, it was a pretty surreal moment,” Burr said. “To see all their hard work pay off, it was a great moment. Definitely the highlight in my coaching and athletic career.”

The remarkable thing about the opposing coaches’ early take on the Eagles is that Abbey Park didn’t fully utilize Gorrell, a

Grade 11 student who has already committed to Penn State, until the final day of the tournament. Coming off an injury, Gorrell didn’t play a full set until the semifinals. And Abbey Park still didn’t lose a set.

“It was really a testament to our depth. Brady Martin and Devyn Mackenzie came in and played some big minutes for us,” Burr said, “Niki and Sarah (Williams) were hitting so well and Melissa Langegger, a Grade 10 kid, took Tori’s spot and was just owning the net. It was amazing to watch her come into her own.”

Add in Gorrell — “she’s definitely one in a million,” Burr said — and the Eagles were unstoppable.

And they may be just as tough to beat next year with four of the six starters returning. Bozinoski, who is headed to the University of Buffalo, and Scott, the Eagles’ setter, “will leave some big shoes to fill,” Burr said.

“But we’ve got a great core group of girls coming back. They’re already excited about next season.”

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