Written by Jim Metcalfe Wednesday, September 26, 2012 1:55 PM -



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DELPHOS — Jefferson's volleyball team has shown steady improvement in the 2012 campaign.

The Lady Wildcats took another step Tuesday night, downing Paulding 25-20, 18-25, 25-20, 25-18 in Northwest Conference action at Jefferson High School.

"We're showing signs of getting there. We are definitely improved," Jefferson coach Joy Early noted. "Last night, we had a 5-setter (with Lima Temple Christian) where we were on one set and off the next. We were much more consistent tonight; we still have our moments but they are getting less as we move on."

Paulding (2-11, 0-4 NWC) coach Todd Harmon figures the match was par for the course. "We have been that close and we were that close tonight," he added. "We lost a lot of seniors from last year but that is no excuse. We have girls that have roles to fill and we simply have to do the job every set and every match. We will go back to the drawing board and move on." Jefferson (7-8, 2-2 NWC) got off very quickly — five straight aces by senior Fallon Van Dyke (7 aces overall out of a team total of 15). The Lady Panthers slowed the early momentum but the Red and White steadily built a 16-10 edge on a hitting error by the Panthers (32 for the match). The Panthers then took advantage of some hitting miscues by the Wildcats (32 for the match) and kills by junior Emily Farr (2; 4 for the match) and junior Sierra McCullough (4 kills), getting an ace by sophomore Morgan Riley (13 digs) to take a 20-18 lead and forcing a timeout by Early. That was the last hurrah for the visitors in the set as a hitting error gave the serve to junior Kenidi Ulm. An ace, two spikes by junior Lindsay Deuel (7 kills), two miscues and a hit off the block by junior Katelyn Goergens (10 kills) finished the set.

Paulding started off better in the second set and got the lead early. A 6-0 span — with four hitting errors by the Lady Wildcats the main part — put the visitors in control at 13-6. The Red and White could not recover from then on and the Panthers maintained a comfortable margin, tying the match at 1-1 on a hitting error.

The third set was the opposite of its predecessor; the Wildcats getting off to a quicker start and building a 13-7 edge as Van Dyke (6 kills, 7 digs) put down an overpass. The nearest the Panthers could get from then on was 13-12 — an ace by senior Courtney St. John (12 assists) — but the Wildcats — with more variety at the net — maintained the lead and put themselves up 2-1 on a hitting miscue on set point.

After a couple of ties early in the fourth set, Jefferson got the lead on a Deuel kill and never trailed again. Using aggressive serving that forced Paulding to start its offense from deep in the

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court, strong digging in the back row and solid hitting, they built up a 15-7 margin on an ace by junior Rileigh Stockwell (3 aces). Paulding did not go away quietly, getting within 16-14 on a hitting error. However, a spike off the defense by Goergens stopped that momentum and pushed the hosts to a 20-14 edge on a miscue. One more time, Paulding got within two — 20-18 on an off-speed kill by freshman Kelsey Beck (8 kills, 25 digs) — but a kill by Van Dyke jump-started a closing 5-0 spurt. Another missed spike on match point sealed the deal for the Wildcats.

"We communicated very well tonight," Early added. "It sometimes is a lot of screaming but it's effective; we need to communicate well to win. When we do, we're successful; when we don't, we struggle much more. We focused on that tonight."

Junior Kamie Pulford had seven digs and sophomore Brooke Culp added 20 assists for the home team.

Junior Tiffany Spangler added 14 digs and junior Kaley Varner nine assists for the visitors. Paulding won the junior varsity match 25-22, 25-19.

Both teams return to NWC action 6 p.m. Thursday (JV match starts): Jefferson at Spencerville and Paulding home to LCC.

Monday night, the Wildcats lost a 5-set road marathon to the Lady Pioneers 17-25, 25-15, 15-25, 25-23, 15-10.

Goergens led the way (6 aces, 11 kills, 2 blocks), along with Van Dyke (4 aces, 8 kills) and Culp (22 assists).

LTC won the JV match 25-23, 23-25, 25-12.