

Viking Volleyball



FRAN RUCHALSKI / Palatka Daily News

Freshman middle blocker Brooklyn McLeod gets the ball up and over for St. Johns.

Easing the Sting

SJR State avenges 2018 conference tournament loss with sweep of Lake-Sumter

BY MARK BLUMENTHAL
Palatka Daily News
mblumenthal@palatkadailynews.com

The stinging five-set loss to Lake-Sumter at last November's Sun-Lakes Conference tournament in which the St. Johns River State College volleyball team won the first two sets is still a sticking point to Kendal Hoges.

"That has been in our mind every day," the sophomore middle hitter said.

Hoges and her teammates did something to lessen the sting Wednesday night at home. The Vikings dominated up front and recorded 39 kills en route to a decisive 25-17, 25-20, 25-21 triumph over the defending conference tournament champion

See **VIKINGS**, Page 2B

Vikings

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

LakeHawks at Tuten Gymnasium in the first conference match for both teams.

"It was important for our front line (to play well)," said Hoges, who had nine kills and a block from her position. "We just had to do it"

When asked what makes this 4-3 Vikings team unique compared to last year's unit, Hoges had a two-word answer.

"The energy," she said. "We have more of a family-like atmosphere. We had to show (Lake-Sumter) what we're made of this year. We're a different team."

And so are the LakeHawks, who went to the Division II national

junior college tournament in Charleston, W.Va., last year after dusting off the Vikings in five sets, then taking down top-seeded and host Pasco-Hernando in the conference final. Lake-Sumter has yet to win a match, starting this year 0-5.

"They have Skylar Martin (who had seven kills and a block) who played for us last year," Vikings coach Matt Cohen said. "They have two or three girls who saw significant time for them last year. But they are a new team."

As for what he's seen with his team in a relatively young season, Cohen said, "I think the biggest difference is the balance we have. We have five girls who can score for us, so when we're passing well and giving our setter options, I think we're tough to stop."

That setter is sophomore return-

ee Jordyn Pruski, who was handing out assists like they were birthday wishes in this win with 35 total off the 39 kills. Lacey Redinger had 10 kills from her outside position, while Hoges and Brooklyn McLeod (seven kills) had a big night in the middle hitter spots. Lucy Herter had six kills for the Vikings.

Ahead 8-7 in the first set, the Vikings scored 10 of the next 13 points to coast to the win. The last two sets were competitive. Ahead 19-18 in the second set, Redinger came up with a kill, then served the next two points, one being an ace that hit the net and tipped over on the LakeHawks' side to make it 22-18. The Vikings never looked back.

In the third set, the LakeHawks took a 19-18 lead, but a Redinger kill tied it. Lake-Sumter went ahead again at 21-19 and the teams

traded points. The ball wound up in the hands of sophomore return-ee Bianka Solarzano, who served out the final five points of the match, getting two kills from Hoges, one of spectacular variety, and then an ace on the final point.

Redinger added an ace and seven digs, while Pruski had six digs and an ace.

The Vikings travel to New Rochelle, N.Y., this morning and play four matches in a two-day span starting Friday at Monroe Community College.

"We just need to get better with-in chaos," Cohen said. "That's our biggest challenge right now. We don't get a quality touch, we just freak out too easily. We need to be calmer. When we are calmer, we're good, but when they get tense, we're high air. We need to work on that."