

## Lady Flyers, Redskins set for district rematch

Written by Jim Metcalfe

Wednesday, October 24, 2012 1:07 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 30, 2012 12:08 PM

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VAN WERT — Both Ottoville and Lincolnview were well aware of the teams they would be playing in the Division IV Van Wert District volleyball semifinal Tuesday night at The Cougars' Den: Midwest Athletic Conference powers Marion Local and St. Henry.

Neither the Lady Big Green nor Lady Lancers backed down from their foe.

However, try as they might, neither could match up well enough to survive in tournament play.

In the opener, the Lady Flyers dispatched the Green 25-18, 25-11, 25-13, while in the nightcap, the Lady Redskins secured a 25-11, 25-17, 25-15.

"We made too many mistakes overall. Marion Local is too good of a team to give them easy points; they capitalize, which is why they are one of the best volleyball programs around," Ottoville coach Kirt Martz noted. "Our serve-receive wasn't up to our standards; we're capable of doing much better there. We stayed with them the first set because we came out with an aggressive mindset — serving, hitting and just attacking. We just couldn't maintain it but we also lost to a very good team."

Flyer coach Amy Steininger had a different take.

"We came in a little nervous and almost passive. Once we settled down and got over the nerves, we played looser," she added. "We have a lot of weapons and a deep bench. Our serves really gave us a spark, especially Allie (Wendel) and Brooke (Winner). Ottoville is one of the taller teams we've faced and they gave us trouble with their blocking. That put some doubt in our minds."

In the first set of the opener, the Lady Green (10-13) stayed with the Flyers (21-3), leading 7-3 on an ace from senior Abby Siefker (8 stuffs, 6 kills). A serving error, one of eight for the Green and Gold (2 aces), jump-started a major spurt by the Flyers: 8-0. Four of the points came on aces by Claire Heitkamp (11 kills), including one that put them up 13-7. The Green battled back to tie the set at 13-13 (hitting error), 14-14 (kill off the block by junior Tonya Kaufman) and 15-15 (kill by sophomore Annie Lindeman). However, a successful spike by Hannah Heitbrink (5 kills, 3 stuffs) gave the Flyers the lead for good. They finished it off on a hitting error (14 for the match for the Green versus 10 for the Flyers) for a 1-0 lead.

Ottoville again got off quickly in the second set, taking a 5-3 edge on a kill by junior Nikki Burgei. However, their last lead of the match — and the season — was at 6-5 on a hitting error by Marion. A missed spike attempt tied the set at 6, commencing an 8-0 spurt. An off-speed winner by Allie Thobe gave the Flyers the lead for good. A missed serve broke the momentum but only

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slightly. Two points later, a kill by Heitkamp started a 10-0 Local spurt, all but two on either a kill, an ace or a stuff. Three straight stuffs by Siefker gave Ottoville hope but a cross-court kill by Heitkamp sealed the second set.

Consecutive aces by Brianna Hess gave Marion the lead from the start of the third set. Ottoville mistakes — either via missed serves or hits — combined with good serving from the Flyers (16 aces to their 6 missed serves) and a balanced attack at the net put the Flyers in total command. They steadily built their lead until the final point, a kill by Gina Kramer, to finish the sweep.

“We lose two seniors: Abby and Tammy (Wannemacher). They will definitely be missed because they are two outstanding young ladies,” Martz added. “What you saw tonight was their experience from the start versus our lack of it overall; we had nine girls that gained their first varsity experience this year. We had our growing pains all year and tonight but we’ll be better for it moving forward.”

Lindeman added five kills for the Lady Green.

Wendel and Katie Elking each had three aces for the Flyers.

In the nightcap, the Lady Lancers (10-13) jumped up quickly on the Lady Redskins (21-3), taking a 3-1 edge on a hit off the block by junior Kelsey Mohr (4 kills). However, that was short-lived as a kill by Taylor Clune (11 kills, 3 aces) began a 10-1 spurt — all but one on kills, stuffs and aces — that put St. Henry up 11-4 on a Lancer hitting error (18 for the match versus 11 for their foe). Lincolnview — despite its usual stellar digging against the balanced and hard-hitting Redskin attack — could not answer the size advantage of their foe. The Redskins closed the set on a hitting error by the Lancers for a 1-0 edge.

“St. Henry’s blocking is just amazing. We had to alter our usual attack to try and get around their blocks,” Lancer coach Heather Crow explained. “I am proud of how we kept battling and fighting. We take a lot of pride in our digging and we did that well tonight; the difference in the match is we could stay in rallies but they could finish more than we could. Plus, they have so many weapons that we literally had to go 1-on-1 with our blocking — follow the girl across the net from you.”

St. Henry coach Diana Kramer had nothing but praise for her team and the Lancers.

“We came off a tough 5-setter Saturday and we cleaned up a lot of the mistakes we made then: serving, passing and just generally attacking,” she added. “We got a lot of touches on their hits and that helps your defense. Plus, we knew Marion Local won the first match but we stayed disciplined and focused on the job at hand. Lincolnview played great defense and forced us to keep hitting; that’s a credit to the girls for keeping it up.”

Lincolnview again stayed even early on in the second set but a stuff by Kami Siefring (4 stuffs) put the Lady ‘Skins up for good at 5-4. That just set the tone for the rest of the set, starting a 16-3 span as Sam Thobe (9 kills) began to assert her strength at the net. Crow took the second of her two timeouts down 20-7 on a hitting error. The Lancers began to show life behind Mohr, junior Ashley McClure (3 kills) and senior Jodie Doner (9 kills), getting the deficit down to 24-17 on a hitting error. However, a clean kill by Kylie Koesters (6 kills) put the Redskins in total command.

The third set was close most of the way. The Lancers started to get more success at the net, not only with Mohr, McClure and Doner doing well but with the help of sophomore Devann Springer (5 kills). They held their final lead at 15-14 on an off-speed hit by Doner but that was the final point of the Lancer season. However, a kill off the defense by Clune put the serve in the hands of Clune. She got two aces of the next 10 points and once again, the Redskin balance and hitting machine got cranked up to finish the match. A hit off the net that fell to the

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Lancer side of the floor by Thobe finished the sweep.

Lauren Calvert (3 kills), libero Whitney Miller and Mandie Tennant (3 kills, 2 stuffs) also played their final matches for Crow.

"We lose those four seniors and their leadership will be missed," Crow added. "It's been a while since we've made it to districts and it's to their credit. We are trying to build a program like St. Henry and to get to play a team like this at this point of the season is a good sign."

Ally Mikesell added six kills and five stuffs for the Redskins.