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Campolindo wins NCS Volleyball Tournament



Campolindo boys' volleyball NCS winners

Photo Jon Kingdon

By Jon Kingdon

In their 40th match of the season, the 31-9 Campolindo boys' volleyball team defeated De La Salle in three straight games to win the North Coast Section tournament. The first two games were close with the teams tied at 17-17 in each game before the Cougars won each by scores of 25-22 and 25-21. The third game was all Campolindo, winning 25-17 to close out the match.

Playing for the NCS championship was a long-held goal for coach David Chen and the players, with the prior two tournaments having been canceled due to the pandemic. "The experience of missing out on two big years was really disappointing," Chen said. "Everybody was a bit nervous, and they knew what this moment meant to them. When it came down to the end of the games when the scores were close, we made the big, disciplined plays when they were needed."

De La Salle had the height to match the front line of Campolindo and it took time for the Cougars to adjust. "De La Salle was disciplined up at the net with blocks, timing wise," Chen said. "They knew who our hitters would be, so they really made our offense and hitters uncomfortable."

Senior co-captain Josh Ewert, playing with a sore shoulder that he was icing after the match, changed his game to adapt to the De La Salle front line. "I adjusted to their size on the front line by not hitting every ball as hard as I could and making plays like tipping the ball," Ewert said. "It was just a matter of getting the ball on the floor and not always ripping it."

Ewert also credited his teammates on the front line and the team's setter, Andrew Pak: "(Co-captain) Brian Thomas, Gabe Goeller and Patrick Volk were our top hitters that really brought it in. Andrew had a number of great sets all year. I could not have had a better setter."

With so many options on the front line, Pak, who has also played outside in the past as well, took advantage of all of his weapons. "It's been such a great experience being the setter on this team because I have so many guys that I can go to that can put the ball away and it's allowed me to be creative with it," Pak said. "Coming into the game, we wanted to keep our nerves in check and play together as a team. Our adjustments in the game were to make sure that we were dialing in our passes first before we hit and to see where we were going before we hit."

Sophomore Graham Volk, the team's libero, led the team's defense. "We watched a lot of film on De La Salle, studying their tips," Volk said. "We wanted to stay aggressive and continue playing our game."

The back line was also helped by outside hitters Josh Ewing and Patrick Volk (Graham's brother). "Josh takes up half the court and Patrick is also really good defender," Volk said.

Chen also acknowledged the play of defender Cooper Ciruili and Brody Crouch who made some big serves and highlighted the play of Ewert. "What doesn't Josh do?" Chen asked. "He's really composed and brings a sense of calm to the rest of the guys which helped in situations like this."

Campolindo played a very competitive schedule to prepare themselves for games like this one. "We've been in some tough situations with injuries and illnesses during the season and a number of our players really stepped up in times of need," Chen said. "Tonight, Will Marusich was out sick and Brian Thomas was playing with a bad ankle, and we knew who was going to fill in."

This was the second North Coast championship for two of the Campolindo players. Tyler Vineyard was a forward on the basketball team and Tyronne Tuavale was a lineman for the football team and each saw a parallel between the volleyball team and those teams.

"In a sense, both teams were the same," Vineyard said. "We both had top players in Josh Ewart and Aidan Mahaney leading our teams to the championships. It was also the leadership that co-captains Brian Thomas and Cade Bennett brought to each of the teams."

Tuavale who played a lot more for the football team had a similar feeling of accomplishment with each team: "I did not get the minutes on the volleyball court that I got playing football but the feeling and energetic euphoria that I got from football was very similar to how it felt with the volleyball team."

As with all coaches, Chen still saw room for improvement, in this case, the need for the team to improve their serving: "Our Achilles heel has been not being consistent enough with too many faults. At this point and in this moment, if we were to continue to harp on what we know is just in our nature, it wouldn't have helped the situation. That's who we are and let's move on and make up for it somewhere else."

As the seventh seed in the NorCal championships, the Cougars lost to the second seed Mountain View, 3 games to 1.

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