

SPORTS

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Drury stuns Aquinas to become champions

By Herb Garbutt
HALTON MEDIA GROUP

The E.C. Drury Spartans put together as dominant a performance as you will see in high school volleyball. And their timing could not have been better.

The Spartans rallied from an opening set loss in which they looked confused and unorganized to win the Halton senior girls' A/AA volleyball title with two sets in which they mowed down the defending champions with the ruthlessness of professional assassin.

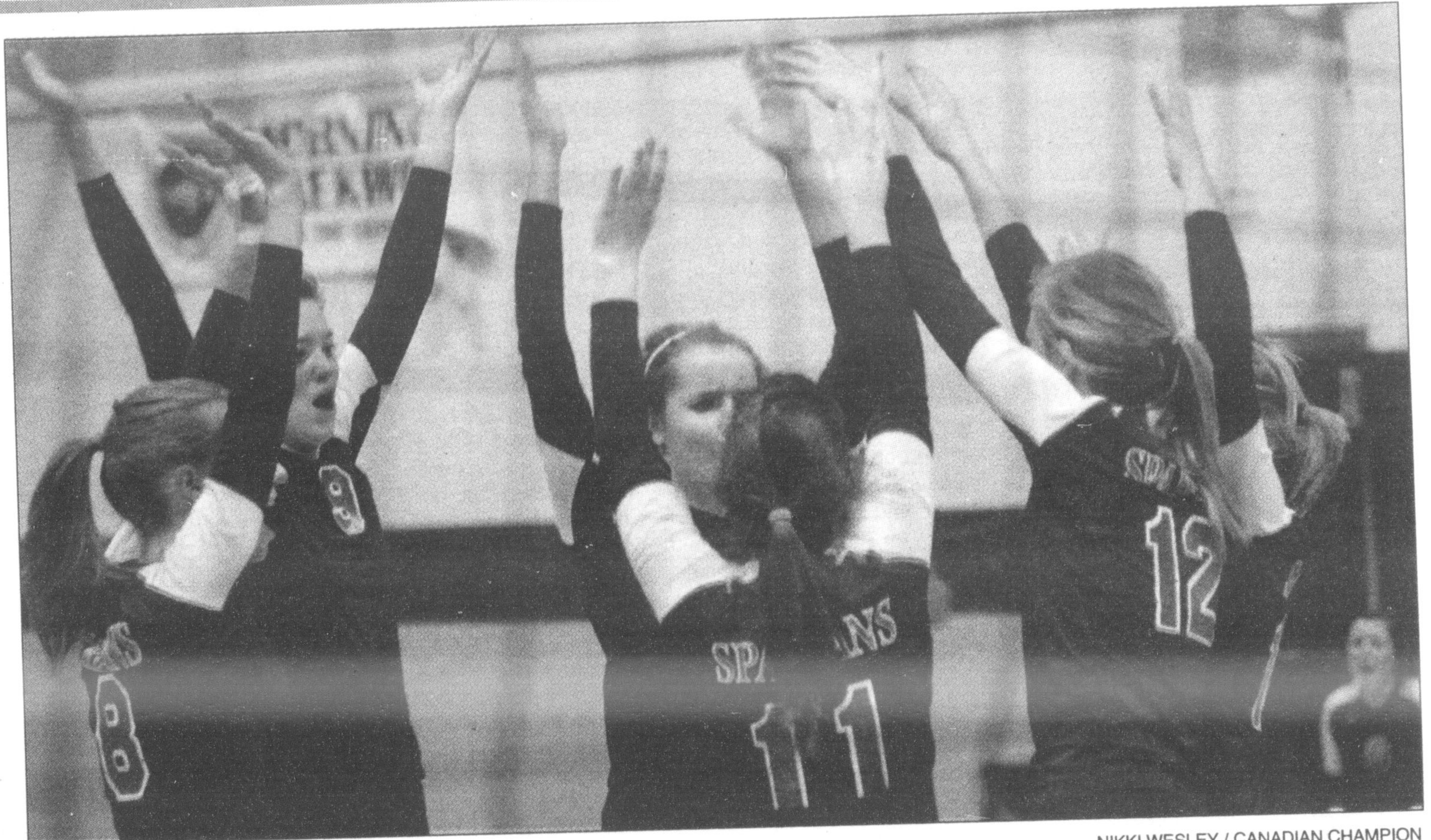
"They just sucked the life out of us," said St. Thomas Aquinas coach Peter Szpakowski after Drury's 16-25, 25-5, 15-3 victory Thursday afternoon. "As much as we tried, we just couldn't come back from that."

"That" was Drury's commanding victory in the second set, which they opened with 12 consecutive points on its way to a 21-1 lead. What made "that" so surprising was that it looked like Drury was in for a short afternoon after a disastrous opening set in which they never held or shared the lead. But Drury turned the tables in the final two sets, never trailing in either.

"We've been waiting for this for a long time," said the Spartans' Meg Rector, who drove home five of the last seven points to secure the championship. "It feels great."

Aquinas had little in the way of answering the triple attack of Tory McCutcheon and the Rector sisters, Meg and Bri. Aquinas attempted to tip the ball over them in the opening set but once Drury's defensive coverage improved and they came up with some blocks, it was all over.

Nicole Woods served up the first 12 points of the second set, a run in which McCutcheon delivered five kills, pounding the ball to the floor in front of Aquinas' help-



NIKKI WESLEY / CANADIAN CHAMPION

GOTTA HAND IT TO THEM: Members of the E.C. Drury Spartans, from left Tasha Brunner, Tory McCutcheon, Bri Rector, Danielle Munday, Meg Rector and Jenn Armstrong raise their hands in celebration after winning a point in Thursday's Halton senior girls' volleyball final. The Spartans rallied for a 16-25, 25-5, 15-3 victory over the defending champions, St. Thomas Aquinas Raiders.

less defenders.

"We knew we could play like that," said McCutcheon, who is bound for the University of Central Florida next year. "We just had a few nerves at the beginning. Once we got rid of the nerves, we were hitting pretty good."

Woods took a simple approach to keeping the roll going.

"I just tried to pretend every serve was the first serve," she said.

It seemed to work, though she also kept the streak rolling by diving flat out to keep a ball alive for the 10th point.

When Woods finally did miss long on a serve, Aquinas couldn't capitalize and McCutcheon reeled off nine in row to cap a ridiculous stretch that ended when a ball dropped between two Drury players — a rare miscue in the last two sets.

"We just didn't go crazy," said Meg Rector. "We just kept it simple so we didn't do something like touch the net."

Which is what made the run of 21 of 22 points so incredible. There are so many things that can go wrong — a missed serve, a net violation, a missed spike — that it is almost impossible to put together such a long run, particularly in a title game against the two-time defending champion.

Aquinas showed a brief sign of life by staving off set point twice but when Drury ran off five straight to take a 6-1 lead in the deciding set, it was all but over.

"They have three girls that can smash the ball," said Szpakowski. "We knew we couldn't go toe-to-toe with them."

It wasn't just the force they hit the ball with but the precision.

"Our big girls were just picking spots at will," said Drury coach Kevin Houldcroft.

Houldcroft delivered a simple message after the opening set, "Girls you don't want to go out like this."

Particularly after the year Drury enjoyed. They had swept 14 consecutive matches in

league play heading into the final. The loss in the opener was their first loss in 29 sets. It would have been easy for Drury to fold after the loss but instead, with their season on the line, they responded with their best volleyball of the season.

"Peter's teams are always good. They always have been," said Houldcroft. "I'm just so happy for the girls and to have the people from Drury come out and support us, I'm getting very emotional."

Drury's comeback assures them of being able to stir some more emotions. They will now play in the Ontario Federation of Schools Athletic Association (OFSAA) AA championship in Kenora. The provincial high school tournament begins March 9.

The Milton District Mustangs won the junior girls' volleyball championship by beating St. Thomas Aquinas. See Wednesday's Champion for details.

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