

SPORTS

SJR State volleyball team falls one point short of conference final

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The St. Johns River State College volleyball team had a championship date with top-seeded and tournament host Pasco-Hernando right there in its hands.

In an exhausting match that took well over two hours, the Vikings had the ball to serve up 14-13 in the fifth set of their Sun-Lakes Conference semifinal match with second-seeded Lake-Sumter, just one point away from moving to the final.

Unfortunately for the Vikings, that last point never came.

The LakeHawks won the point to tie it up at 14-all, then took the final two points to capture a 19-25, 15-25, 25-23, 26-24, 16-14 victory over the Vikings to advance to the first junior college Division II conference championship Saturday night. On Sunday, the LakeHawks took the momentum to nationally ranked Pasco-Hernando and outlasted the Bobcats, 26-24, 25-19,

17-25, 25-27, 15-13, to advance to the national Division II championship tournament on Nov. 15 in Charleston, W.Va.

"It was both exhausting and fun to be a part of," Vikings coach Matt Cohen said after his team finished its first Division II season at 22-11. "Both teams put their best effort forward. We just couldn't find ways to finish."

The Vikings, who lost two of three matches during the regular season to Lake-Sumter (14-13), but won the one

match on the same Pasco-Hernando floor it played on Saturday, dominated the LakeHawks early and often before starting to lose that momentum as Lake-Sumter started putting its game together.

The Vikings led 23-22 in the fourth set when a Vikings player had a chance to put a wide-open kill attempt away and missed the mark as her shot flew out of bounds. Lake-Sumter would ultimately

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take the fourth set. Then in the fifth set, the Vikings needed the one point to move on to the championship, but committed a costly service error as the ball went long. That gave Lake-Sumter the ball back and the LakeHawks took advantage as they made a block to take the lead, then

won the final rally of the match to advance.

"We played our best volleyball of the season," Cohen said. "All along, I kept telling the girls that the idea was to continue to get better and that by November, we'd be playing our best volleyball of the year. To say we couldn't finish like we had in some matches earlier in the year would be selling these girls short. I felt we did have the ability to finish. Give Lake-Sumter credit for coming back."

In her final match in an SJRSC uniform, Hanna Foecker had a night to remember, delivering 23 kills, two service aces, two assists and 15 digs, while freshman front-line teammate Lindsey Grossman had a huge match with 22 kills, 22 digs and two assists. Freshman Jordyn Pruski recorded 58 assists and added two services aces and 14 digs, the same amount of digs as Skylar Martin. Arena Acree had three aces and a dig. In her final match, Abigail Barnhard put up

seven kills and had three kills.

Earlier in the day, St. Johns blanked sixth seeded Florida Gateway of Lake City, 25-17, 25-17, 25-7, behind Foecker's 15 kills, five service aces, 18 digs and one block, Grossman's 12 kills, two aces and 12 digs, Kendal Hoges' eight kills and Pruski's 42 assists and six digs. Eden Edgell put up five kills for the Vikings, who will lose sophomores Foecker, setter Kellsy Crow, Barnhard and Eden Beato.