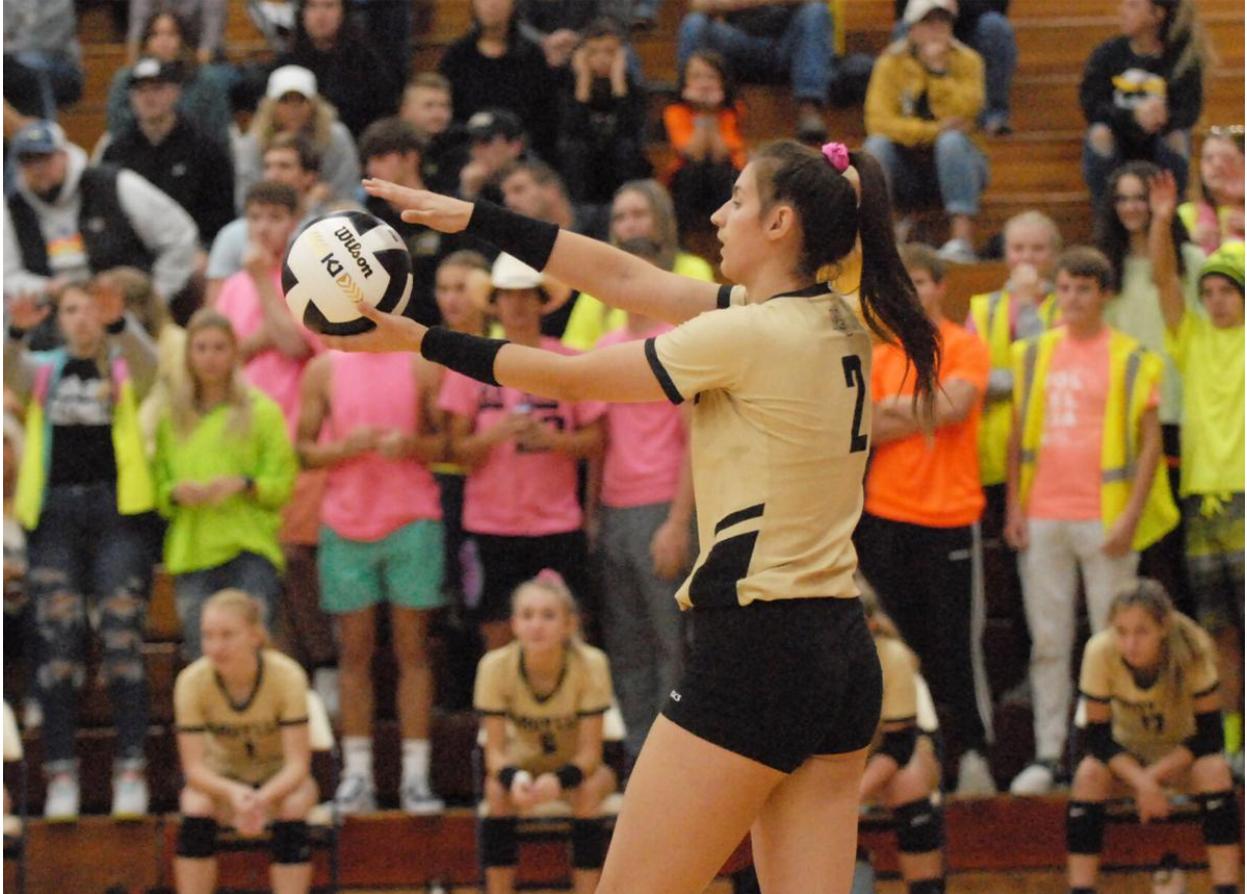


M-G advances to regional final for 2nd straight year



ELWOOD — In what figured to be an emotionally charged regional semifinal, the intensity of Alexis Baney and Madison-Grant proved to be too much for Alexandria as the Argylls are within one more win of a trip to semistate.

Baney hammered seven of her match-high 15 kills in the fourth set and Grace Holmberg added 10 kills, and the Argylls took a 25-11, 25-19, 7-25, 26-24 win over their regional and Central Indiana Conference rivals.

The Tigers overcame the death of beloved coach Deanna Miller, a COVID-19 shutdown and a 6-8 start to forge a three-way CIC tie and win 20 matches and the school's fourth sectional championship. First-year coach Emalee Wyatt expressed her pride in what her team and its five seniors — Carlie Remington, Taylor Stinefield, Kara Simison, Olivia Hall and Kendall Parker — were able to accomplish this season and in their careers.

“There is a ton of fight in them,” Wyatt said. “I told them to keep fighting and keep playing hard, and they did that, even after a couple not so great sets. ... They're amazing. I'm so proud of them with everything they've been through.”

Saturday morning, the Argylls proved to be too much for the resilient Tigers to overcome.

M-G blitzed Alex from the service line in the opening set to the tune of seven aces. Service runs by Daya Greene, Baney and Gabby Rudy built an overwhelming 21-7 lead on the way to a 25-11 opening-set win.

“We had quite a few aces, which surprised me because (Alex) is a really good passing team,” M-G coach Kayla Jump said. “I think that knocked them off their normal game plan.”

The Tigers grabbed their first lead of over one point at 3-1 in the second set, but the Argylls quickly took control. A six-point service run from Baney widened the M-G lead from 16-15 to 22-15, and Holmberg ended the set with a block for a 2-0 Argylls advantage.

As the Tigers had done all season, they showed no quit despite the early setbacks.

Stinefield opened the third set with a nine-point service run, and the Tigers never looked back. Stinefield — who finished her career with seven kills and match-best eight aces — also served out the set's final four points to extend the match.

In the second regular season meeting between these teams, a fifth set went to the Tigers. Baney was determined to not let that happen again.

“If we wanted to win, somebody had to take over,” the junior middle hitter said. “The message was that we needed to calm down and play our game because we had really slacked off. I said we couldn’t let our opportunities go because we might not get another chance again.”

Baney also led by example. The 6-footer put away three kills in a row as the Argylls seized momentum with a 7-1 early lead.

The Tigers did fight back. Three straight Parker aces tied the set at 9-9 before an ace from M-G’s Daya Greene sparked a 3-0 run for a 21-18 lead. An Ashlynn Duckworth kill gave Alex its final lead at 22-21. Another Duckworth kill saved the first match point, but Greene put away the final point as the Argylls survived the set and the match.

For the Argylls, Gabby Rudy had 27 assists and three aces while Greene — playing outside due an injury to Azmae Turner — added three kills and three aces.

The Tigers were led by Addy Warren’s nine kills, Parker’s 27 assists and seven kills each from Stinefield, Hall and Duckworth.

Madison-Grant will face No. 10 South Adams (27-8) in tonight’s championship match after the Starfires swept Rossville (17-16) in the second semifinal at Elwood. South Adams won its only regional title in 2016 while the Argylls — who lost to Wapahani in the regional final last year — are seeking their first trip to semistate since 2013.

“If we play with intensity — because I know we can play 10 times better than we did — we will win,” Baney said.