Cabrillo moves within win of reaching state tournament

By ERIC ANDERSON

The Cabrillo College volleyball team will play a familiar opponent in a familiar situation tonight. For the second straight year, the Seahawks will take on San Joaquin Delta for a spot in the state tournament. A year ago, Delta ended Cabrillo’s season, but the Seahawks were seeded No. 11 in NorCals; now they are ranked No. 1 in the state and have a 27-1 record.

“It’s kind of, ‘Here we are again,’” Cabrillo coach Gabby Houston-Neville said. “They are a familiar foe and the girls are fired up to play them again.”

The top-seeded Seahawks, who will host tonight’s match, reached the third round of the Northern California playoffs by defeating eighth-seeded American River 25-18, 25-16, 30-28 Saturday.

“We played great,” Houston-Neville said. “It was a really, really good match and the girls were doing all the right things — and then American River changed their lineup in Game 3. It took some time to adjust to that, and we ended up pulling it out at the end. It was kind of exciting.”

American River (19-9) put three of its biggest players, all standing over 6 feet tall, up front to counter Cabrillo middle blocker Skyler Moon, who had been piling up kills. The Seahawks were down 19-14 before coming back to tie it when American River’s taller players were rotated off the front, but had to rally again after falling behind 24-22.

“‘In the end, we just made fewer errors and had really good serving when it counted,’” Houston-Neville said.

Moon finished with 13 kills and three blocks. Also, Ally Russo had 12 kills, two blocks and nine digs; Brooke Carroll 48 assists, 10 digs and three aces; Stefanie Mahaley nine kills and two blocks; and Michelle Meyer 20 digs.

Houston-Neville said Mahaley was “phenomenal” and has made a big difference since taking over on the right side, while Meyer was strong defensively.

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“They have some really good hitters and (Meyer) was playing some really good defense against them,” she said. I think they weren’t used to their big hitters getting dug so much, and I think it kind of threw them off.” Cabrillo has already beaten fourth-seeded Delta (20-7) twice this season, once in Delta’s tournament and once in the finals of the San Jose City College tournament. Those matches, however, were early in the season, so while Cabrillo has an idea of which players it needs to stop, Delta could have changed its lineup, Houston-Neville said.

The winner will advance to the state tournament, which will include two representatives from both Northern and Southern California. The tournament, which will be held Saturday and Sunday at Chaffey College in Rancho Cucamonga, will have a double-elimination format.