



# MENDOCINO-LAKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT NEWS RELEASE

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## **EAGLES PLAY ANOTHER FIVE-SET THRILLER WITH ALAMEDA**

**Written by: Joe Langstaff**

It's a shame that the Mendocino College Eagles women's volleyball team doesn't have any more matches scheduled with the College of Alameda Cougars this season.

Instead, on Monday, the two teams played each other for the second and last time in the 2018 season that has now concluded, save for the community college women's volleyball state tournament.

In terms of sheer competitiveness, entertainment and drama, the two Bay Valley Conference matches in which the Eagles and the Cougars faced off against each other this season would be hard to top.

Both matches required the playing of five sets to determine the winner. In each match, the loser scored 13 points, before the eventual winner garnered the necessary 15th point to win the deciding set and the match, in both cases on the opponent's home court.

This writer has little doubt that if there were a third match played between these two teams, it too would likely end up "going the distance," not being decided until one of the two teams scored the match-winning, fifth-set 15<sup>th</sup> point.

Sadly, with the season concluded, we'll never know for sure how a third match between the teams would have played out.

In the first match between the teams played in Alameda on October 10, the Eagles pounded the Cougars in the first set, winning it 25-8. The second set was closer, but the Eagles won that set too, by a narrow 26-24 score.

Looking to close out the Cougars in straight sets, the Eagles tried to make it happen. But Alameda fought hard and managed to survive to play at least one more set, winning set three 25-23.

They duplicated that effort in the fourth set, winning it by an identical 25-23 score and setting up a decisive 5<sup>th</sup> set.

After the match, Eagles head coach Katherine Escobedo gave her account of the exciting and somewhat unusual fifth set.

"The fifth set was intense. During that set, the score was tied 6 to 6. One of the Alameda girls hit the ball and got a kill, with the ball landing in the back corner.



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“The ball actually bounced up and hit the lines referee in the face and knocked her glasses off, which caused her to start bleeding. She had to go get seen by the trainer, which caused a bit of delay.

“The Alameda coach was insisting that the match should go on, since her girls would get cold. She tried to have one of her coaches do lines. I told the ref that wasn’t fair. We should wait for the other official. He agreed to wait. He allowed both teams to huddle and talk amongst themselves.

“When the lines referee returned, the game continued. Alameda went up 8-7. The teams switched sides.

“We made a couple big plays and went up 12-9. Alameda came back with some big serves. The score went to 14-11 in our favor and then to 14-13. We ended it with a big kill by Erin (Hale).

The rematch between the two teams at Mendocino College was originally scheduled to take place this past Friday, November 9. But it was postponed because of the college closure due to very poor air quality in the area caused by the tragic Butte County fire.

The match was rescheduled this week on Monday, October 12. Given the prior match, it was not at all surprising that this one would turn out to be another marathon encounter between the two teams.

The Eagles played this match with 8 players: Hale, KJ Taylor, Christina Wilson, Kate Bazzani, Katie Kuehn, Liana Menton, Hannah Stewart and Jasmine Rice. The Eagles were still without the services of their libero Torrie Boles and her backup Isabel Gutierrez, (both having suffered injuries from which they had not yet recovered).

As they had in set No. 1 of the match at Alameda, the Eagles again played a strong first set, a trait they have shown in most of their matches this season.

They jumped out to an 11-5 lead, bringing an Alameda timeout. But the Eagles just kept pouring it on, hitting a high point of a 12-point lead at 20-8. In that stretch Hale had multiple kills. Taylor and Kuehn also had kills.

Alameda, try as the might, could not cut the deficit to less than 10 points, the Eagles finally winning the set 25-15.

The Eagles took an early lead in Set 2 when Taylor made a kill for the first point. But Alameda got the next 2 points on a kill and a Mendocino hit out of bounds.

It turned out to be a lead the Cougars would not relinquish for the remainder of the set. When the lead went to 9-4, the Eagles called a timeout.

Over the next several points the lead fluctuated between 4 and 5 points before reaching 6 points with a 16-10 score in Alameda’s favor.

A Kuehn tip kill, followed by her ace, cut the lead to 4 and a Hale kill a bit later cut the lead to 3, 17-14. But Alameda made a run to boost the lead to 21-14.



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A kill by Rice and 2 by Wilson helped cut the deficit to 22-18, but Alameda was able to match points the rest of the way, winning the set by a 25-20 score and evening the match at a set apiece.

Set No. 3 transpired much like set No. 2, except that it took Alameda a bit longer to get and hold a lead. The Eagles got a quick 2-0 lead, the first point on a Wilson ace.

In the early going, the score was tied multiple times, first at 2 points each, then 4, and 5 points each. The Eagles went up by 3 points, 8-5, but Alameda won the next 8 points to tie the score 8 all. The Eagles called a timeout.

After the timeout, the Cougars earned the next point on a kill to take the lead and kept adding on until it reached 18-12, with Eagles calling another timeout.

The Eagles cut the lead to 4 points but Alameda got it back to 6. The lead held between 5 and 6 points the rest of the way, with Alameda winning the third set by a 25-19 score to go up 2 sets to 1.

The Eagles fell behind early in the fourth set 0-3, but rallied back to win the next 4 points, the 4<sup>th</sup> point coming on a Taylor kill. It was Alameda's turn to take a timeout.

The Cougars fought back to tie the set at 6-6 and again at 7-7.

Alameda then took a slim lead and held it for several points. When the score reached 16-13 in Alameda's favor, the Eagles called a timeout.

The timeout didn't bring the hoped for results, with Alameda continuing to lead and increasing the its lead to 4 points at 20-14. Staring at a deciding third set and match loss, the Eagles called another timeout.

After the second timeout, the Eagles began to rally, chipping away at the lead until it was 22-19. Alameda called a timeout.

When play resumed, the Eagles earned the next 2 points to cut Alameda's lead to 22-21. Alameda made a kill, answered by a Taylor kill, Alameda's lead back to 1 point at 23-22.

A Taylor kill tied the score at 23. A Rice kill gave the Eagles their first lead since early in the set, now 24-23.

The Eagles completed the late-set comeback when Taylor gave them the set-winning 25<sup>th</sup> point on a block, the Eagles winning Set 4 by a 25-23 score, sending the match to a deciding 5<sup>th</sup> set.

Alameda took a 2-1 lead in Set 5. The Eagles rallied back on another Taylor kill, soon followed by a Kuehn ace to give Mendocino a 4-2 lead.

The Eagles continued to lead with scores of 5-3, and 7-5 before Alameda rallied to to the score 7-7 and then take an 8-7 lead. The teams changed sides.



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Alameda extended its run to 4 points and a 10-7 lead. But the Eagles made a counter rally, scoring the next 3 points to tie the score 10-10, two of the points coming on Hale kills.

Alameda went up 12-10 on an Eagle error and an Alameda kill. The Eagles got a point back on an Alameda hit out of bounds.

Alameda went up 13-11 on a kill, but the Eagles got a point on an Alameda error and then a Taylor kill to tie the set 13-13.

But the Eagles then failed to get a ball back over the net on the next point, with Alameda going up 14-13. The match ended when the Cougars got the deciding 15<sup>th</sup> point on a block to win the set 15-13 and the match 3 sets to 2.

Alameda's win left both teams tied for fifth place in the final conference standings, both with 5-9 conference records.

The Eagles ended their season with a slightly better overall record than Alameda, the Eagles finishing with a 5-12 record, Alameda at 6-15.

Coach Escobedo shared her thoughts after the team's final match of the season, starting with comments about Alameda's coach.

"It's always fun to play Linda (Thompson, the Alameda head coach). She puts on a good show, for sure. Some of the other coaches are kind of scared of her. But for some reason, she loves me. She actually told me after the match that we put up a good fight.

"She hasn't stood up like that and coached in a few years. That made me feel good. She's been coaching in the BVC the longest (among coaches of women's sports)."

Thompson has been the head volleyball coach at Alameda since 2004. She was the head volleyball coach at Laney College from 1997-2002 and the head softball coach at Laney from 1994 to 2008.

Speaking about the match, Escobedo felt "It was a fun game to watch. Kate, our setter, definitely stepped it up this game. Christina, our outside hitter, was focused and determined to win. She probably played one of her best games. Today she played smart. She watched for the holes and went all out.

"KJ played really hard. She's a dependable, consistent player we can count on score points for us.

"It was a good game. Everyone played really well. Everyone got a chance to get in the game. They all played hard. It was our last game. So I wanted everyone a chance to get on the court.

"Kate Bazzani played really well for us. She played hard in the front row.



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“Liana Menton usually doesn’t play in the back row, but that’s something we tried. She’s been digging every ball. She’s become a really big asset for us in the back row.”

Asked which players she would consider to be most improved on the team this year, Escobedo responded “I would have to say, physically, Liana. Mentally, I would say our setter Katie.”

With the team having only one sophomore on the team this year (Gutierrez), there should be a sizeable group of returners next season with a year’s worth of experience playing college-level soccer.

“I told the girls (after the match) you’ve had this little “practice run” this season. Now that you guys have this chemistry, we’re going to be doing a lot of offseason training; open gyms, our spring class and our summer class.

“I want to take them (the players) to the series if possible and begin building that chemistry.

“We going to be adding more preseason games next season. We only had one preseason game this season (coach Escobedo being hired just before the start of the semester).”

Escobedo has already started recruiting locally for next season, both in Mendocino and Lake Counties.

The 2018 Bay Valley Conference women’s volleyball season produced co-champions; Los Medanos and Solano College. Fittingly, the two teams played each last Friday, November 9, at Solano, in each team’s final conference match of the season.

Going into that match, Solano trailed Los Medanos in the conference standings; Los Medanos with a perfect 13-0 record and Solano in second place at 12-1. Los Medanos had defeated Solano 4-1 in their first match back on October 9, at Los Medanos.

In this second meeting at Solano College, the Falcons turned the tables on the Mustangs, beating Los Medanos in 5 sets, after trailing 2 sets to 1, Solano rallied back to win set four 25-16, and the deciding 5<sup>th</sup> set by a 16-14 score.

The two BVC co-champions finished conference play with identical 13-1 conference records, each team’s lone conference loss coming at the hands of the other.

Solano had a better overall season record of 18-10 to Los Medanos’ 16-12.

College of Marin and Yuba College finished conference play tied for third place, each with 9-5 records. Contra Costa and Napa Valley finished in seventh and eighth place in the conference respectively, Contra Costa with a 2-12 record, Napa Valley 0-14.

The CCCAA Women’s Volleyball State Championship Tournament seedings should be announced the end of this week.