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Campo Volleyball Season Ends in NorCal Tournament

By Brad Kvederis



Natalie Meniktas Photos Gint Federas

A season that began with high hopes and a lot of question marks came to a bittersweet end for Campolindo on Nov. 26, as the Cougars bowed out of the CIF girls' volleyball state championships with a 3-1 opening-round loss at Christian Brothers Sacramento. Campolindo finished the season 25-10, and 12-0 in the DFAL.

After narrowly winning the first set, Campo reached game point in the second - but the host Falcons fought back, scoring four straight points to win in overtime and tied the match at 1-1. Christian Brothers then won the third set handily and cruised the rest of the way to win 23-25, 26-24, 25-11, 25-21.

The missed opportunity to go up 2-0 was deflating for Campo, according to head coach John Vuong, who cited it as the turning point of the match.

"I think the big back-breaker was in the second set, when we were up 24-22 and couldn't close out. It took a lot out of our younger players... [they weren't] able to recover," Vuong said. "Christian Brothers has great outside hitters, but they were playing better defense than us that night."

Tuesday's season finale came on the heels of a heartbreaking five-set defeat at the hands of Bishop O'Dowd High in the North Coast Section championship match the previous weekend. The Cougars overcame a 2-0 deficit in

that contest - and thought they had won when an O'Dowd player's spike attempt went out long on match point. But while the players were celebrating, the officials reversed the call after a lengthy delay and ordered the teams back on to the court; O'Dowd won the next two points to clinch the title. (For more about that game, see our online article posted Nov. 24, www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0719/Cougars-Lose-Heartbreaker-in-NCS-finals.html.)

Despite the back-to-back tough losses to end the year, Vuong said his team still considers the season a success. While they couldn't duplicate last season's run all the way to the state championship game, they swept their conference schedule and came a fingertip away from repeating as section champions - no mean feat for a team that was supposed to be having a down year.

"With eight seniors graduated last year, many thought we were rebuilding. But going 12-0 in league and (being) a section finalist were great accomplishments," Vuong said. "Our players responded to their fullest and competed every night, and challenged each other in practices. That is all we could ask for."

Campolindo looks to be well-positioned for next season, with libero Natalie Meniktas the team's lone graduating senior. Team MVP Kelley Wirth will return for her senior season, and key front-line players Kirsten Sibley and Emma Johnson will be juniors.

"We will expect a bigger season next year," Vuong said. "A lot of things could happen with one year of club volleyball. And the players will be more mature. Our goal is to play in December, and it doesn't change no matter who we have."



Kelly Wirth



Emma Johnson and Kirsten Sibley celebrate after scoring a point

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[back](#)

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