

Volleyball: Hall 20-25-25, Mendota 25-17-23

Mendota takes Hall to the limit

Lady Red Devils prevail in NCIC play after tough three-game match

By Andrew Daglas
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MENDOTA — These days, when the Mendota Spikers take the floor both teams can expect a knock-down drag-out time.

Two days after coming up short in a three-game match against Sterling that featured a 31-29 deciding game, the Spikers pushed the visiting Hall Lady Red Devils wire to wire in a 25-20, 17-25 23-25 loss.

"It's been unbelievable this week," said Mendota head coach Tracey Nelson. "We battle, we battle, we battle, and we can't seem to get that last point."

After dispatching La Salle-Peru in just 35 minutes on Tuesday, Hall barely outlasted Mendota in a match that approached the one-hour-and-15-minute mark before anything was settled.

The tenacious tone was set right at the start, as neither team could take more than a two-point lead until an ace by Elaina Ambler gave Mendota a 10-7 advantage.

Almost every series featured long volleys as hard hits were met by determined defenses, and players on both sides of the net flew from end to end to keep the ball off the floor.

Good defensive positioning and solid digging helped the Spikers keep the Lady Red Devils at bay and maintain a slim edge most of the way.

"Our players had to drift a lot. Instead of coming down on the ball, they had to drift and hit the ball," said Hall head coach Demi Salazar, whose team moved to 13-2 and 3-0 in the NCIC. "That was working right into their defense."

Hall was eventually able to put together four points in a row to tie the game at 20. But the Spikers answered with a game-clinching five-point run



NewsTribune photo/Cory Soldwedel

Hall's Lisa Klein (left) blocks the tip from Mendota's Erin McKeague (No. 13) during game two of the Lady Red Devils' 20-25, 25-17, 25-23 win over the Spikers Thursday at Mendota. With the win, Hall improved to 13-2 overall and 3-0 in the NCIC while Mendota dropped to 6-9 overall and 0-4 in the NCIC.

bookended by Ambler's tip kill to break the tie and her service ace to finish off the win.

Mendota got the second game off to a 3-0 start, but four kills between the big-hitting Lisa and Kailey Klein helped Hall pull it to 8-8. The squads traded points until a

Vanessa Funfsinn ace gave Hall an 11-10 lead, their first since being up 6-5 in game one.

Two points later they went up 12-11 and began to pull away, as the front line finally found holes in the Mendota defense. Hall got kills from Lisa Klein, Funfsinn and

Kelsey Polte during a 10-3 scoring run that gave them the biggest advantage of the night for either team at 22-14.

In the rubber match, neither team showed any signs of letting up. Hall opened up several leads of four and five

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points, but Mendota kept closing the gap. As the visitors kept inching towards the 25-point mark, the Spikers came up with several key defensive stands to hang in the game.

Leading the defensive charge were Ambler, with eight blocks and seven digs, Marissa Cox with 14 digs and Jessica McKenzie with 12 digs.

"We talked about that before the game, trying to set up some defenses and adjust to their hitters," said Nelson. "I was very impressed with our defense, the way we played scrappy and didn't let anything drop."

The efforts paid off as Mendota, aided by two Hall errors, battled back to a 19-all tie.

After a series of hotly contested volleys with each team making at least one miraculous save to keep a point alive, Kailey Klein finally closed the match out for Hall with a sharp kill to the middle of the court.

The kill was her 11th on the night, bested only by Lisa Klein's 19. Funfsinn had six kills and 22 assists for the Lady Red Devils.

Salazar said a battle like this one, though exhausting, was good to help the team keep focus.

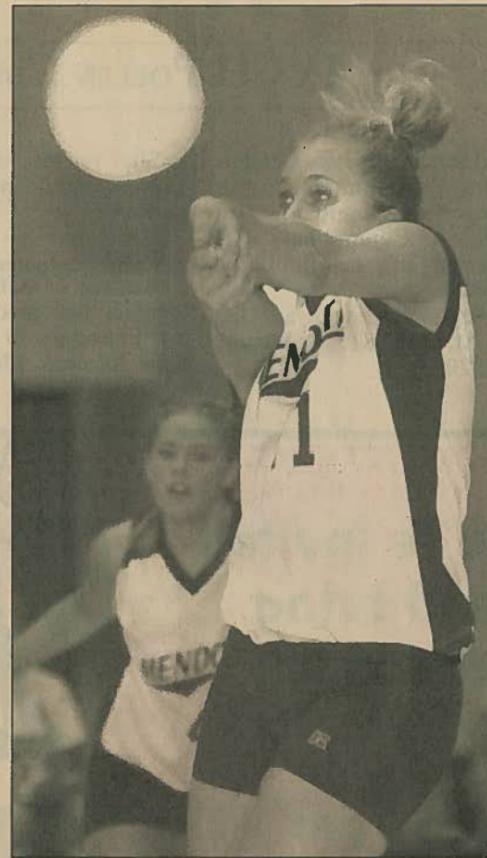
"Your kids have to know that everybody comes to play every day," he said. "We knew that (Mendota) would be tough."

"They do some things that give us problems," he added, declining to elaborate on which things he was referring to. "That's a team capable of doing some damage."

Ambler led Mendota offensively with nine kills, while McKenzie and Ashley Kimrey added five apiece. Setter Emily Happ put up 18 assists.

The Spikers are now 6-9, 0-4 in conference. Despite enduring their third hard-fought game in a week without a win to show for it, Nelson said her team can take away a lot of positives.

"Our defense is right where it needs to be," she said. "If we keep playing the same as we have this week, I know we're going to come up



NewsTribune photo/Cory Soldwedel

Mendota's Marissa Cox (No. 11) makes a pass from the back row during game one of the Spikers' NCIC loss to Hall Thursday.

with some big wins. I just keep the girls in a positive attitude. They're all ready for the next competition."

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