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Mustangs stun sixth-ranked Mediapolis

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MOUNT PLEASANT — Pressure? What pressure?

The way Marty Barnett sees it, the pressure wasn't on her underdog Davis County volleyball squad in Friday's Class 2A Region 8 semifinal to pull an upset. It was on the team trying to avoid be upset.

"I don't know why there would be any pressure on us," Barnett said. "We're not the team ranked sixth in the state."

That team was Mediapolis, who entered Mount Pleasant Gym with only two losses in 40 matches this season. Loss number three came in stunning fashion, as 28-12 Davis County took all three tough games from the Bullettes, winning 25-22, 25-22 and 27-25 to move within one win of a trip to the state volleyball tournament.

With the victory, the Mustangs will take on another ranked team in No. 10 West Liberty. That regional final match is scheduled to take place in Durant next Tuesday. There is no word yet as to whether or not that contest will be moved to a different location — Durant is a short drive for West Liberty but a long haul for the Mustangs. Friday's match with Mediapolis was originally scheduled to take place in nearby Eldon, but was moved to Mount Pleasant.

The longer driving distance didn't seem to keep Davis County volleyball fans away. When the Mustangs' final block hit the floor on their fourth match point Friday, the Davis County volleyball team was engulfed by a supportive student body that kept the celebration going in congratulating each player as they came out of the locker room following the match.

It was right about then that Barnett felt comfortable in celebrating the win herself.

"I never felt comfortable (during the match)," Barnett said. "I respect Dennis (Jandrey) and his teams too much to feel too confident."

Barnett's squad certainly played with plenty of confidence throughout the match. Facing a team with amazing ability at the net, the Mustangs met and beat Mediapolis up front with 36 kills to the Bullettes 30.

Senior Lauren Dewes and sophomore Rylee Eakins were right at the heart of the Davis County attack. The duo led the Mustangs with 22 kills, scoring on almost half of their 45 successful attacks in the match.

"We knew we had to have good hits," said Eakins, whose team-high fifth block clinched the Mustangs regional final berth. "Getting good hits and good blocks were what we needed to win."

Dewes, who had a match-best 13 kills, talked about where Davis County's confidence came from to pull off the

surprising sweep.

“I looked over their stats before the match and I told the girls we could do this,” Dewes said. “We do play some big teams during the season. We’ve played at some really tough tournaments. We’ve seen some good teams and we felt like we were prepared to play against anyone. “It’s so exciting. It’s awesome to be moving on.”

Right from the start, it seemed Davis County had the ability to stay with — and even beat — No. 6 Mediapolis. The Mustangs made the first big run of the night, scoring nine of 10 points to turn an early 5-4 deficit into a sudden 13-6 lead.

Mediapolis rallied back, but couldn’t get back on top until a late three-point run put the Bullettes up 21-19. Davis County answered with three straight points of their own and never looked back, putting away the opening game on Dewes’ fourth kill of the night.

“We just didn’t worry about their hitters and their blockers,” Dewes said. “We just focused on playing our game and trying to come out on top.”

The Mustangs again showed that confidence in game two, pulling away for a 10-7 lead. Mepo answered with seven straight points and seemed to be on their way to finally establishing some control with a 14-10 lead.

Instead, it was Davis County that answered. The Mustangs used hustle to keep rallies alive and consecutive kills by Aisha Boone and Eakins to pull ahead, 23-19.

When Kari Wuthrich nailed an ace to clinch a second straight 25-22 Mustang win, the gym exploded with the cheers of Davis County fans.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been as proud of a bunch of kids as I am of these kids,” Barnett said. “We could have just gone over and taken a loss, but the kids just went out and played volleyball.”

The simple message of ‘just play volleyball’ seemed to serve the Mustangs well throughout the night. While Mepo made several mistakes passing and setting the ball, Davis County showed poise in their execution and led most of the third game of the match, leading by as many as five points midway through the clincher.

“Isn’t that what you work for? You work so that they’ll be playing the best they can at this point of the season,” Barnett said. “I’ve always tried to keep it simple in teaching this game. I think scouting and trying to run different sets just gets in the way. Keep it simple.”

Putting away Mepo wasn’t as simple as hoped, however. Davis County lost three late match points and fell behind in game three, 25-24. As the sixth-ranked Bullettes (38-3) looked to be charging back to save their season, Barnett’s message during the team’s final timeout was also a simple one.

“Take a deep breath,” Dewes said. “That’s all she said.”

“I didn’t know how receptive they’d be after being away for three years,” said Barnett, a hall-of-fame coach who came out of retirement to coach the Mustangs this season. “They’ve been very receptive all season long. It’s been great.”

Dewes had a kill to even the match, followed by one from Boone. The fourth match point proved to be the winning one, as the Mustangs (28-12) head to Durant Tuesday to face West Liberty one win from going to the

Class 2A state volleyball tournament.

“I feel like we can do anything right now,” Dewes said. “We’ve never been this far before. I’m excited. I think we can do it.”

“We’ve always wanted to get there,” Eakins said. “One more win and we’ll be there.”

Davis County 25-25-27

No. 6 Mediapolis 22-22-25

Davis County Statistics

Serving — Shelby Graves 17-17, Leah Rushman 14-14, Aisha Boone 12-12, Kari Wuthrich 11-11, Lauren Dewes 10-12, Kaylee Scholten 6-8. Team 70-74. Aces — Rushman 2, Wuthrich 2, Dewes. Team — 5.

Hitting — Dewes 27-37, Eakins 22-26, Boone 18-22, Amber Cassat 10-12, Scholten 8-11, Alexa Owen 4-4, Rushman 1-1. Team 90-113. Kills — Dewes 13, Eakins 9, Boone 7, Scholten 4, Cassat 2, Owen. Team — 36.

Setting — Scholten 21, Owen 7, Graves 5. Team — 33.

Blocks — Eakins 5, Boone 2, Cassat, Scholten. Team — 9.

Digs — Dewes 15, Rushman 15, Boone 12, Scholten 10, Graves 5, Owen 4. Team — 61.

Mediapolis Statistics

Aces — Kaci Keitzer 2, Kalyn Ertz, Kensley Heater, Haley Hillyard. Team — 5.

Kills — Ertz 10, Heater 7, Jessica Holsteen 5, Heidi Hillyard 3, Rachel Holsteen 3, Elizabeth Schulte, Aubrey Siegle. Team — 30.

Blocks — Ertz 5, He. Hillyard 3, J. Holsteen 3, R. Holsteen 2, Heater, Siegle. Team — 15.