

MELHS volleyball team uses strong defensive effort to topple Waterloo Gibault

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – While they won the opening game Monday night, **Metro East Lutheran boys volleyball coach Jason Batty** wasn't exactly the happiest coach.

“I told them our defense was really lacking that first game,” Batty said. “I thought our defense was standing around too much and we weren't covering.”

Message received.

The Knights' defense picked up the pace and helped MEL go on a game-breaking nine-point run that helped them record a 25-23, 25-15 win over Waterloo Gibault at Hooks Gym, taking their record for the season to 3-4.

“They were able to clean it up and get into positions and be ready,” Batty said. “I told them that right now, I felt we were one-dimensional – all we're doing is offense and we're not expecting to get blocked and not expecting the ball to come over (the net). I really wanted to focus on that, and it showed after that.”

Once the Knights got going, they were hard to stop. “We really cleaned it up,” Batty said. “I think we've found a rotation we really like; once the boys get comfortable with each other and knowing what their pluses and minuses are, they'll get more comfortable with each other.”

Batty cited senior J.J Schwartz – who's playing volleyball for the first time – as someone who's really improved for MEL. “This is J.J. Schwartz's first time ever playing volleyball,” Batty said. “He's starting right side for me right now – every time, he shows improvement. The one thing that's really good about him is that he listens to what I have to say and what the other players have to say, and he can correct it. It's really showing because he's getting more and more playing time.”

Senior Braden Woolsey was cited by Batty as well. “Braden's really coming into his own,” Batty said. “Him and A.J. (Risavy) have really connected; I love when they run a back-one and if the other team isn't expecting it, it gives me goose bumps when they run that.

“I feel we still have a ways to go on our defense, but we're improving every game; we're starting to read. You have to read the hitters, read the server – little things like that will help them along the way.”

Game 2 opened with a four-point MEL run that looked as though the Knights were going to run away with it, but the Hawks bounced back and pulled to within 4-3 before MEL pulled away to take an 8-4 lead. Gibault managed to pull to within 9-6 before the Knights got on a hot streak and pulled away to 18-6 before Gibault scored again. The closest the Hawks could come was 18-10 and 22-11 before the Knights closed out the game and the match.

On the night, Braden Woolsey had 10 blocks and Risavy eight; Braden Woolsey scored six kills while Risavy had five kills and Thomas Schroader three kills, with Brent Woolsey recording seven digs and Risavy 24 assists.

MEL is idle until Saturday's Rockwood Summit Tournament in St. Louis County; play begins at 8:15 a.m. The Knights then meet up with Belleville Althoff on the road at 6 p. m. April 10.

