

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

SCCAL Girl's Volleyball: Mariners hold off scrappy Hawks in sweep

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BY: TONY NUNEZ



Aptos High outside Sophia Bruce's (6) tipped ball carries over the net and into Mt. Madonna outside Elise Slater's (8) block during their Santa Cruz Coast Athletic League match Thursday in Aptos. -- Tony Nunez/Register-Pajaronian

APTOS -- For a few minutes the Mt. Madonna Hawks looked like they were going to be the first team to take a set off Aptos High in league play up 18-17 in Game 2.

But the Mariners rapidly rebounded to sweep the visitors 25-14, 25-18, 25-17 Thursday in Santa Cruz Coast Athletic League play.

Trailing for the first time in the match, Aptos (13-4, 8-0) stormed out of a timeout and scored eight straight points to win Game 2 and regain control of the night.

Senior Maddy Bol led the Mariners with 14 kills and senior Sophia Bruce added four kills while filling in for Madi Dueck, who was sidelined with a concussion. Karsen Welle recorded four aces.

Aptos, the defending tri-SCCAL champ, has not lost a best-of-five match since their preseason loss to Notre Dame-Belmont. That was a month ago.

All the winning since then -- their only official loss coming to Granite Bay High of the Sac-Joaquin Section in a best-of-three tournament match -- has done wonders to their already high confidence. It's made their 0-3 start to the season seem like it never happened.

"I think they deserve to be confident," said Aptos head coach Lucas Bol, while adding that their tempo at practice, more than their play in games, aids their confidence, "and I think it helps."

It was a pair of Elise Slater aces that gave Mt. Madonna (8-6, 4-4) the lead, but it was the Hawks' passing which kept them within striking distance through the first 18 points of Game 2.

After losing the opening game by 11, Mt. Madonna fell back on its fundamentals. The Hawks serve-receive was solid, they challenged nearly every Aptos attack and, most importantly, their passing was precise.

The improvement in passing allowed senior setter Sophia Saavedra to feed Mara Peruzzi, Sophie Ortiz and Slater. Ortiz had nine kills and Slater added five. The passing also helped erase the Mariners four-point lead in Game 2.

The Hawks were trailing 17-13 before they took off on a 5-0 run to take the lead. Slater landed two consecutive aces after Peruzzi knocked a powerful strike past the Aptos block, which forced the Mariners to take a timeout to regroup.

The quick pause in the action did wonders for Aptos as Mt. Madonna's serve out of the break went into the net and Welle pummeled the ball into the hardwood for a kill on the following point to regain the lead.

Aptos shutout Mt. Madonna for the remainder of Game 2.

“For the first 18 points of that game they were passing dimes,” Bol said. “If a team’s passing like that and feeling confident we’ll feel threatened. Hopefully things like that get us to rise up.”

Added Bol: “And it did.”

Game 3 was mostly Aptos. The Mariners jumped out to a 9-2 lead and never trailed.

Mt. Madonna did cut the lead to two at 16-14 with a 5-1 run, which concluded with a Gracie Howley ace, but Aptos again finished off strong.

The Mariners closed the game on a 5-0 run to win the match and continue their undefeated run in the SCCAL.

“I think we played pretty tentative and that’s why we had some slow starts in some of the sets,” said Mt. Madonna head coach P.K. McDonald, “but we battled back and I think we showed glimpses of our best.”

Mt. Madonna was coming off a four-set loss to second-place Soquel High, which took place Tuesday in Watsonville. The Hawks kept every game close, but couldn’t string enough points together to pull the upset.

As was the case Thursday.

Mt. Madonna occasionally sprinkled in a Slater kill here, a Peruzzi block there and a diving dig from Ortiz at other times of the match. But all of the above came too few and far in between.

The plays are being made. Now it’s about making them consistently.

“That’s going to be the key,” McDonald said.

The Hawks play in the Alvarez tournament in Salinas Saturday before hosting Harbor High Tuesday at 6:30 p.m.

Aptos travels to Scotts Valley High Tuesday at 6:30 p.m.