

Volleyball: Class A Hall Regional

Hall, Princeton cruise into championship for rematch of last year's regional final

By Andrew Daglas
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The Hall Lady Red Devils and Princeton Tigresses earned top-four seeds and first-round byes for the Class A Hall Regional Tournament.

Taking the court for the first time in the tournament Tuesday night, they both showed why.

In the first game of the night, the top-seeded Lady Red Devils rode explosive hitting and an even more explosive home crowd to a 25-16, 25-15 win over No. 11 Earlville.

Lisa Klein smashed 13 kills and Kailey Klein eight kills — most of which had bystanders reaching for radar guns.

Vanessa Funfsinn fed most of those kills, finishing with 23 assists on the night.

"We were ready to play tonight, and we did all right, but we could have done a lot better," said Lisa Klein.

The Lady Red Raiders hung in both games despite a few Hall runs, includ-

ing a 7-0 start to game two.

But the Lady Red Devils were a bit rusty in their first postseason match, missing serves and committing a few defensive miscues.

Neither team was able to settle into a rhythm in the streaky contest. Hall coach Demi Salazar attributed that to some playoff butterflies, particularly among his younger players.

"They've never played in a regional before. For them, it's the first time (they feel) their life is on the line," he said.

In the end, Hall's power was enough to make the difference.

Earville coach Tonya Thorp was pleased with the resilience her team showed, scratching back from several large deficits.

"They didn't give up, and they played hard until the end," she said. "They knew they had a challenge tonight, and they were up for it."

Kelsey Polte had seven points and four aces for Hall, and Lana Romanelli scored all of her service

points on Hall's 7-0 run to open game two.

Becky Spiers scored four points for Earlville. Erin Wiedmann led the team with three kills, while Courtney Boltz and Chelsea Martin each added a pair of kills and a pair of blocks.

Princeton 25-25, St. Bede 15-6

It was a different story for Princeton in the evening's second contest, as the Tigresses came out sharp right off the bat.

After Angela Baumgartner and Ashly Lowdermilk struck back to back kills to take a 5-3 lead, Princeton gradually picked up steam.

The Lady Bruins kept game one close, until a 9-1 Tigress run, keyed by relentless defense and a struggling St. Bede serve receive, made it 20-8.

St. Bede fought hard down the stretch, closing the lead to 24-15.

On the final point, both teams charged a furious volley that featured



NewsTribune photo/David Manley

Hall's Lisa Klein (No. 34) puts one past Earlville defenders Tia Torres (No. 10) and Jen Meredith (No. 15) during the Lady Red Devils' 25-16, 25-15 win over the Lady Red Raiders Tuesday in the semifinals of the Class A Hall Regional. Hall will now play Princeton for the regional title Thursday at 7 p.m.

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Rematch

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one desperation dig and game saving return after another before the Lady Bruins finally relented.

"An all-around good effort. Momentum's everything in volleyball, especially in regionals," said Princeton coach Andy Puck. "We've been working on not making a lot of errors, making better free-ball passes, establishing the middle and freeing up our outsides."

Game two was all Princeton. Baumgartner (five total kills), Lowdermilk (four kills), Erin Yepsen (eight points, five kills) and Julie Musselman (four kills) led a Tigress hitting attack that combined power and precision to pick apart St. Bede's defense.

A 9-1 lead quickly became 17-4, then 25-6 as the Lady Bruins strung together consecutive points only once in the game.

Betsy Russell chipped in eight points, eight digs and a game-high 17 assists for the Tigresses.

"We knew coming in it was going to be a tough

match," said St. Bede coach Kyle Moreno. "Whenever (Princeton) rotated around, usually they had someone strong up at the net.

"I don't know if it was nerves or what, but there was no communication on the floor," he added.

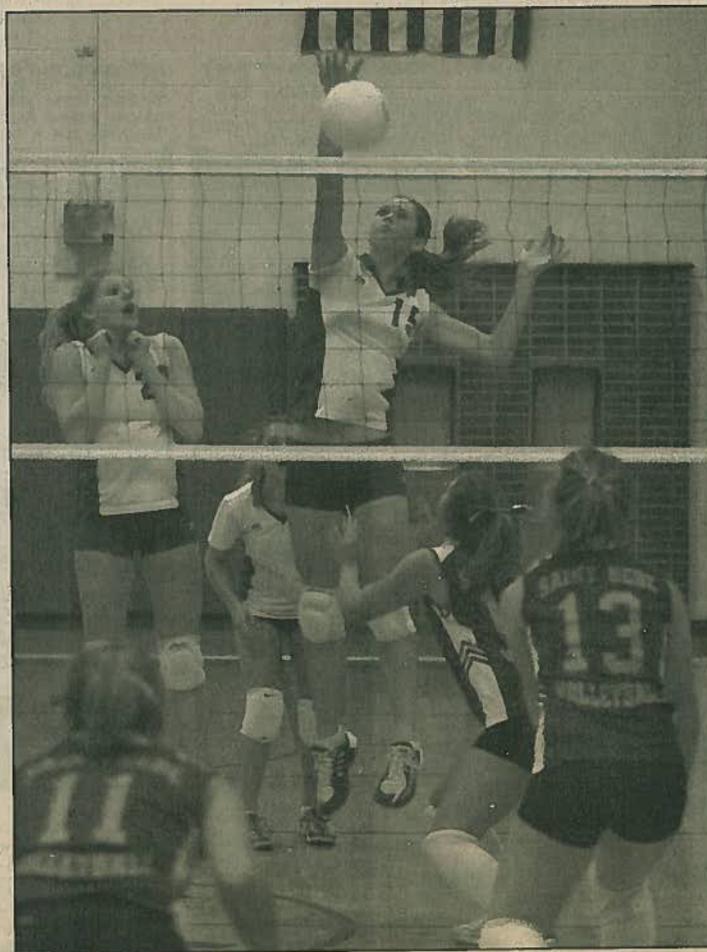
Toya Hodges led the Lady Bruins with 10 assists, nine points and eight digs. Jessica Phelps added 10 digs, and Emily Eiten 10 kills and two blocks.

The winning teams will be back on the Hall floor Thursday night for the regional final, in what's expected to be a hard-fought contest between two schools that are very familiar with one another.

Last year, Princeton beat Hall in the Class A Princeton Regional final to give Puck his first regional championship as a coach.

"Hall's a force to be reckoned with. It's a good rivalry," said Puck.

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NewsTribune photo/David Manley

Princeton's Angela Baumgartner (No. 15) goes up for the kill and the point during the Tigresses' win over St. Bede in the semifinals of the Class A Hall Regional Tuesday.