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Past, present and future

Shrine Catholic volleyball winning and building

By Brad D. Bates
 C & G Sports Writer

Royal Oak Shrine Catholic volleyball coach Bill Wolf has a lot on his plate these days.

His Knights now have old postseason rivals in their league, are breaking in a roster with only three seniors and looking to improve on an already steady start that has them at 8-5-2 overall, 2-0 in the Catholic League East Division at press time.

“We’re improving quickly,” Wolf said Sept. 18. “With only three seniors, I thought we’d take most of the year to get everyone together. The seniors have carried the load, though. They play all the way around.”

Senior captains Lauren Bald (outside hitter), Christi Rapp (outside hitter) and Annie Sutherland (setter) are hoping to help their nine junior teammates prepare to take over next year while finding a way to win this year.

“It’s important to get them developed because most were on JV last year,” Wolf said of the seven juniors who are new to varsity. “The pace of the game is so much faster on varsity.”

While the Knights look to win today and build for the future, they are also looking to exorcise a couple of past demons, namely Allen Park Cabrini, which has beaten the Knights in three straight CD Division championship matches.

With Warren Immaculate Conception and Taylor Light and Life closing their doors following the 2006-07 school year, the Catholic League realigned its volleyball divisions for 2008. Cabrini and Bloomfield Hills Sacred Heart moved from the West Division to join Shrine, Marine City Cardinal Mooney and Waterford Our Lady of the Lakes in the East.

“(Cabrini) has won the last (three) years, but we didn’t play them in the regular season,” Wolf said of his team’s past with Cabrini. “(Realignment is) good for us, because we get to play Cabrini and Sacred Heart more.”

The Knights took round one this season against Cabrini, winning 25-20, 25-23, 21-25, 25-17 Sept. 9 at Cabrini.

And while the Knights have lost to Cabrini in three straight CD Division championships, they’ve beaten Sacred Heart in three-straight CD semifinals. Shine and Sacred Heart’s rivalry was furthered this year when the Knights beat the



Photo by Scott Drelinski
 Royal Oak Shrine Catholic senior Annie Sutherland sets a ball while junior Jenny Cadena looks on during a match Sept. 20 at Clawson High.

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Gazelles Sept. 16 at home.

The Knights will meet Cabrini for a second time at 6 p.m. Sept. 25 at home. They face the Gazelles at 7 p.m. Oct. 2 at Sacred Heart.

Young players, such as middle hitters Julie Walsh, a sophomore, and junior Rachel McCullough, have helped Shrine in these early rivalry matches.

“Our middles are really coming along and giving us a lot more blocking than we’re used to,” Wolf said.

“(Walsh) is 6-2 and (McCullough) is 5-10, but she can really jump. She gets up there. Being a middle hitter is tough because everything is happening around you, but they’ve adjusted really well.”

Another of the Knights’ strengths has been their serving, a skill that was key in their win against Sacred Heart.

“We served 94 out of 96 against Sacred Heart,” Wolf said. “It’s subtle, but it makes a big difference. Sacred Heart missed 14, and we missed two. That’s a lot of points.”

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