

Volleyball: East Forsyth nabs inaugural playoff berth



East Forsyth volleyball players celebrate against Walnut Grove during a Region 8-4A tournament second-round match Tuesday at home. (Photo by Jake Cantrell)

Jake Cantrell
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After a 2-0 sweep of Walnut Grove in Tuesday's Region 8-4A tournament, the East Forsyth volleyball team is headed to the state playoffs for the first time in school history.

For Broncos head coach Chris James, his team is getting the success they deserve and have earned.

"Honestly, I'm just really, really happy for these girls," James said. "This is an awesome group of girls, and I'm really happy for them. We've had girls that have been working for this all four years, and now, they're finally going. They've been putting in the work, and they get all the credit. ... It's an amazing feeling."

The Broncos ran through the region with an undefeated record in the regular season, earning the No. 1 seed and hosting right for the tournament, which kicked off Tuesday night. As the top seed, East Forsyth received a first round bye in the region tournament, putting the Broncos just one win away from clinching the school's first volleyball state playoff berth.

Walnut Grove proved to be a difficult out for the Broncos in the first set, coming just one point away from being the first team in the region to take a set against East Forsyth. The Warriors scored six unanswered points to take a 24-23 lead and force a set point. The Broncos answered back, tying the game at 24, then 25 before stringing together the consecutive points necessary to claim the set, 27-25.

James said it was good to see his team challenged, as they prepare for a playoff run.

"They're poised to make a good run, so this was a good match for us," he said. "They were kind of shaky in the beginning, but that's good for us. It puts us in those situations where it's a little bit tense, and that will definitely help us in the long run when that happens again."

The second set looked more familiar for East Forsyth.

After going down 3-0 to begin the set, the Broncos responded with a 14-2 run to take control. East Forsyth stole the momentum with clean rallies and then grew the momentum with excellent serving, starting with aces by Chelsea Torrence and Mandy Karavite.

"One of our big things, we don't necessarily need to have a bunch of aces, but what we really want to do is get them out of their system and get them predictable," James said. "That's our goal. ... We may not necessarily get as many aces as we did today, but we just want to get them out of their system and get them predictable. Today, we had a couple that were feeling good."

"Mandy did a really good job when we were in a tough spot. She got a few really good serves that got them out of system, and then she got a couple aces and that just kind of sparked it from there."

The Broncos tallied eight aces on the day, as Karavite led the way with three between the two sets. Senior Macy Meadows added two more late in the set before libero Mataya Orth finished off the Warriors with back-to-back aces to end the match, claiming the second set 25-10.

As East Forsyth looks to get its opponents out of sorts on the offensive end, Orth keeps the Broncos held together, calling adjustments and strategy on the court before plays and covering the whole court during them.

"She does a lot of clean up for us, which is nice," James said of Orth. "When we get to a point where we're out of system and kind of running around a little bit, she does a good job of cleaning up and you need somebody like that."

It's these extraordinary efforts from the entire team, both on and off the court, that makes this squad different, James said.

"These kids want it and they want it for each other," he said. "They're talented. I think that's first and foremost, but I think they're gelling as a team. We have old heads and we have young bucks, and they're coming together. Since day one, they've all been there, trying to make it a positive experience for each other. They're putting in the work not only on the court but in their relationships with each other, and that's been huge for us."

Although the Broncos (29-7) have already clinched a Class 4A state playoff berth, the team has more to take care of before then. East Forsyth will face off Oct. 10 against second-seeded North Oconee, with the winner advancing to the tournament finals.

"Thursday is going to be a tough one," James said. "North Oconee is no joke. They're a good team and they're definitely going to come after us, so we have to make sure in that first match that we're ready to go."

With the tournament being double elimination, East Forsyth finds itself in a good position heading into the final day of the event.

One match win and the Broncos will be in line to host their first-round matchup in the state playoffs. Two wins would have East Forsyth adding a region championship to its historical firsts.