

Xavier Jumps to 3rd in the State After Defeating Boulder Creek

By Holly Santman

The Xavier College Prep volleyball team improved to 10 – 2 and jumped to No. 3 in the state after defeating Boulder Creek on Wednesday night at the Xavier Activity Center.

Coming off an impressive showing at the Westwood Invitational Tournament of Champions where they won eight of nine matches, the Gators dominated in straight sets, 25-14, 25-17 and 25-7. They now only trail Hamilton and Notre Dame Prep in the state rankings.

Senior setter Alexa Shiner had a strong showing with 27 assists, three kills and four digs. She was acrobatic at the net all night, setting the ball just behind her to allow the outside hitter a powerful kill almost every possession. Shiner's assists led outside hitters Emma Soderstrom and Ava Larkin to a combined 21 kills.

Shiner, explaining the Gators' strategy, said it was important to read the middle blockers on the opposing team.

“A big part of it is looking on the other side of the net, so being able to tell where the other middle is going and just trying to figure out the location on top of that is really crucial,” Shiner said.

While the Gators have relied heavily on their senior outside hitters in many of their matches this season, Xavier coach Lamar Bryant said the goal for the team was to work the middle blockers in transition to give them more opportunities to score.

“I think we're still really young, but I want to keep improving,” Bryant said. “We have to find multiple ways to score. Right now, we're a little bit outside hitter reliant.”

The Gators saw the other side of the net well, holding the Jaguars to just 14 kills and four blocks.

Xavier had the momentum in the first and third sets, but the Jaguars put up a strong fight in the second. They got their energy up and started the set on top and points went back and forth until the Gators took the lead 9-8 and did not give it up for the rest of the set.

The match was more competitive than the final score indicated, highlighted by multiple long volleys where at least four players recorded digs.

“We're so much stronger, much more cohesive than what we were last year,” Jaguars coach Jherra Ricks said. “We're a very young team as well, so we have no seniors, we have three juniors, seven sophomores and two freshmen.”

Ricks said her young team (2-6) has an advantage because most teams do not know what to expect from them.

“I really do truly believe we will be a playoff team and that's really what we're looking for,” Ricks said. “So, I think as long as we continue to communicate and work together as a team, we're going to be just fine.”

Xavier plays Desert Vista (3-2) at Desert Vista High School Thursday and Boulder Creek takes on Chaparral (4-2) on Tuesday at Chaparral.