

Cougars Drop Home Opener to Valparaiso

by Joe Pecoraro
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EDWARDSVILLE - Crowds returned to First Community Arena for the first time in more than a year and a half on Friday night to see SIUE volleyball open the 2021 Cougar Classic; however, the Cougars' home opener would be spoiled in a straight-set loss to Valparaiso (13-25, 21-25, 17-25).

The opening set saw the Cougars fail to find their footing, as a pair of lengthy scoring runs for the Beacons put the set firmly out of reach. The Cougars were held to a .038 hitting percentage, while the Beacons hit at a .333 clip and sided-out a match-high 76%. However, the Cougars found their groove in the second set, trading blows with Valparaiso and holding the Beacons to a .211 clip. [Sydney Hummert](#) shined in the second set, registering six kills on 15 attempts and also recording five digs. Hummert was responsible for nearly 50 percent of the Cougars' kills in the second set. Despite the improvements, Valparaiso's defensive effort proved enough to thwart the SIUE attack and narrowly claim the second set. The third set saw even more back-and-forth action, seeing a match-high five tie scores and a pair of lead changes. A Beacons scoring run, however, would prove to be the difference, as Valpo would win the third set and the match.

Hummert registered the team's only double-double, recording 11 kills and 11 digs on the night. [Alyse Drifka](#) nearly recorded her fifth double-double of the season, notching eight digs and 11 assists. [Julia Treichel](#) notched seven kills and seven digs, while [Grace Beekman](#) and [Nicole Kijowski](#) each amassed seven digs of their own. [Annie Ellis](#) led the team with a .312 hitting percentage (6-1-16).

"They're very eager to keep getting better," said SIUE Head Coach Kendall Paulus following the match. "I'm excited for what their court experience is going to do for us in the long run - meaning three weeks from now, two weeks from now. So, I think we'll continue to keep getting better and I know we have it in us."

The Beacons (8-2), who had swept Western Illinois in the afternoon match, have clinched the tournament title with a 2-0 weekend record. The Cougars, who fall to 2-8 on the season, will close out non-conference play tomorrow at noon when they host Western Illinois. The match will be streamed live on ESPN+ and tickets are available online or at the door.