

NUNES
BUILDING MAINTENANCE
• Commercial • Industrial • Residential
Windsor's Only Final Clean Company

Jon Cooney
Bonded and insured
24 Hour Service
Unionized #625
207 Erie St. E., Suite 103
Windsor, ON N9A 3X2
Phone: (519) 973-8471
Fax: (519) 973-8436



Essex High's Red Raiders Sr. Girls' Volleyball team celebrates their SWOSSAA AAA/AAAA championship last week after defeating the Chatham Kent Golden Hawks in Essex, Feb. 27. The girls took bronze at OFSAA March 7. Front: Jocelyn Cooper. Second row (l-r): Delina Girard, Samantha O'Neill, Melissa Smith, Jessica Beaten. Back row: assistant coach Bri Paluch, Shea McLaughin, assistant coach Kyle Williamson, Jolynne Piroski, Jessica Masse, Candace Garrod, Janelle Balkwill, Ally Pettit, and head coach Lindsay Miller.

Photo: Andy Comber

Red Raiders take bronze in OFSAA girls' volleyball

March Madness started early for the Essex Red Raiders Sr. Girls' Volleyball team as they managed to dodge wicked blizzard conditions, high winds and a 12-car accident on the 401 and a 75-car pileup on Hwy 400 just south of Barrie on their way to OFSAA in Midland on March 5. Some parents took as long as 12 hours to arrive but the girls arrived in time for the annual OFSAA banquet. A few other teams weren't as lucky and were involved in the pileup. Fortunately no injuries to players were reported.

Tuesday, Essex began the tournament in a five-team pool and were seeded no. 4 overall of 20 other championship teams who also had won our version of SWOSSAA.

This was the first year Essex has competed in AAA. As has sometimes been the case this season, they started slowly and fell behind by as many as six points in every game, but always found their stride and came back to win the first three matches in two straight sets.

In a key matchup against Eden from St. Catharines, with Essex down 8-2, Ally Pettit came off the bench to serve eight straight points and lead Essex to the eventual victory. With momentum being such a key factor in volleyball, each girl

played a pivotal role throughout the tournament in contributing to the continued wins.

At 7:30 pm Tuesday night Essex did experience defeat and finished second in their pool. This permitted them to advance to the top 8 championship round.

The following morning Essex discovered they would meet the no. 2 seed in the quarterfinals, Oakridge from London --- a powerhouse some expected to win the gold. Essex was down 5-0 and Coach Miller called a time out. Once again the momentum shifted. Huge blocks by Jessica Masse and Janelle Balkwill, solid serving and great defence saw Essex upset Oakridge in game one 25-22. It was an emotion-packed game, in which the Essex parents controlled the airtime led by Brad Smith who simply wore out his voice.

As the players changed ends for the start of Game 2, all the parents gave a standing ovation and high-fived the players as they walked past. Now "this is volleyball", one parent said. We had never seen our girls rise with such emotion and courage all year long.

In game two Essex fell behind early once again, but saw the game eventually tie at 19-19 but eventually lost 25-20 setting up a third game to 15.

The Essex cheering section was still absolutely rabid - out of control loud and encouraging, easily outscrambling the London crowd. By this time the gym had filled with players and coaches of other teams just to see what all the noise was about. Essex was not expected to give Oakridge this tough a match.

Game 3 saw Essex take the early lead on two Garrod kills and a monster double block by Balkwill / Masse again. Sam O'Neill was all over the court chasing down balls and leading the team. The momentum built to a crescendo, at which point Essex was up 8-2 at the switch and never looked back, upsetting the no. 2 seed 15-7. The gym erupted with cheers and tears as Essex coaches, parents and players all danced and hugged, tears streaming down faces. The no. 2 seed was going home ---- wow!!

"The absolute best I've ever seen them play," said Coach Miller as she rushed to call the high school with the update.

Essex would move on to meet Stratford, the no. 3 seed, in the semifinals. This team was loaded with talent and Essex looked as though they had spent their entire emotional reserves playing London, and fell two games straight.

This moved the Raiders

into the Bronze Medal game against Don Wilson SS from the Durham/Oshawa region. This team had just taken one

game from the no. 1 seed Jacob Hespeler so we knew we could have our hands full again.

At this point the Raiders seemed re-focused on winning the medal and literally stepped up to another dimension to somewhat easily win the bronze, defeating Don Wilson 25-22 and 25 - 15. At one point Essex was up 20-8 led by some timely serves by Melissa Smith.

Throughout the OFSAA tournament, lefty Janelle Balkwill had nine serving aces, while O'Neill and Garrod had over 30 kills each. Masse and Pettit simply teamed up to continuously shut down the opponent's hitters. Throughout the year the quiet confidence and consistent play of Jocelyn Cooper has kept the team grounded while Dee Girard has done a fine job setting. We will miss her next year. The defensive prowess of Jessica Beaten, having transferred to Essex this year, solidified our back


row and played awesome at OFSAA. Five grade 12 girls saw this as their last high school volleyball game ever and went out and grabbed the bronze.

At the end of the OFSAA tournament, Coach Miller presented Ally Pettit with an award for her significant and timely contribution to the win. Essex will hopefully see six grade 11 returnees next season including Jolynne Piroski and Shea McLaughlin. What a fine ending to our first year in AAA.

Congrats to coaches Lindsay Miller and Brianna Paluch on a spectacular season. Many thanks to all the supporters who jammed the gyms this year to cheer on the Essex Red Raiders.

Next up is the annual All Star Game March 20 at Herman High School where three Red Raiders - Sam O'Neill, Jocelyn Cooper and Janelle Balkwill - will represent Essex. Well done girls!
Submitted by Greg Balkwill

WHY COULDN'T
YOU
BE DRIVING THIS?

Ken Knapp 

390 TALBOT ST. N. ESSEX • 519-776-6447 • www.kenknappford.com