



D-III: Juniata Wins National Title

The Eagles took down defending champion Washington University in St. Louis.

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Mallory Carra
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ROCHESTER, Minn. - More than a thousand wins and 28 years later, Juniata College can finally call itself the Division III women's volleyball national champions.

Juniata swept the crown away from Washington University in St. Louis, last year's champion, in a 3-0 (30-27, 30-27, 30-28) victory, while the University of LaVerne took third place over New York University, 3-1 (30-25, 28-30, 30-28, 30-23) in the consolation match at the NCAA Division III Women's Volleyball Championship at the Mayo Civic Center in Rochester, Minn.

The win capped a historic year for the school, located in Huntingdon, Pa. The title is a first-ever in the history of the Juniata women's volleyball program, which started in 1977. Earlier this year, Juniata head coach Larry Bock, who has been with the team since the beginning, also celebrated his thousandth win, making him the winningest coach in women's volleyball history.

The Eagles dedicated the title to all of those who have been apart of Juniata volleyball, past and present.

"We did it for our teammates who are here and not here," Juniata senior Katie Charles said. "We did it for Larry and we did it for anyone who has ever touched our program. This is not just a win for us. As exciting as it is to win this national championship, we just won this for about a thousand other people."

The sweep came as no surprise to Juniata, a team that swept the 2003 national champion Washington in September earlier this season.

"We knew we were gonna get it done," Juniata sophomore Stephanie Kines said. "There was no doubt in anyone's minds."

In the history of the school, Juniata had made 19 NCAA tournament appearances without producing a title. It was always something that has eluded the decorated Bock, whose many accolades include an induction into the inaugural class of the American Volleyball Coaches Hall of Fame last year.

"It's been 28 years and I can't tell you how many press conferences I've been to having left the locker room full of tears," Bock said. "This is much better. I'm honored to be involved with the school and the team that has put up with me as coach."

For Washington head coach Rich Luenemann, there's no hard feelings losing to Bock's No. 1-ranked Juniata.

"The quality of play that we saw tonight at the D-III level was amazing," he said. "There was one team that had more points than the other, but there was no loser tonight. We were in the national championship match and were a hair away from winning it. If there's anyone in America that it was okay to lose to, it was Larry Bock."

Earlier in the evening, LaVerne defeated NYU in four games to claim third place for the second straight year. NYU, last year's runner-up, dropped to fourth place this year.

There was less pressure for both squads, but the Leopards took advantage of NYU's serving and passing problems to come out on top.

"Because it was the last game, we pretty much came out with no regrets and wanted to have a good time," LaVerne senior Sara Lupu said. "We wanted to leave with a good memory of winning and having fun together."

Even though there was no championship at stake, LaVerne was just pleased to end the season with a win.

"As much as we'd love to be No. 1, I don't see anything wrong with being No. 3," LaVerne senior Jennifer Stout said. "I mean it's still top four teams in the nation. That's not bad at all."

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D-III Teams Thankful For Last Minute Change of Plans

Volleyball teams spend Thanksgiving in Minnesota, prepping for the Final Four

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Mallory Carra
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ROCHESTER, Minn. -- Four women's volleyball teams have a challenge ahead of them this weekend in Minnesota and it has nothing to do with turkey.

The NCAA Division III Women's Volleyball Final Four tournament just got started on Thanksgiving Day. All four teams spent 90 minutes Thursday practicing at the Mayo Civic Center for the first time since arriving in Rochester, Minn. In Friday's semifinal round, 2003 National Champion Washington University in St. Louis meets University of LaVerne at 5:30 p.m., while NYU and Juniata play in the 8 p.m. nightcap.

While players and coaches didn't mind competing for the championship during Thanksgiving weekend, it was difficult for many of their families to make their way to Minnesota.

Washington senior Colleen Winter didn't mind ending her career during the holiday weekend, playing volleyball on the biggest stage in Division III.

"At first, everyone was sad that they didn't get to be with their families like we have in the past over Thanksgiving," she said. "But you're so excited after quarterfinals and you just want to play. I'm really excited to end senior year on Thanksgiving weekend because what more can you be thankful for, except for playing your last game at the Final Four."

Washington head coach Rich Luenemann agreed, appreciating that he can spend the holiday with his squad and compete for a national championship for the second straight year.

"What a great time for a bunch of people who are so very, very close like a volleyball team to be together during the holiday," he said. "What a great opportunity to be together on a holiday and be in the Final Four. It doesn't get any better than that."

Not only did Juniata senior Katie Charles not mind spending the holiday at the Final Four, but she planned on being in Minnesota for Thanksgiving since the NCAA announced the host of this year's Final Four in the summer. Her father even organized a bus for fellow parents to get from Pennsylvania to Rochester this weekend.

"As soon as I found out, I was like we're going to be in Minnesota and I told my parents we're not having Thanksgiving this year at home," she said. "It was good for my parents because they have off work, so they can come out here. It's a nice thing, because on any regular weekend it would be tough to get off work."

But for the other family members of players and coaches who wanted to come, getting to Minnesota was no easy task.

The family of NYU senior tri-captain Serena Bountour will not be at the Final Four to watch the last volleyball matches of her career because the trip from Huntington Beach, Calif., her hometown, was just too expensive.

"The cheapest flight we could find was \$500 and that wasn't going to happen," she said.

Many of her teammates faced the same problem, but it's not too devastating for the squad, she said.

"It was ridiculously expensive," Bountour said. "So families who couldn't afford it drove or if they're too far, they're just not coming. We'll just make some copies of the [game] videotapes and send them out."

Some the families of players from California had better luck. All of the La Verne families will be present at the tournament to cheer on the squad, whose entire roster hails from the Golden State.

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"We had a good amount of parents that were prepared and had their tickets," La Verne head coach Don Flora said. "Some were already prepared, some were last minute, but they made their plans and understood what was in front of them. We have parents coming from Las Vegas, (Los Angeles), Ontario (Calif.), Palm Springs. They're coming from everywhere."

Last season, the Final Four was held at LaVerne Dec. 5-6, the weekend after Thanksgiving, providing a two-week break between the quarterfinals and the semifinal matches. However, this year the NCAA decided to do away with the extra weekend, which pleased La Verne senior Jennifer Stout.

"Yeah, it's two weeks to prepare and that might be good, but if you're not ready by now for the Final Four, there's no need for the two weeks," she said. "We had two practices at home and we came here. We're ready. I don't think the two weeks are necessary. I thought it was drawn out and too long to wait."

All of the coaches were also thankful for the quicker approach to scheduling the championship.

"I'm glad we're getting to do this right way. The two week break has always been kind of excruciating," Juniata head coach Larry Bock said. "It's a little difficult to plan training. On the other side, this is a difficult travel weekend. As a team, they're ready to play."

NYU head coach Ed Caesar agreed, noting that the extra weekend last year may have given his players too much time to get scared about possibly facing conference rival Washington University in the tournament.

"It's one of those things where you just want to go out and play instinctively and not have to think about things," he said. "So we landed on Sunday and we turn around, we're leaving 48 hours later. I like that kind of turnaround, so when you get on the court it's instinct right away. They're ready to battle."

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Wooden Cup Profile: Clark Lea

Fullback hopes to have impact on his local community

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Mallory Carra
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When Atlanta Falcon's linebacker Jamie Duncan served as the grand marshal at Vanderbilt's 2004 homecoming parade, Commodore's fullback Clark Lea remembered him as a former Vanderbilt All-American who once spoke to his high school class.

Growing up in Nashville, Tenn., Lea grew up seeing the influence of Vanderbilt football players, like Duncan, lending a hand in the community. As a Vanderbilt student-athlete himself, Lea followed in their footsteps.

"I remember the impact they had on the field and in the community," he said. "I remember them coming to talk to my class in fifth grade and in high school. Whether the kids I see remember it or not, I know it makes an impact and that's the reason I keep doing it. As much as they benefit from it I benefit as well."

His efforts in the community and on the field have made him one of six finalists for the inaugural Wooden Cup.

To Lea, the award means even more because of who it is named for - legendary men's basketball coach John Wooden.

"When I heard about the award, I did some research on him," he said. "He was a great father, who won father of the year, and was voted Coach of the Century. That's heavy, and it meant a whole lot to me to have my name be in anyway associated or related to him. He's the best coach that ever lived."

Lea, a first-year graduate student at Vanderbilt, is an aspiring coach himself. Although his Vanderbilt football career ended with a 38-33 loss to Tennessee on Nov. 20, Lea is hoping to remain with the Commodores on the sidelines by getting a graduate assistant position in the Vanderbilt athletic department.

"I really enjoy that side of football," he said. "I think there are so many lessons to be learned and there are so many ties to everyday life in sports. I would love to get the chance to coach a scholar-athlete and use what I've learned in the classroom in my coaching style."

Off the field, Lea served on the Vanderbilt Student-Athletic Advisory Board as a football representative for two years. With the board, Lea participated in throwing an annual Christmas party and field day for local children, fundraisers for inner-city schools and visits to the Vanderbilt Children's Hospital.

The one volunteer opportunity that Lea has yet to pursue is politics, his primary academic interest. He received his bachelor's degree in political science last year and is now studying toward a terminal master's degree in political science. Now that his college football career has ended, he plans to help out politically in the spring.

"Hopefully I can use the extra time to volunteer for a campaign," he said. "Elections get popular every four years, but they're always going on."

Lea's interest in politics stems from a government class he took during his freshman year at Birmingham-Southern College in Alabama.

"To fill out my schedule, I took a class in 'Intro to Government,'" he said, "and low and behold, the 2000 Election happened. It got me interested and I wanted more. Then the next year Sept. 11 happened and it also sparked my interest, opening a window to [my interest in] international relations."

Lea considered going into the NFL, but said he would rather tackle a career in coaching instead and is looking forward to starting his career on the football sidelines.

"I don't think there's anyone who wouldn't want to play for the NFL, but my opportunities are slim," Lea said. "I have great undergraduate degree from Vanderbilt and I plan on putting it to use. At the next level, I have to be realistic about where I have opportunities."

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