

SPORTS

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Senior Spartans set to defend volleyball title

By Herb Garbutt

METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

The E.C. Drury Spartans nearly gave away a golden opportunity, but their coach was able to find a silver lining.

The Spartans' demonstrated just how dominant they can be as they opened Friday's Halton senior girls volleyball semifinal with a 25-3 victory over the Acton Bearcats. But the young Spartans squad showed a bit of inexperience as well, allowing their season to teeter on the brink after allowing Acton to take the second game 25-23.

In the end, Drury prevailed by taking the deciding game 15-6, allowing the Spartans to advance to Wednesday's final (game time is 5 p.m.) at Sheridan College in Oakville. And as scary as it was to see his team's season on the line, Drury coach Kevin Houldcroft said there were some valuable lessons in the semifinal victory that could help them repeat as Halton champions.

"That second game was good on two fronts. First, now they see what happens when you take your foot off the pedal. You have to focus on every point and know what you're going to do, especially when you get deep in the playoffs," Houldcroft said. "Second, it shows we have character."

The Spartans' opponent in the final, the undefeated St. Thomas Aquinas Raiders, will not be as forgiving should Drury let its guard down. Not only are the Raiders a perfect 11-0 including playoffs, they have yet to drop a set this season and have the added motivation of losing to Drury in last year's final.

The Spartans will have their own motivation, though. Having won the consolation championship at last year's Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations (OFSAA) tournament, they are ready to take a run at the big prize this time around.

Friday's semifinal wasn't the only adversity the Spartans have faced this season. They came into the season having to over-

come the losses of Tori McCutcheon, who earned a scholarship to the University of Central Florida, and Meg Rector, who was named to the Atlantic University Sports (AUS) all-rookie team at Acadia. Then mid-season Bri Rector was sidelined with an ankle injury and for a time they were also without Tasha Brunner, who was away on a school trip. Rector, the team's captain, helped Defensa win the Ontario under-16 championship last year while Brunner suits up for the Georgetown Impact.

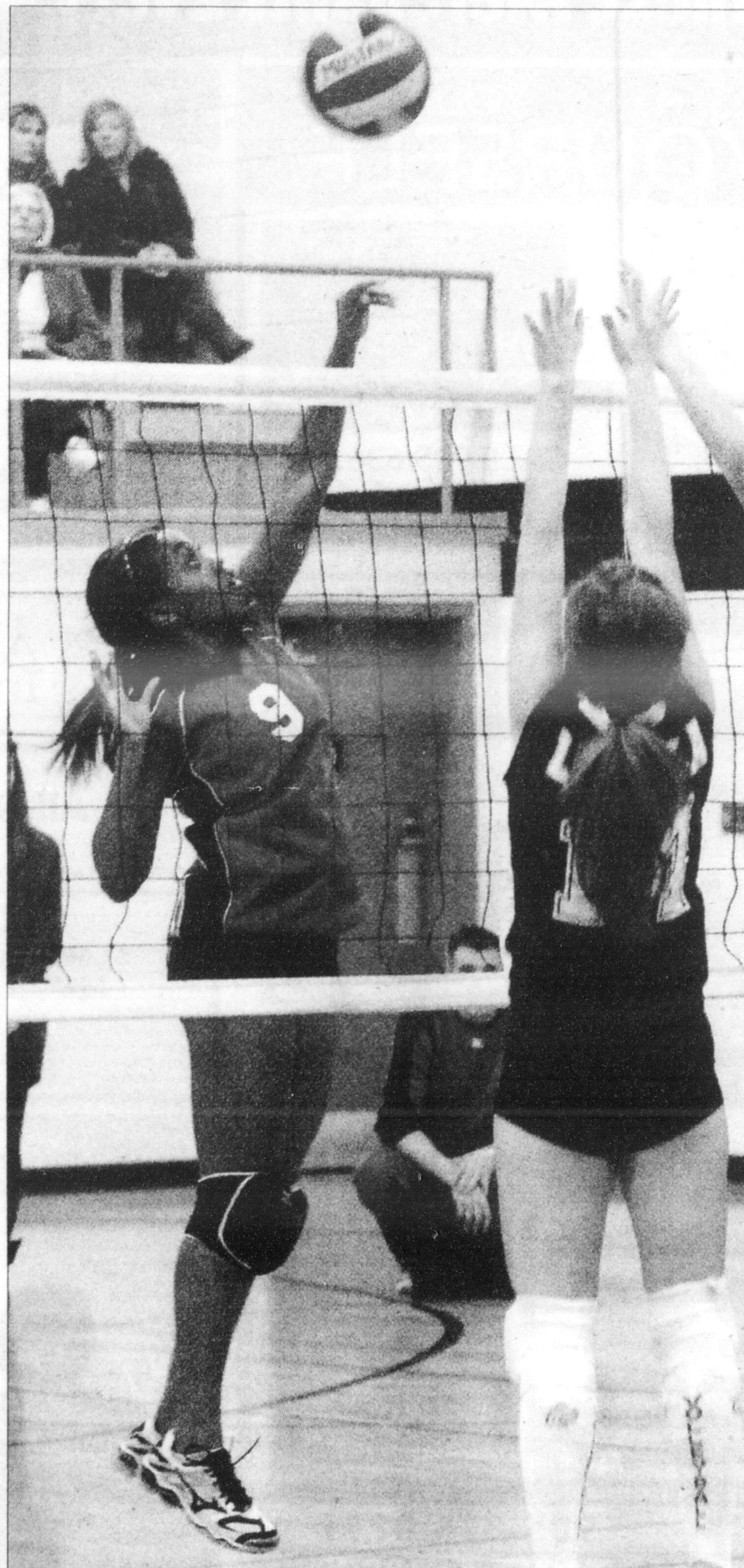
In the absence of the team's two club players, Nicole Woods, who like the other two earned a starting role on the Spartans as a Grade 10 last year, stepped up to fill the void. Houldcroft said the absence of the other two allowed Woods to show how far she has come both on and off the court.

Just as important to the Spartans success this season has been the dedication of the newcomers from the junior team. After the junior squad went 1-9 last season, Houldcroft said the first-year seniors not only met the higher demands of playing at the senior level, they exceeded his expectations. Courtney Johnston (libero) and Andrea Stoskopf (middle) both earned starting jobs.

"I preach commitment and hard work and the players have to buy into that," Houldcroft said. "Courtney Johnston stays for hours after practice. Seeing how much they have improved and how hard they have worked, I'm proud of them."

Houldcroft said Rector's leadership has also played an important role in the improvement of the younger players. For her part, Rector said the team has learned its lesson.

"We weren't that consistent. We thought we had it in the bag," she said. "Our passing and setting were there and we executed really well (in the first game), but we pulled through and we worked well together. We just have to stay focused and keep a positive attitude."



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

STILL UNBEATEN: Milton District's Dria Mayers tips the ball past the outstretched hands of Loyola's Laura Silva in last Wednesday's Halton junior girls volleyball semifinal. The undefeated Mustangs won 25-12, 25-18 to advance to tomorrow's Halton final where they will face the Assumption Crusaders.

Late rally allows Cavs to clip MD in hoops semi

Milton District's basketball seniors are getting awfully familiar with semifinal defeat, but certainly not comfortable with it.

For a fifth straight year, the Mustangs were turned back in the last-remaining obstacle to Halton Tier 2 championship play, getting eclipsed by the visiting King's Christian Cavaliers 73-70 Friday afternoon.

MD took an eight-point lead into the final quarter and led with a mere 9.5 seconds remaining. That's when a Cavaliers three-pointer — their ninth on the day — and two drained free throws crushed the Mustangs' bid

to break their semifinal curse.

While leading for most of the second half, the hosts were clearly beaten on the boards and were a disappointing 3-for-12 at the line through the first three quarters.

The fact that MD led by as much as 11 points and had beaten King's Christian earlier this month made the defeat all the more heartbreaking.

Ryan Brown gave the Mustangs three leads in the final few minutes and finished with a game-high 29 points, including 11 in the second quarter. Also hitting double digits were Marko Varaklic (13) and Brandon Adamson (10).

Mustangs advance to Halton final

By Steve LeBlanc

CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Next stop, Sheridan College.

Determined to match the unbeaten season its male counterparts turned in this past fall, Milton District's junior girls volleyball team drew within a game of a perfect 2010 Wednesday — stamping its ticket to the Halton AAA championship.

Weathering a few anxious moments in game two, the Mustangs delivered a 25-12, 25-18 semifinal sweep of the Loyola Hawks, who'd taken them to a third set just one week earlier.

Not wishing to tempt fate with another tiebreaker, the Mustangs stepped things up after the Hawks evened the score twice and took an early lead in the second set. Their fortified efforts put them one win away from a second straight regional title, having captured the AA championship last year.

"We kept the intensity up today, that was the difference," said co-captain Alysha Carusi, who had a half-dozen kills and directed a fundamentally-sound attack. "We didn't get rattled (in game two). Coach (Dave) Walker keeps telling us when we get pushed just to stay calm and play Mustangs volleyball."

Powered by Carusi and fellow power Ipandeep Kaur, MD's hitting and serving were simply too much for Loyola to contend with.

Co-captain Dria Mayers got the Mustangs off to a big start in the second game with three straight aces, while Renee Lacenaire had a big kill to halt the Hawks' uprising and put the semifinals away with a final ace, the 18th overall for the victors on the day.

Ten straight points propelled MD to a convincing first-set victory, with three straight aces by Carusi and impressive net play from Rose Serafini highlighting the lopsided game. Lacenaire led with five kills, while Carusi and Kaur had four apiece.

The Mustangs and Assumption Crusaders will battle for AAA supremacy tomorrow at 2 p.m. at Sheridan.