

Sports

After one year absence, Volleyball repeats as State Champs

CHRISTOPHER ERBIN

Features Editor

After so many years of being a dominant force around the state, the Varsity Volleyball Team was in a position it had not been in for a while. They completely missed the State tournament a year ago, and while they made the tournament this year, Carl Neuburger, head coach, was not sure what to expect from his young and inexperienced squad.

Although many called it a rebuilding year for West Linn, the Lions breezed through the early rounds of State and survived an intense five set semifinal against number two ranked Central Catholic Rams to move on to the State Championship. There they defeated North Medford 25-19, 25-18, 25-22 to become State Champions for the first time since 2003, when Neuburger was also coaching the team.

"We were always trying to play within the game plan and take advantage of what the other team was giving us," Neuburger said. "The kids deserve the credit because they really trusted us (coaches) and they really made the effort to do what we said ... These kids really took what we told them to heart. And they had the ability, at

least most of the time, to pull it off."

The State title was Neuburger's third at West Linn, and he along with Michelle Hoover, assistant coach, made all the difference for the Lion players.

"Carl (Neuburger) and Michelle (Hoover) are outstanding coaches. They have taught us just about everything we need to know about volleyball. They have made a major impact on the way we think, act, and play

helped calm the young team.

The Championship was officially won when Alyssa O'Neil, junior, sent a spike cross court without a single North Medford player being able to react. The winner was one of 19 kills contributed by O'Neil, who also had seven digs.

"We just played out of our minds," O'Neil said. "We worked really hard during the season, but to do this well is beyond our wildest dreams. It is incredible, that tournament

won what may have been the most emotional and intense match of the entire season, as they outlasted the Rams. The entire front row gave another strong defensive performance led once again by Kawasaki with 41 digs and O'Neil with 28 kills.

"Beating Central Catholic was key. We never gave up and it was an extremely tiring match," Kawasaki said of the two and half hours semifinal. "I think we read the blockers pretty well. A lot of our success starts with defense, but our front row did really well."

The team contained the Rams star player Lily Wygal, who received the second most tournament votes behind Kawasaki.

Girls Volleyball ended the regular season as the fifth ranked team in state and an overall record of 20-4, excluding tournament results. Their performance in the regular season was enough to earn them a first round bye in the State playoffs, where they faced Southridge in the second round. Thanks to the entire front row of Hurt, senior, Caitlin McDonnell, Betsy Wilhelm and Danielle Sargent, juniors, the Lions would end up running away with the match 25-19, 25-17, and 25-21. The teams co-captain and lone senior,

Michelle Hurt, added 10 kills and three blocks, playing in her last home game as a Lion.

"Playing my last home match was sad but I was excited to move on to the State playoffs and see my team succeed," Hurt said. "Being a member of the team is very special. I loved my time with each and every one of my teammates! We all get along and it makes going to the gym everyday more exciting."

Hurt is hoping to attend college in the Mid-Atlantic Conference. Multiple schools in the conference have offered her scholarships, however she would like to play at Central Michigan along with her older sister.

In TRL play, the squad went undefeated again, only losing one set to Oregon City in the early stages of the year. West Linn volleyball has now won 108 consecutive league matches, as the team looks to regroup to make another State title run next year.

"Teams have underestimated us this season and we have had a lot success. Considering we lost so many players from last year, other teams may be surprised to see how far we went in state this year and we are going to try to be just as dominant next season," O'Neil said.

"It's not about the individual. It's a team sport. We just played and didn't have to worry about anything. It was all about being a team and winning the championship as a team."

-Kellie Kawasaki, junior

on the court," Michelle Hurt, senior, said.

A young and inexperienced Lions team appeared more calm, poised and ultimately stronger than their North Medford opponents who had already survived multiple five set matches just to reach the State final. The Lions had played a more vigorous regular season schedule than their Medford opponents and had also competed in more tournaments which may have

was one of the best moments of my life, by far."

Kellie Kawasaki, junior, was named Player of the Match, as the libero led the team defensively with 20 digs.

"It's not about the individual, it's a team sport," Kawasaki said, "I just played and didn't have to worry about anything. It was all about our team and winning the championship as a team."

In the semifinal against Central Catholic, the Lions

Local all-stars participate in Rep Side, take on college teams

CALLEY LATHROP

Staff Reporter

Only the second team in the country to do so, the best girls rugby players from local high school teams combined to form the "Rep Side," pitting them against local Varsity college teams.

The Rep Side played Reed College on Sept. 22, and crushed them, 47-0, scoring in all three thirds. (The matches were split into three 30-minute thirds.)

"I knew we could take this team on, but was surprised that we could shut them out like that. There was a lot of intensity, and I was very proud of our team's sportsmanship as well," Ernie Espinoza, head coach, said.

The second game, hosted by Western Oregon University, ended on a positive when Audrey Jones, 2007 Lake Oswego graduate and forward captain, scored the first try off a penalty, diving through the defense to tap down the ball in the try zone during the last five seconds. The final score was 10-5.

"This was a tough game. They were very organized, with a great defense. It was a lesson in intensity for us," Espinoza said.

The Rep Side had its first game against a well-known and distinguished university team in West Linn when it played the University of Oregon Ducks at a field called "The Farm," located off Stafford Road. The Rep Side faced a tough defense and a very experienced back line that has practiced together for nearly three years.

"They were very organized and had great ball-handling skills," Espinoza said. The final score was 61-15 in favor of the Ducks.

Rugby is considered brutal by many, but there was only one severe injury during the season. Alisa "Scooter" Cheadle, sophomore, was injured near the second third at the UO game, and fractured her foot in two places.

"It didn't hurt until after I left the field. At first I thought it was my knee, but it turns

out I twisted my ankle so badly it broke in two places. I was just worried I wouldn't play again," Cheadle said.

The final game of the fall season was in Corvallis,

17-17. Each team had scored three tries and made one conversion.

During this game, there were four to five hold-ups by each team, preventing scoring.



Megan Hackney, junior, passes to Zchona Jones, junior, off of a ruck during a scrimmage at Rep Side tryouts on Sept. 22. Players who made the team participated in games against Western Oregon, Reed, Oregon State, and University of Oregon.

Photo Submitted by Kimberly Jones

against Oregon State University. During the first third, OSU scored ten points. The Rep Side fought back and by the beginning of the last third, the score was tied

Within the last seven minutes, the Rep Side's defense was extremely pressured. OSU scored three times, mainly through breakaways near the sidelines.

"They were really tough and very physical. We were able to pick up and almost beat them! The team was most tenacious, and it was very exciting. This was one of our most interesting games by far," Espinoza said.

A record of 1-3 could be considered rather mediocre for a normal team, but the fact that these players and rivals had several weeks of preparation before playing against collegiates is still impressive. Expectations were high as Canby and West Linn placed eighth and ninth at the National Invitational Tournament, and Portland teams placed high in the 2007 State tournament.

"I knew we would be able to compete at a higher level, and I was very impressed with how they played. The team really worked hard," Espinoza said.

Rep Side takes on Colleges

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