CABRILLO STATE VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

**Cabrillo handed first loss in 62 matches**

Sweep by Irvine Valley creates long road to title for Seahawks

**By Julie Jag**

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APTO 10 The Cabrillo College women’s volleyball team will have to follow the teachings of the prophet George Michael if it wants to defend its California Community College Athletic Association state championship. You gotta have faith.

The host Seahawks suffered their first loss in 62 matches Saturday night when Irvine Valley swept them 3-0, in the third match of the CCCAA state tournament at Cabrillo. The Seahawks beat Grossmont 3-1 in the first match of the tournament Saturday to set up the showdown between the top-seeded NorCal and SoCal teams, both of which entered undefeated.

Irvine Valley (26-0) will advance directly into Sunday’s state final. Cabrillo (31-1), meanwhile, will have to beat the winner of the 10 a.m. match between Grossmont and Feather River if it wants a rematch against the Lasers in the 3:30 p.m. championship.

The Seahawks will have to beat the Lasers in the final and in an ensuing game to 25 to retain their title.

That’s a fight the Seahawks are prepared to take on. In fact, Cabrillo coach Gabby Houston Neville said her players had mentally accepted the fact they might have to play three straight matches, plus the extra game Sunday to come out on top. They avoided that long road, though, thanks to their opening match over Grossmont, which also tested the Seahawks’ faith.

Cabrillo vs. the Griffins in state experience, crowd support and very little else during Saturday’s matinee between two undefeated teams, yet they managed to escape with a 30-28, 21-25, 25-17, 25-20 victory.

“We beat them in every stat category except shooting yourself in the foot,” Grossmont coach Jamie Ivers said. “In that we beat them hands down.”

The Griffins (28-1), the No. 2 SoCal seed, tallied more kills (49-42), more assists (54-40), more aces (11-8) and more digs (54-42) than Cabrillo, but the Seahawks, the No. 1 NorCal seed, ultimately made more points. The discrepancy can be partly attributed to the fact Grossmont also committed four times as many serving errors (74-14) as the Seahawks. But sophomore defensive specialist Bruce Ryan checked the win up to a difference of one key intangible: faith.

“It was just relentlessness. We really had to believe,” Ryan said. “Everyone contributed in every single way.”

Cabrillo’s Tyler Gasolaga had 35 assists, Patrick Williams made two solo blocks and four assists and Alex Flores hit 11 kills. Kelsey Shaver led the Seahawks with 10 digs and 14 kills. That was considerably fewer than the 31 — the most ever for a NorCal player at state — that she tallied when the teams met in their opening match of the 2013 CCCAA state championship.

Cabrillo also won that match in four games and beat Irvine Valley in five to advance to the state final. There, the Seahawks met and defeated Grossmont again on their way to becoming the first NorCal team to win the state title in the 37 years since the CCCAA consolidated its divisional championships into one all-encompassing tournament.

The Seahawks have their sights set on a repeat, especially since the tournament is being held in their home gym, which was filled almost to capacity Saturday. For that to happen, coach Houston Neville said the most important match for her team to win Saturday was the first one.

“I’m relieved,” she said. “It’s tough to have to do three matches on Sunday. This one was the biggie.”

Houston Neville said it took until the third game against Grossmont for her to feel comfortable her team would advance. The Seahawks stumbled out of the gate, falling behind the Griffins by as many as five points in Game 1 before rallying back behind Ryan’s aggressive serve. They pulled into a tie at 24-24 after the officials made a controversial call ruling a Shaver serve to the deep right-hand corner had been touched by a Griffin before it sailed out of bounds.

That rocked the Griffins’ boat some, but they continued to battle for four more points until a second straight serving error and a shanked pass put the match in Cabrillo’s hands. The Seahawks struggled mightily in Game 2, committing error after error until they trailed Grossmont 23-13. Then, something snapped within them and they rallied back with a vengeance, rattling off eight straight points under Ryan’s serve. Grossmont got the ball back when Jasmine Rivera converted a kill in the middle and notched the win behind a hit from Vanessa Phyuak. But the damage had been done. Cabrillo just kept rolling through Game 3, getting up by as many as eight points late, and never trailed in Game 4.

Now the Seahawks are ready for the next step.

“We’re more comfortable now. The team is more settled in the tournament, knowing that we did it and we can do it again,” Ryan said. “That’s our motto. It is possible.”

Even though it will take winning back-to-back matches Sunday, Grossmont could claw its way back to the final, just as it did last year. And they just may. Why? Because Ivers also knows a thing or two about the philosophies of George Michael.

“I have all the faith in the world that we can recover and come back,” Ivers said.