

Alton's volleyball team fights to end of regional match against Chatham-Glenwood

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – **Alton's girls volleyball team** faced elimination in the second game of their IHSA Class 4A Alton Regional play-in match against **Chatham-Glenwood** Monday evening, but the Redbirds battled until the end.

The Titans scored the first six points of the second game and had stormed out to as much as an eight-point lead before the Redbirds caught fire and scored nine of the next 10 points to pull even with Chatham at 21-21 and seemed to be ready to force a third and deciding game.

Chatham bounced back, though, and scored the final four points of the game to eliminate Alton 25-22, 25-21 and advance to a 5:30 pm. Tuesday match against top-seeded Edwardsville, with the winner taking on the winner of the 6:30 pm. match between Quincy and Springfield at 6 p.m. Thursday for the regional title and a trip to next week's Chatham-Glenwood Sectional semifinals against the O'Fallon Regional winner; that match will be played at 5:30 pm. Nov. 1 at Belleville West, with the sectional final set for 6 p.m. Nov. 3.

The Redbirds were eliminated at 14-20-1 on the year; the Titans advanced with a record of 18-12.

Redbird coach Stacey Ferguson said communication problems the Redbirds had led to problems they had on the court. “Communication was always a struggle for us,” Ferguson said. “I don't know like, while I have unspoken leadership on the court, I don't feel like I have one girl on the court that really takes charge verbally and leads the court, so that leads to some of those unforced errors as well.”

Chatham took a lead in the opening game as well, but several times the Redbirds pulled to within a point or two but couldn't find a way to get into the lead. “I think we played their game,” Ferguson said, “which was good for them; it worked for them. They're a good team, they worked hard, they picked everything up, but that's not what we do, that's not what we practice, and when we divert and start playing the way they play, it throws us off of our game; that's where those errors come in because we're trying to force things that we don't do.

“I don't think we swung at the ball like we should; whenever we have girls who can hit, we need to be hitting and not tipping.”

The Titans bouncing back from Alton's comeback in Game 2 was representative of what **Titan coach Amanda O'Rourke** feels the Titans need to do. “That's kind of the mentality of what we've got to do in the postseason,” O'Rourke said. “If you give up points, you've got to get it going again and just don't allow them to do that.

“I'm glad we won in two, but I would have wanted us to push a little harder at the end.”

Game 1 opened up fairly even, the teams splitting the first eight points before the Titans went on a small run that put them ahead at 9-5 that forced Alton to call time out before pulling to 9-7 before Chatham pulled ahead to 12-9. The Redbirds managed to pull to within 13-12 before the Titans pulled away again, but Alton could never quite draw even with Chatham or take the lead; twice more, Alton would get to within a point of the Titans, but Chatham had the answers every time to pull away and eventually close out the game at 25-22.

Chatham opened the second game in command, scoring the first six points to force Alton to call time out; the time out seemed to work as the Redbirds scored the next two points, but Chatham took advantage of mistakes and got out to as much as a 13-5 lead, maintaining it until the game reached 20-12 in Chatham's favor before the Redbirds got on a run, getting to 20-17 before the Titans scored again, then forging a 21-21 tie and seemingly having them on the ropes.

But Chatham pulled together and scored the final four points of the match to advance into tonight's match against Edwardsville.

Annie Evans and Savannah Fisher led the Redbirds with five points from serve each, while Fisher and Gwen Hunter had five kills each, Evans had 13 digs and Sydney Schmidt added 19 assists and 11 digs for AHS on the evening.

O'Rourke knows that it will be a tough assignment going up against the Tigers. "We're excited," O'Rourke said. "We like playing tough competition and that's when we shine, so we're coming out excited and ready to go."

Monday's loss was the Redbirds' 20th of the season, something the program hasn't experienced in some time, but Ferguson is optimistic about 2017. "I have a good core group of juniors that have some varsity experience and they're a great group of girls," Ferguson said. "They work hard, they love the sport, they put in a lot of time in the off-season between club and what we do conditioning-wise, so I'm looking forward to that.

"This year has been a learning experience for them, so I'm really hoping the bad things can transfer into some positive changes for next year."



