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Campolindo comes up short in state finals

By Jon Kingdon



Erin Thomas Photo Gint Federas

Campolindo girls volleyball head coach John Vuong was concerned when the Cougars were up to Division I for the NCS playoffs, having to compete against teams that had far larger student bodies. Ironically, the schools with the smallest student bodies, Campolindo and Bishop O'Dowd, met in the finals with O'Dowd besting Campolindo. Each qualified for the NorCal state tournament, with O'Dowd playing in the open division and Campolindo playing in Division I bracket.

With the No. 1 seed, Campolindo earned a first round bye and then defeated Clovis North and Palo Alto by 3-0 scores to then play and defeat Menlo-Atherton 3-1, earning the right to represent Northern California in the state finals against Vista Murrieta. In the match, Campolindo ran into a freshman buzz saw named Claire Little who had 30 kills and the Cougars lost to Vista Murrieta by a score of 20-25, 30-28, 25-22 and 25-21.

Particularly frustrating for Campolindo was losing the second set when they were ahead 24-19 and could not close out the game.

Vuong and assistant coach Dave Chen made it to their third state finals with the Cougars. Vuong still spoke highly about the team: "They worked hard all season and it was a reward for their efforts to play the championship game. I told them that getting here was not easy and that every other school in the state would have loved to have been in our place. It just wasn't our night tonight."

Erin Thomas, Molly Mitchell and Audrey Pak stood out for the team. "Audrey has gone above and beyond everything I expected," said Vuong. "She's played every position we've asked her to play. There's been nothing she can't do on the court. She really put the team on her shoulders through the whole season."

Vuong also highlighted junior Madison Xiong who had to step in for an injured player: "Maddie had a number of kills. She was ready to play and took advantage of the opportunity and did not disappoint at all. She showed the ability to step up and gave us a chance to win."

There was a special chemistry that pervaded the team. "The best part of this team is that we're such a family and we play for each other," said senior Arielle Allen. "We all wanted it so bad."

Senior Sophia Newman took great joy in winning the Northern Regional finals: "As this was my last year at Campolindo, I wanted us to take one of these big games, playing our hearts out and having fun and I'm so happy that we beat Menlo-Atherton to make it to the finals. Everything is special about this team. I've never been on a team like this where everybody wanted to play for each other and be there for each other. John and (assistant coach) Dave Chen were the best coaches I've had in my volleyball career. They always gave 100%, coming in on off days, giving us the best opportunity to win and allowing us to believe that we could do it."

The lone freshman on the team, Olivia Wiseman, appreciated the uniqueness of her situation after the Menlo-Atherton game: "It's such a unique experience as a freshman to go to the state tournament. My heart was pounding. I love being on the team and everyone has been really nice to me."

It was a long process for Vuong: "At the beginning of the season, I did not see us making it to the state finals. Playing in Division I was training on the job and we had to adjust as we went on. The team improved a lot in the sense of cohesiveness and team chemistry. We had the talent to play as one unit, led by captains Audrey Pak and Sophia and all of the seniors. They realized the opportunity to make it to the finals and they took it."

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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