





UIS volleyball team wins home debut over Benedictine

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Playing at home usually brings added pressure, but for the University of Illinois Springfield Prairie Stars volleyball team, taking the court at The Recreation and Athletic Center was a relief Tuesday.

After a month-long road trip that included 13 away matches, UIS finally played at home. The Stars beat the Benedictine University at Springfield Bulldogs 25-15, 25-13, 25-22 in front of 210 spectators.

"The returning players said this is the most fans they've ever seen in the stands," UIS junior outside hitter Sam Krilich said. "We asked them, 'Is this the most fans you've ever seen?' and they said, 'Definitely.'"

An 11-kill effort from Krilich lifted the Stars. It wasn't pretty at times, but UIS (4-10) managed to hold off the Bulldogs' rally in the final game and beat Benedictine (3-13) comfortably.

UIS coach Angie Riggle would like to see her squad play a lot cleaner. "We did a good job of moving the ball around, but mentally we were out of it," she said. "A lot of our errors were mental mistakes that were unforced errors."

"We started Games 1 and 2 sluggish. We started Game 3 with a bang, then we became sluggish."

Benedictine coach Drew Aschenbrenner would have preferred a more consistent effort, too.

"We actually came in Game 1 pretty good and we just lost focus and energy," he said. "It took a couple games to get our confidence back. We made some mental errors at the end of the match and we've struggled with that all year."

"I think our defense is a lot better. Our blocking wasn't very good (Tuesday), but it has gotten better. So has our passing. We're 10 times better than what we were in the first few matches."

In Game 1, UIS rattled off nine straight points and built a 14-8 lead.

"We ran a lot of hits out of the middle better than we have," Krilich said. "That's something we've really improved on. Normally, we're shooting to our outsides a lot." Freshman middle hitter Maddy Barnes had seven kills and junior middle hitter Courtney Kombrink contributed six kills for the Stars.

Sophomore right-side hitter Missy Chott led the Bulldogs with six kills.

Benedictine didn't fare well against a NCAA Division II opponent, but the Bulldogs have faced stiff competition on a regular basis since making the jump from the junior college level to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics.

"The competition is a lot harder than we expected it to be, and we have a small team," Chott said. "We have one senior. I think that makes a difference. We've stepped it up, but it's still a transition process that we're still trying to get into."

Aschenbrenner doesn't downplay the upgrade in competition.

"It's a lot more difficult, but we're not that far away," he said. "We're competing. We're still going four or five games. If we get three or four good recruits, we'll get better." Riggle has a clear idea of what it will take for the Stars to get better. UIS will play at home for the majority of October.

"I want them to focus more on the mental aspects of the game," she said. "We have the skill there, but I felt mentally we weren't there."

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