

Senior girls' volleyball team OFSAA bound

BY JAY FAWLER

With OFSAA in sight, the Chatham-Kent Golden Hawks was the only team standing in the way of the Red Raider senior girls' volleyball team's birth to the most coveted volleyball tournament in all of Ontario. With a victory, the girls would be heading to the OFSAA championships in their first year of participation at the AAA division.

Chatham-Kent traveled to first-place Essex on Tuesday, Feb. 27 hoping to duplicate what their senior boys' team did during the Fall season – win SWOSSAA. However, the girls' team did not have the best record in the region. That title belonged to the Red Raiders.

The Raider gym was at full capacity – not an empty seat in the house for this emotion-driven game. The girls knew that they were not only playing for themselves, but for the senior boys' team which was upset by the Brennan Cardinals during the WECSAA finals, eliminating their shot at the eventual SWOSSAA champion Chatham-Kent senior boys squad.

The girls never trailed in the first set, taking a commanding 24-17 lead late in the set. The Raiders would go on to win the next point and take the set on a

Chatham-Kent miscue 25-17.

It seemed as if the Golden Hawks' serves found the bottom of the net as often as they found the top in the second set. The Raiders capitalized on the five missed serves on the Chatham-Kent side and were able to take a 19-9 lead in the set. Essex star Janelle Balkwill was deadly on both sides of the ball with numerous kills and blocks and helped her team win the set 25-15.

The Raider gym erupted with chants of "One More Point" but it seemed as if that point would never come. Leading what could be the final set 24-14, the Red Raider girls needed only one more point to capture the SWOSSAA crown. Playing conservatively, hoping for a Chatham-Kent slip-up, the girls had to endure a late rally by the Golden Hawks before they would become champions. After saving four match points, the Chatham-Kent Golden Hawks could not hold off the Red Raiders and would lose the set and the match 3-0 with scores of 25-17, 25-15 and 25-18.

The Red Raiders now head to Midland for the OFSAA Championships on March 6 and 7.

Check the Free Press website Wednesday for an update on this story!



Focus – Essex Red Raider's Delina Girard prepares to set up the volleyball, supported by teammate Janelle Balkwill, during the SWOSSAA Sr. Girls' Volleyball Championship against Chatham-Kent, at Essex High Feb. 27.

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Novice A
Drs Hager/Kniaziew

Playoffs began in Tecumseh on Wednesday night. The first period was uneventful with Essex unable to convert on a powerplay. At 4:07 of the second Brady Rickeard broke around the net, spun around, and took a shot that was deflected by Grant Quinlan and tapped in by Jake Maisonneuve to give the Ravens a 1-0 lead.

Essex held off the Eagles and killed a penalty midway through the third. Josh Scratch and Adam Amicarelli combined to shut out the Tecumseh offense. This scrappy contest ended 1-0, giving the Ravens a 1-0 record in the playoffs.

To fill a gap in the schedule, the team traveled to Harrow for an exhibition game on Saturday afternoon. Harrow took advantage of an early powerplay and went on

the board at 7:34 of the first. Essex applied great pressure in the second with two powerplays and numerous scoring opportunities but was unable to find the tying marker.

At 13:01 of the third in a scramble in front of the net, Jake Watters beat the Harrow netminder with assists going to Grant and Brady. At 11:46 Harrow responded to regain the lead 2-1.

At 9:45 Brady let a shot go from the top of the circle, Jared Fuerth whacked away at the sprawling netminder. When the goalie arose, the ref signaled goal, awarded to Brady, and the Ravens had tied the game 2-2. Essex went on to kill two more penalties in the third and this one ended in a 2-2 tie.

Playoffs continue this week as the Ravens battle Belle River and Riverside.

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UNDEFEATED – The Belle River Junior Girls' Volleyball team recently wrapped up a stellar year. They had an undefeated 33-0 season, won both the General Amherst and Essex High School county-wide tournaments and were the finalists in the WECSAA AAA/AAAA tournament at St. Clair College. Congratulations on a great year girls! The team members are (L-R) – Front Row: Courtney Grosse, Morgan McCloskey. Second Row: Emily Gagnon, Jessica Allison, Miranda Gasparovic. Back Row: Andrea Gerrard, Katherine Bortolin, Katie Pacuta, Jessica Shepley, Karlee Parent, Mona Ben-Aoun, Sabrina Botsford and Coach Ms. Kassian.