

SPORTS

Lady Rebels upset Three Lakes in Sectionals

By DOUG ETTEN
SPORTS EDITOR

The stage was seemingly set as heading into the WIAA Division 4 Sectional tournament there were just three set wins standing between the Three Lakes Bluejays girls volleyball team and a return trip to the Sectional finals.

Unfortunately, it was an off night offensively for the Bluejays which coupled with a few calls that didn't go their way and a solid night of play from rival Laona-Wabeno meant the end of the line for the 2021 Northern Lakes Conference (NLC) champs.

Playing against their rival for the fourth time this season, and having already defeated the visiting Rebels three times over the course of the season, the fourth time was the charm for Laona-Wabeno who took those before mentioned three sets by scores of 25-23, 28-26 and 25-22. Following a win two days later over Columbus Catholic it is the Rebels who are headed to the WIAA Division 4 State Championships in Green Bay this coming weekend, and the Bluejays who are left wondering what might have been.

"It's a difficult thing to process, but especially so for senior captains Kara (Sowinski), Mari (Szevs) and Sara (Gruszynski)," said coach Jayme Wyss. "Laona-Wabeno came in with nothing to lose and played very well. We on the other hand, did not play very well at all."

In front of what was a capacity crowd in Three Lakes last Thursday, the Bluejays seemingly never were able to string together periods of consistent play. And while no team ever moved in front by more than six points over the entire match, the Bluejays were often trying to come from behind.

"In that first set, at one point we were down by at least six points at 17-11," said Wyss. "We have played aggressive all season so I don't understand why we were so

conservative in that set, and even too many times later on."

Still, down by six the Bluejays came back, eventually taking the lead 18-19 when a serve that would have taken the set to 18-20 in favor of Three Lakes was ruled out, tying the match instead at 19-19 and giving the ball back to the Rebels.

Three Lakes would get back in front once more at 21-22 after a block kill by Szevs. The senior would follow with a kill on the offensive side then to tie the game at 23 all, but a kill on the left from Ellie Krawze split Szevs and Sowsinki to put the visitors up 24-23. The Bluejays would have a chance to even it up, but a tip at the net sailed out of bounds giving the final point and the first set to Laona-Wabeno.

The Bluejays came out of the gates better in the second set, moving ahead with the first four points and eventually taking a 5-10 lead which forced the Rebels into a timeout. Out of the break, the visiting team crept back into the match, scoring the next five straight to knot the set at 10-10. Three Lakes then punched right back out of a timeout of their own, crawling ahead by four at 12-16. Six straight points though for Laona-Wabeno put them in control until the Bluejays got back up by one at 21-22, on serve with the ball in Sowinski's hands.

Three Lakes would keep the one-point advantage until 23-24 where a chance to close out the set and tie the match at one set apiece was in their hands. The longest point of the night though went the Rebels' way, tying the game again at 24. Three Lakes again had a chance to close the second set up 24-25, but the Rebels would take four of the next five points to swing the match and go up two sets to one with a 28-26 win in the second.

"When you look at the statistics I think it shows that we had the potential to come away with the win even on

a bad night," said Wyss. "It felt like it was a combination of bad calls that killed any momentum, us playing at our worst and them playing at their best. And somehow we still pushed to only two-point losses in the first sets. It's probably the more frustrating part."

In the third set neither team would pull away to start as it went to 11-11 before a couple of straight points from the Rebels put them in charge. At 13 all, Mari Szevs would get back-to-back points to move it to 13-15 in favor of Three Lakes. Krawze then sent an attack wide to make it a three-point lead that would grow again with the Bluejays up 16-19. Three-straight points from the visitors would then knot the game again, forcing Three Lakes to call a timeout.

Out of that timeout the set would stay tied up until 21-21 before three straight points from the Rebels made it 24-21. The Jays would get a much needed side out, but the next serve across would find the right hand of Alli Albrecht who put a kill between the arms of Gruszynski and Sowinski, finding the floor and ending the night.

Three Lakes struggled to contend Laona-Wabeno attacker Ellie Krawze who finished with 26 kills on the night on 64 attempts. Other than Szevs who finished with 10 kills on 32 attempts, no one hit at a positive percentage for the Bluejays who could not find any offensive momentum. Gruszynski added five kills followed by two from Addie Lehmann and one from Kaya Szevs. Sowinski led the way with 16 assists on the night. Kaya Szevs had four service aces followed by one each from Sowinski, Lehmann and Gruszynski.

"Things didn't fall our way to end this season," said Wyss. "Even when everything appeared to be in our favor."

The Rebels would go on to face Columbus Catholic, who was without All-State player Dorci Walker for much of the



Kara Sowinski gets airborne to celebrate a point with teammates Jenna Erickson (No. 20) and Addie Lehmann (right) during the third and final

set of Thursday's WIAA Division 4 Sectional match against Laona-Wabeno.

— Staff Photos By DOUG ETTEN

night due to an injury. With a win in four sets they would clinch a spot at State where they'll play Friday morning at 9 a.m. in the Division 4 semifinals against top-seeded Monticello. If they win that match they will play Saturday morning at 9 a.m. for a State championship against either McDonnell Catholic or Wonewoc Center.



Tears flow from the eyes of Mari Szevs (No. 13) as she is consoled by her sister, Kaya (No. 3) following the conclusion of last Thursday's WIAA Sectional loss to Laona-Wabeno.



Three Lakes head volleyball coach Jayme Wyss talks with her team after calling a timeout during the third set of last Thursday's

Sectional semifinal loss to Laona-Wabeno, who advanced to the State Tournament this week.

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