
Paradise Hill Volleyball Team Wins Provincial Silver Medal

December 2, 2009

How do you sum up a volleyball season that ends with a provincial silver medal? How do you sum up a coaching career that spans thirty-one years, three provincial gold medals, three silvers and two bronzes?

“It started when these boys were in grade 10 and we went down to Ponteix in 2007 for the provincial championships and won a bronze,” said head coach Wayne Wisser, “but the main guys who won that medal were the older graduating players. We knew that next year the grade tens who were moving up would have to carry the team and do it for us in 2008. We did make provincials that year and finished in 7th place, with players in grades 10 and 11.”

“This year assistant coach Steven Trefiak, the team and I sat down as a group and decided what our goals were. The main consensus was to win a gold at provincials. We worked hard at that all season. When things were going well we congratulated ourselves and when things weren’t going that well, we reminded ourselves of what our goals were.”

With this approach the team was able to put together an excellent season, playing in high-level tournaments and never finishing lower than fourth. Winning the Weyburn tournament against big comprehensive high schools was an especially high point for many of the boys. After finishing up the regular season in relatively good health, the team won their conference and advanced to Regionals, beating Leoville in the finals for the gold.

“We won our way in to provincials – we had a free pass as tournament hosts but we didn’t have to use it – and it was stressed to the boys that in each of the previous four times that we’ve hosted the provincial tournament no Paradise Hill team had ever used its free pass – they had always won their way in,” said coach Wisser, “and this year it would be no different.”

In the Provincial tournament all of the round robin games went well until the last game against Davidson. “I was really nervous when we played against Davidson. We needed that last round robin game to get that first place finish in our pool – and a guaranteed place in the final. Then we lost the first set.”

It was at that point that the team, standing on the line before the second set against Davidson, became infused with a common purpose and determination. “Standing on the sidelines there was no doubt in any of our minds that we were going on to the finals,” said Logan Huard. “He was dead on,” said Mathew Hougham, “at that point everyone knew that we were going for the gold as of right now. So we woke up and won the next two matches 25-16 and 25-14.”

After winning their pool the team advanced to the semi-finals and a match against Goodsoil. “The Goodsoil game was the most important game that we played all year,” noted Logan Huard, “and everyone came to play – every one of us was hitting, blocking and setting great.”

“All year we’d tried to avoid giving up runs of points,” said coach Wisser, “ – tried to avoid the mental lapses that lead to giving up a run of points. Against Goodsoil everyone was in the moment and we didn’t give up any runs of points against – it was a single for us, and a single for them, all match long. The scores were very close because Goodsoil was in that zone as well: two teams in the semis playing consistently and superbly. It was a great match, characterized by beautiful play and mutual respect.”

In the finals against Fox Valley the Paradise Hill team began tentatively: “It took us the first set to settle down and realize that we were in the provincial final and that we could compete with these guys,” said Matthew Hougham. “ Then we came out and dominated them in the second set from start to finish with big blocks and big hits.”

“ The place went nuts,” said Logan Huard, “There were 400 people yelling and screaming their hearts out. You couldn’t hear a single word anyone was saying. Mr. Wisser called a time out and talked to us in the huddle and we couldn’t hear a single word. Not a single word. We won that game 25-18.”

“The third game was back and forth,” said coach Wisser, “a well fought game, and Fox Valley came out on top 25-21 to clinch the gold.”

When asked for his thoughts on the day Coach Wisser remarked, “I would throw balls up in the warm-ups for the boys to hit, and typically, when I do that, only seven will go bang into the court -five out of twelve don’t make it. This past weekend they were pounding twenty out of twenty - just crushing hits- and I asked myself who were these boys? If I’d measured their verticals in those moments I would have seen a ten to twelve inch increase and there’s no physical or logical way to explain that except to say that the spiritual and inspirational things that they were experiencing took them to a higher level than they’d ever gone before. That’s how I felt watching the matches. It was just a phenomenal experience and something I’ll never forget. I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for all these people doing this for our school and our students.”

When the boys were asked if they had any final thoughts that they wanted to share Logan spoke for the entire team: “It’s Mr. Wisser’s last year- he retires in June, so whenever we got to the circle before the game it was always ‘let’s do this for Mr. Wisser’ – it was always all about him.”

Surprised at this revelation coach Wisser smiled: “For me personally, to end it that way, well - it’s the best retirement party a guy could have! A good way to go out.”