

Cougars fall one win short

DESPITE FINISHING WITH THEIR BEST CONFERENCE RECORD SINCE 2014, COUGARS MISSED THE SHOT FOR PLAYOFFS

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At the end of October, it looked like Clackamas Community College volleyball was headed back to the playoffs for the first time since 2014. The Cougars were on a five-game winning streak that started with a 3-0 sweep of Lane (then second place in the South Region). Clackamas was sitting in fourth place with a record of 8-4 and needed one more win to seal the first playoff appearance under Head Coach Sarah Hoeke.

After losing to Clark on Nov. 2, the Cougars looked to beat third-ranked Chemeketa on Nov. 7 to clinch a playoff berth.

Clackamas won the first two sets 25-20 and 25-22, but Chemeketa wasn't going down without a fight. After trailing the Cougars 6-1 in the third set, Chemeketa stormed back and took the third set 25-19.

The fourth set went to Chemeketa who squeaked out a 25-23 win to tie the set totals at two and send the match into the fifth and final set.

The fifth set was tied at 12-12, when Chemeketa's freshman middle blocker, Delaney Smith, recorded three straight kills to give Chemeketa the win.

"We just have to get right back in the gym and get ready," Hoeke said after the loss to Chemeketa. "We need to hone in on our skills and get our confidence back. We played really hard, we just got to get back on the grind."

Clackamas' loss put them in a tie for fourth place in the South Region with Clark. With only four teams from each region making

the NWAC playoffs, the stage was set for a win or go home play-in game.

"We beat each other once and now we know each other really well and I think we know what we need to improve on for the next game, so I think we have the edge," sophomore libero Rachel McCoy said on Nov. 7. "We're going to beat Clark and go to the [playoffs] and do really well."

Saturday was the third and final time Clark and Clackamas would meet this season. The winner of the match would be moving onto the playoffs, the loser would be finished with the 2018 volleyball season.

Clark dominated most of the first set, scoring 23 points before Clackamas reached 13. The Cougars rallied a little but fell 25-17.

In the second set, Clackamas led 24-17 before Clark tightened things 24-22, but Clackamas hung on for the win, 25-22.

The third set saw Clark jump out to a 13-3 lead, Clackamas battled back but fell 25-20.

The fourth set also went to Clark 25-20, and with that the Cougars' season had ended. One win short of a return to the playoffs.

Overall Clackamas finished with a record of 22-18, finishing 8-7 in the south division. The roller coaster season saw the Cougars win three or more games in a row three times, but also had two losing streaks that lasted as long. Sophomore outside hitter Hanna Yamashita led the NWAC in kills with 400 and McCoy accomplished

Photos by Jonathan Villagomez



her goal of leading the NWAC in digs with 573.

The Cougars may have missed the playoffs, but the 2018 team was an improvement from 2017. According to sophomore outside hitter Naomi Earwood, the highlight was bonding with her teammates.

"I just love this team," Earwood said. "I'm so glad that we came together. Not that last year's team wasn't good, but this year is so much different. The vibe between the girls feels like a real team. We can all talk to each other, we hang out outside of games and it's been a great experience."

Jonathan Villagomez contributed to this story.



Hanna Yamashita, above, guides the ball towards Chemeketa on Nov. 7 at home. Top right, coach Sarah Hoeke directs the team from the sideline.