

SIUE volleyball hands UIC its first loss of season Friday night

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CHICAGO – SIUE volleyball handed UIC its first loss of the season Friday night with a 25-18, 20-25, 25-15, 26-24 triumph at the UIC Invitational.

The Cougars, 7-3, won the battle of the winning streaks. SIUE has now won six consecutive matches and will go for its second straight tournament victory Saturday against Bowling Green at 12:30 p.m. UIC, 10-1, entered the night with a 10-match winning streak to start the season and had been one of 10 teams left nationally to be undefeated heading into the weekend.

UIC had a chance to get back into the match in set four. After the Cougars grabbed a seven-point lead, the Flames pushed back to take a late 23-21 lead. However, SIUE picked up three kills late from [Taylor Joens](#) in its final five points to knock off the Flames.

"That was the first time in that situation where we have had a lead, lost it and then turned around to win," said SIUE Head Coach [Leah Johnson](#). "We stayed so poised. Our heads stayed tough. We really stayed dialed in. I was so proud."

Johnson said it was especially important that the Cougars win the fourth set and not allow UIC an opportunity to win in a fifth set.

"This team (UIC) has gone five sets a lot, and they are on their home court and are defending a win streak," added Johnson.

The Cougars stifled UIC's offense, which hit a season-low .119. UIC entered the match hitting .260 as a team.

SIUE picked up a season-best 13 blocks against the Flames. SIUE middle blocker [Carley Ramich](#) led the Cougars defense with a career-high nine blocks. [Emily Harrison](#) recorded six blocks while [Taylor Held](#) and Joens added five and four, respectively.

"That was the game changer," said Johnson of the team's blocks.

The Flames also did not have an answer for Joens in the middle, who finished with a career-high 18 kills. Her .517 hitting percentage also was a career best.

"She had a monster match," said Johnson.

[Ashley Witt](#) joined Joens in double figures in kills with 11.

Kelsie Groot led three UIC players with double figures kills with 15.

Earlier in the day, SIUE opened the tournament with a four-set victory over UMass Lowell, extending its winning streak to five matches.

The Cougars defeated UMass Lowell 25-14, 25-12, 21-25, 25-12 in the opening match of the tournament.

Harrison led the SIUE attack with 10 kills and a .348 hitting percentage. As a team, the Cougars hit .240 with 50 kills.

UMass Lowell, 5-7, had just one lead in the first set before the Cougars took over. With the Cougars leading 9-8, SIUE used a 16-6 run to close out to the opening set.

After cruising in the second set, the River Hawks grabbed the third set before the Cougars picked the pace back up in the fourth set. [Ashley Witt](#) recorded five kills in the fourth set.

"We were pretty balanced. I think that's the key right now," said Johnson. "Everyone contributed in some way."