

WIN NO. 25: Shells top Miners, set school single-season wins record

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ROXANA – The number 25 was certainly a magical one for Roxana's volleyball team Thursday night.

The number 25 is the number of points needed to win a volleyball game. And the number 25 is the number of wins the Shells were hoping to reach for the season to set a school record for most wins in a season.

They did just that in a South Central Conference match at Milazzo Gym as RHS defeated Gillespie 25-5, 25-22 to go to 25-10 on the year in their regular-season and SCC finale.

It was also Senior Night for Roxana as the team honored graduating seniors Braeden Lackey, Brittany Alexander, Hannah Kelley and Krysta Meyer before the match.

“I'll tell you, at the beginning of the summer, I knew they had the potential to (reach 25 wins) and we played 48 matches this summer and I said, 'you know what? It's going to pay off for you because we played a lot of good teams this summer, and when the season comes around, we're going to be better than what people might think',” said Shell coach Mike McKinney. “We lost three really good players from last year's team (Taylor Westfall, Niah Bevolo and Abby Palen) and I said, '25? We just don't want to settle for 25.’

“That was one of our goals, to break the school record (for most wins in a single season) and we got it. Every game from now on, we're going to break our own record.”

Roxana got off to a very quick start against the Miners before Gillespie bounced back and stayed with the Shells in Game 2. “The first game was the way we should be playing all the time,” McKinney said. “Even though we didn't play our best in the second game, we still got the W and hopefully, it'll carry over to next week (when Roxana hosts an IHSA Class 3A regional tournament).

“Last time we hosted a regional, we won – hopefully, that bodes well again.”

The key to the win was what McKinney felt was a total team effort. “There wasn't one person who stood out,” McKinney said. “Everybody contributed; I know that's a cliché, but they had the energy because it was Senior Night – the seniors wanted to go out with a bang and we wanted to break the record and take the pressure of having to break the record in the regionals.

“Now we can go have fun because everything from here on out is going to be icing on the cake.”

The Shells scored the first five and six of the first eight points of the opener and were never seriously threatened, taking advantage of Miner errors and miscues to storm out to a big lead and never looking back.

Game 2 was a bit different; the Miners got ahead 4-1 on the Shells before Roxana got on a run to draw level at 5-5; Gillespie answered with a three-point run to go ahead 8-5 before Roxana managed to pull ahead 9-8. The Miners then got to a 12-10 lead and led as much as 14-11 before the Shells got some momentum and went to a 16-14 lead.

Roxana eventually got to a 21-18 lead on the Miners before Gillespie pulled to within 21-20 and draw level at 22-22 before one final burst put the Shells in front to stay; match point set off a round of celebrations with the Shell players and Roxana student cheer squad when the record-setting win was recorded.

With the start of the postseason on the horizon – the Shells take on the winner of a first-round match between East Alton-Wood River and Greenville at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday in their own regional – McKinney realizes his team could get on a hot streak and make a deep run in the playoffs.

“You never know – put it this way, the top seed in our region, (Springfield) Sacred Heart-Griffin is really good, but last year, they were the top seed in our regional and they lost in the semifinals to a team we almost beat in the championship (Jacksonville in last year's Jersey Regional, falling to the Crimson 20-25, 25-22, 25-20 after Jacksonville eliminated the Cyclones in the regional semifinals).

“You just never know; all it takes a freak injury, a bad night – that's why the play the game.”

