CABRILLO CRUSHES

Seahawks win first two matches of state tournament to advance to Sunday’s final.

By JILLIE JAC
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LOS ALTOS HILLS — Someone was going to have to lose a match this season, and it was going to be Saturday night in a second-round match of the state junior college volleyball tournament between unbeaten Cabrillo College and Irvine Valley.

But it wasn’t going to be easy, and it wasn’t going to be the Seahawks. In the first meeting of two unbeaten teams at the state tournament since 2000, Cabrillo (30-0) — the No. 1 team in the state — and No. 2 Irvine Valley (26-1) battled to five sets at Fortville College before Cabrillo powered to the 25-18, 25-20, 25-19, 22-25, 15-13 victory.

“It was exciting because it was the north and the south, two undefeated teams, neither had lost. You knew one team was going to get its first loss,” said Cabrillo coach Gabby Houston Seville. “Finally, that was the final, and I knew we could still be undefeated.”

The win meant more than —

**CABRILLO CONTINUED FROM BL**

Seahawks outside hitter Brija Morgan jumps to spike the ball during the second game versus Grossmont in the opening match of the CCCAA state volleyball tournament.

IF YOU GO

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

WHO: Cabrillo vs. IRV

WHERE: Fortville College, Los Altos Hills

yre 3:30 p.m.

Sunday at 3:30 p.m., they will have the opportunity to become the first NorCal team to win the state title in 30 years.

“If that’s what really unforgettable — the feeling just to be there,” said Cabrillo setter Tyler Gavago, a Benicia High product. “We’re going to have to just stay together and be a team.”

Staying together as a team in what kept Cabrillo on a winning track Saturday night. Erin Kornegay had 18 kills, Kehney Shaver added 17, and Delanie Bercel and Madison Borch added five spares, each stepping up at a different key point. Gasolles added 46 assists and 50 digs and Kaitynn Comly led the team with 38 digs.

While its win record stayed intact, Cabrillo did break two streaks Saturday. The first came in a 25-18, 25-20, 25-19, 25-21, first-round win over Grossmont, the No. 4 team in the state and No. 3 in SoCal. The Game II loss in that match ended a 61-set winning streak dating back to a five-game win over Fresno City in late September. By winning that match, however, the Seahawks snapped their streak of losing their first two matches of the state tournament, which they did in 2000 — when they were also ranked No. 1 in the state — and 2001 before losing the tournament altogether in 2002.

They beat Grossmont largely on the back of Harbor High graduate Shaver, who took advantage of a Griffin defense keying on teammate Morgan to manage 33 kills — the most for a NorCal player in state tournament history.

“I had so much adrenaline from talking about this all year, I was up at 5 a.m. with butterflies,” Shaver said after the afternoon match. “Now is the time to play the best volleyball we can. It just came out of me.”

Houston added, “The moxie’s off our back, and with that win, they really feel like they belong now.”

Cabrillo brought its best volleyball to the tournament, and it needed against Irvine Valley. The Lasers seemed almost unstoppable where 6-foot-2 middle Anni Mitcham was holding court in the front row. Mitcham made seven kills alone in Game 1 in her way to 30 for the match — 10 more than Marissa Orozco, who had the next most kills for Irvine Valley with 18.

After trading leads in Game 1, the teams tied at 17 all, and then seven more times in the game. But Cabrillo closed out the win when the Lasers made two costly errors in a row. The teams traded the next three games, pushing the match to a fifth set.

Houston said it couldn’t have been any other way.

“Everyone could do it, and I knew it would be like that too,” she added, adding that after the first game she thought to herself, “This is going to five.”

Cabrillo didn’t show the rust of three months without a five-game match. It jumped out to a 3-0 lead, but allowed Irvine Valley to come back and tie it up after Mitcham made several big blocks. Mitchell also had success all through Game 4 and the start of Game 5 with a slide-right hit. But the Lasers lived and died by that play. With the score tied 5-5, Morgan and middle Kelsee Montagna teamed up for a stuff block of that play to give Cabrillo a lead it never relinquished. When Irvine Valley went on top again at match point, Mitchell hit the ball out of bounds, sending Cabrillo into the championship.

“I’m on top of the world right now,” Houston said. “For those guys to play that pretty of volleyball against them like that. — I’m so proud of them.”