Defender Women's Volleyball Reaches Grandest Stage

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DEFENDER WOMEN’S VOLLEYBALL REACHES GRANDEST STAGE

Their final game ended in a heartbreaking 2-3 loss to the Hastings Broncos, but the Dordt Defender women’s volleyball team had an incredibly successful season.

Finishing with a record of 28-8, they were the first Dordt athletic team to make it to a national championship in the history of the college.

The national championship match was held December 3 in Sioux City, Iowa, at the Tyson Events Center. The Defender Nation rallied in force, shattering attendance records and filling the stands with a sea of enthusiastic black and gold. KDCR, Dordt’s on-campus radio station, broadcast the match live.

The Twittersphere was also abuzz with the cheers of Defender fans, and the hashtag #DefenderNation was used dozens of times over the course of the tournament.

Expectations were high going into this year’s season. The 2015 season built confidence that Dordt had a volleyball team that could successfully reach championship-level competition.

“I would say balance is our team’s strongest quality,” says sophomore exercise science major Leah Kamp (Illinois). “We know when to have a good time, and we know how to turn it on and get serious and aggressive.”

As early as a year ago, says Hansen, coaching staff had been giving these players the message that they have the ability, the talent, the necessary ingredients to make that kind of run.” In 2015, Dordt became conference champions for the first time. In 2016, the team faced an even tougher conference race. Dordt finished 3rd in the conference this year, and the team is looking toward next season with “a stronger awareness and drive.”

Through the season, the team remained strong on the court as well as off. Coaching staff and Karla Hansen, Coach Hansen’s wife, provided a supportive, relaxing environment for the players after games on the road, hosting meals in the Hansen home. Ensuring the team was well-provided for nutritionally, emotionally, and spiritually helped the team recover after games and build strong relationships, easing the pressure.
of a stressful season.

“We stayed resilient and focused, and that allowed us to be free and really united us at the pinnacle of our season,” said Hansen.

“National tournament was a real merging of chemistry, camaraderie, joy, talent, and energy. To see it mature even more with each match we played was probably one of the highlights of most of our lives,” said Hansen. “The support, the wall-to-wall people, the fans on their feet—it was better than anything I had imagined. The love, the unity—it was really special. The match finished the way it did, and that was tough, but we felt every bit of everybody’s encouragement and support.”

This year marked the first time two Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC) teams met in the national tournament’s final match.

Dordt defeated several higher-ranking teams in its regular season. Though they lost their first game to Hastings, the team ended its regular season by reversing that outcome in the teams’ second meeting, defeating Hastings, the number-two ranked team at the time.

“Even when times got tough or a positive outcome seemed out of reach, we pressed on, giving our all for our teammates,” says senior communication major Jill Schouten (Iowa). “This quality is valuable for a team—no one is ever going to have it easy. When times get tough, some teams fall apart, while others grow stronger. This season, we grew stronger.”

Brooke Granstra (’17) was one of three Defenders named to the Tachikara All-American Team. Jamie Gesink (’19) and Ema Altena (’19) were the other two.

SHELBI GESCH (’17) AND LYDIA MARCUS (’18)

Faculty Notes

Education professors Gwen Marra and Dr. Pat Kornelis gave a presentation titled “Celebrating Diversity in Christian Schools with Differentiation” at a professional development conference in Belize in January. Education Professor Mary Beth Pollema delivered a presentation titled “Let’s Build Something Biblical” at this conference, and Education Professor Dr. Kathleen Van Tol gave a presentation called “Reaching all the students in your classroom.” The conference was approved by the Belizean Ministry of Education and met national requirements for professional development.

Kornelis, Marra, and Dr. Ed Starkenburg gave a presentation called “Iron Sharpens Iron: Co-Teaching in a Teacher Education Program” at the National Conference on Co-Teaching in Minneapolis in October.

English Professor Dr. Howard Schaap published “Liturgies of the Body: The Jump Shot and Spiritual Practice” in The Other Journal in December.

History Professor Dr. Scott Culpepper gave a presentation titled “The Cinematic Cecil: Elizabeth I’s Right Hand in History, Memory, and Media” at the Gloriana Society Conference at the Tower of London in November.

Mathematics Professor Dr. Tom Clark presented a paper titled “Weighing Fog: Hands-on Modeling for Day 1 of Differential Equations” at the Joint Math Meetings in Atlanta in January.