

LANCER VOLLEYBALL

Belleville East Student Newspaper

By: Steven Stock



It was April 18th, a day circled on the Boys Volleyball's calendar for over ten months. They were playing the O'Fallon Panthers, the team that has ended their season the last two years. In fact, the Lancers have lost nine straight to O'Fallon coming into the matchup.

Leading up to that match against the Panthers, Belleville East continued to impress numerous volleyball fans with a historic 18-2 start. The boys would start 16-0, the best start ever in program history. It was backed up by a 7th place finish in a very competitive Wheaton Warrenville South tournament, where the boys went 3-2 overall. They lost to a 27-7 Lincoln-Way West team in two sets, defeated a 26-7 Wheaton Warrenville South

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team, and finished the tournament losing in 3 sets to a 25-6 Wheaton Warrenville North team. August Werner was named to the All-Tournament Team for Belleville East. Head Coach Joe Nesbit called the tournament a “learning experience” and was still very proud of the boys. “There were times they had to battle adversity and they handled it well. They fought all weekend.”

After returning from Chicago, it was time for a best-out-of-five game with the SLUH Jr. Billikens. Belleville East became the first metro-east team to knock off the Bills last year winning in two sets at home and looked to continue the momentum. The boys would start by firing on all cylinders, taking the first two sets, and fell just short in the third set by a SLUH rally winning 25-21. Going to the fourth set, the boys would stay focused and win the fourth set, 25-21 becoming the first-ever Illinois team to win in SLUH’s gym in their program history. “We got it done. It took a lot of energy, we fought so hard. We came back after losing the third set and fought for the win. I’m so proud of them,” Assistant Coach Kim Riley said after the historic win.

Now it was time to make more history. O’Fallon came into that Thursday with stormy weather outside the gym. After twelve points into the varsity affair, a tornado warning would delay the game for almost seventy minutes. The Lancers waited nine months for this rematch, and they could wait another hour. After the delay, the boys came swinging with big kills by August Werner and Jack Byers that would win the first set, 25-22, the first set the Lancers have taken versus the Panthers since 2022. The mighty Panthers came rallying back, staying in control in the second set, 25-16, to force a

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winner-take-all third set. Belleville East was fine with this behind a rowdy home crowd and being in this position before. The two teams would trade points going from a 6-6 game to a 21-21 game. Out of a timeout, August Werner would point one down and give the Lancers a lead of 22-21. Caleb Day would join in the party, getting a kill, and it was 23-21 East. O'Fallon would grab a point back and make it a one-point game. After another timeout, O'Fallon would hit the ball out and give the Lancers game point. O'Fallon then would rally once again, scoring two more to tie it at 24-24. Then O'Fallon made a rare service error and East was back in the driver seat, 25-24. After a little bit of back and forth, August Werner put a ball down on the right line for the kill, giving Belleville East their first win versus O'Fallon since 2021, and ending a nine-game losing streak.

“We still have a lot to improve on. I think we can build off this and continue to show out” senior August Werner said after the game. “It’s huge that this team is so together. We have a lot of team chemistry. We’re on the same page right now. We can battle with any single team. We’re in every single game and it feels good.”

Head Coach Joe Nesbit continued to echo how happy he was of his team saying, “They were never down and out. They continued to slug their way through. I’m so proud of their perseverance tonight”.

After a huge win against a very good O'Fallon team, the boys would continue to rally off wins against a solid Edwardsville bunch and a red-hot Belleville West team on the road. Then, they would take one more trip up to the Chicago area, playing in one of

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the toughest Boys Volleyball tournaments in the state of Illinois, the Lincoln-Way East tournament. “Our program has done very well over the last few years, receiving some attention from the programs in the state. We were thrilled to receive an invitation, “ Coach Nesbit said of the tournament.

The Lancers would continue to show their adversity, going 3-2 in the tournament and finishing 7th place out of 24 teams. Jack Byers was named to the All-Tournament for Belleville East. They would lose to arguably the best team in the state, Glenbard West, 25-11, 26-24. They also lost to a great Lockport team in two very close sets, 25-21, 25-23. They would finish the tournament defeating a team they lost to weeks ago, in Lincoln-Way West in two sets, 25-16, 25-17 to end the weekend off in a positive direction. Still, the boys learned what they were and where they were at. They now knew what it was like playing against the top Chicago teams and what it would take to get past them the next time in the playoffs.

As we come into the last week of the regular season, the Lancers have continued to roll now sitting at a 28-4 record. With only two games left versus Edwardsville and O’Fallon, if the boys can defeat the Tigers, it would set up a matchup with Southwestern Conference Championship aspirations on the line with the Panthers. If East could do it again and knock off O’Fallon, it would give East their first Championship since 2012 for Boys Volleyball. After finishing the regular season at O’Fallon, the boys will start their playoff run the following week on Tuesday, May 21 at Belleville West at 5:30 PM in the Regional Semifinal taking on the winner of 6. Father McGivney vs 7. Maryville

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Christian, two tough teams the Lancers have beaten in close games this season. Belleville East will look to continue its historic season and hope to continue to keep its state-run dream alive.