

Rachel McDonald tallies 30 kills in SIUE's fifth OVC volleyball win

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EDWARDSVILLE, Ill. – Rachel McDonald tallied the most kills in a single match this season by an Ohio Valley Conference hitter Wednesday as SIUE bested Eastern Illinois in five sets at the Vadalabene Center.

SIUE improved to 5-0 in OVC play at the Vadalabene Center with an 18-25, 25-22, 25-23, 33-35, 15-11 win over the Panthers. The Cougars are now 7-16 overall and 6-5 in the OVC. Eastern Illinois dropped to 9-17 overall and 4-7 in the OVC.

"It was a really tough match," said SIUE Head Coach Kendall Paulus. "and we knew it was going to be a tough match."

McDonald recorded 30 kills and became the first player since SIUE Athletics Hall of Famer Lindsay Rust to reach 30 kills in a match. Rust had 34 and 31 in matches during the 1998 season. McDonald and Rust are the only SIUE players ever to reach 30 kills.

But McDonald wasn't the only offensive option for the Cougars. Hope Everett posted a career-high 22 kills while Dylenn Otte recorded a double-double with 12 kills and 16 digs.

SIUE gained momentum after a first set loss. McDonald and Everett boasted 11 kills in sets two and three as the Cougars gained a one-set advantage.

The fourth set had both teams reeling. Eastern Illinois averted four SIUE match points while SIUE turned away five set points before Hannah Sieg picked up the set-winning kill at 35-33, the longest set of the season for the Cougars.

Four Eastern Illinois players would finish with double-digit kills, including 22 from Laurel Bailey. Taylor Smith had 12 while Danielle Allen and Katie Sommer each finished with 10.

SIUE had an 8-5 lead when the teams switched sides in set five, but EIU fought back to a 10-10 tie. That's when the Cougars pulled away, winning five of the six final points, including a pair of kills from McDonald, to avenge an earlier loss this season to the Panthers.

"I thought we showed a lot of composure," said Paulus.

Both teams stretched the defense. EIU collected 102 digs while SIUE finished with 112. It was the most SIUE digs as a team since the 2006 season.

SIUE now looks forward to its fourth straight home OVC match, looking to recover before facing Tennessee State with a 2 p.m. start.

"I want to make sure we are building on the things we are doing well," added Paulus.