

SPORTS

www.palatkadailynews.com

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2019

B SECTION

Vikings come up short vs. Gulf Coast in conference final

Palatka Daily News

On most afternoons or nights, the St. Johns River State College volleyball team might have won a regional championship and moved on to the NJCAA Division II tournament in Charleston, W.Va.

Not on Sunday against the team with which it shared the Sun-Lakes Conference regular-season title, Gulf Coast State.

"Of the two matches we played this

weekend, we played our better match on Sunday," said Vikings coach Matt Cohen after his second-seeded Vikings lost to the top-seeded Commodores in the Sun-Lakes Conference/Region 8 Tournament, 25-21, 26-24, 25-22, at South Florida State College in Avon Park. "In the end, (Gulf Coast) was better than us offensively. That turned out to be the difference."

And the Commodores (21-6) had to be better than the Vikings (22-9) for the

Vikings played lights out offensively with 43 kills and nine service aces, 52 of the 67 points they scored on the afternoon.

"If they make more unforced errors, we would certainly be in it," Cohen said. "But to their credit, (Gulf Coast) had just three or four errors in each set. There was a thought of waiting for them to cool off, but the problem was they never did. It was just one of those days – they played that great a match."

Emma Richards earned Most Valuable Player honors for the tournament as she turned in 16 kills, including the last two points on kills to finish the match and the championship for Gulf Coast. There is a rags-to-riches story after Hurricane Michael devastated the Panhandle and put a huge dent into the Commodores' season a year ago.

See **VIKINGS**, Page 2B

Vikings

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

For the Vikings, who had their second straight 22-win season after finishing 22-11 a year ago, Louisa Marunde had 14 kills and two service aces, while Kendal Hoges finished with nine kills and a block and Brooklyn McLeod ended up with eight kills.

On Saturday night in the semifinals, the Vikings got revenge on a 2018 come-from-behind victory by Lake-Sumter to defeat the LakeHawks in straight sets, 25-18, 25-23, 25-21. Marunde and Hoges had 13 and 11 kills, respectively, while Dariana Luna had 14 digs, two assists and a service ace and Jordyn Pruski handed out 35 assists and added eight digs. Lacey Redinger, named to the all-tournament team with teammate Hoges, had seven kills, four assists, a service ace and 11 digs.

With the significant time a number of freshmen played this season, Cohen, completing his fifth season overall with the program, is thinking big things with his 2020 team already.

"We had seven freshmen on the team, and five saw significant time," he said. "There's reason to believe we have a strong shot to be better next year. What we have to do is just build on what we got done this year."