

Varsity Girls Volleyball vs Nonnewaug & RHAM

Joel Barlow defeated sixth-seed Nonnewaug in three sets on Nov. 12 in the Class M CIAC semifinal. Coach Conti was pleased with the win but felt that the team played better in the quarterfinal against Woodland Regional. Coach Gilmore thought the team got off to a slow start. Nonnewaug was able to come back to make a competitive first set after trailing 17-8. Joel Barlow won the set 25-19. In that set, they had six serving errors. Luckily for Barlow, Nonnewaug also struggled with serving. Both teams ended the match with nine serving errors.

Players who saw time for Joel Barlow included Maddie Furrer, Olivia Sickinger, Mia Roberts, Zoriana Olexy, Claire Rodrigue, Genevieve Currie, Ripley Robinson, Julia Miranda, Val Amador, and Sylvie Candee. Candee started both the second and third sets, but not the first. The second set was very back and forth. Barlow had two early errors, giving Nonnewaug a 5-3 lead before Barlow took the lead back at 10-9. From there, Barlow went on a 15-7 run to win 25-16. When the score was 20-16, Barlow scored five straight points to seal the set.

The third set was the least competitive. After a 5-5 start, Barlow scored 11 straight points to build a double-digit lead and finished with a 25-10 win.

Coach Conti praised Val Amador's performance. She served perfectly on her 22 attempts, scoring 17 serve points, including four aces, and contributed to Barlow's 87.5 serve percentage. Conti added that Amador passed very well. Coach Gilmore thought Olivia Sickinger had a great game; she led the team with 25 assists. Claire Rodrigue recorded four blocks and tied Mia Roberts with nine kills despite having eight fewer attempts. Zoriana led defensively with nine digs and 15 serves received.

RHAM defeated Sacred Heart Academy in their semifinal, setting up a highly anticipated clash between the top two seeds in the tournament. RHAM was the one seed, and Joel Barlow was second. They previously faced off early in the season on Sept. 6 at a jamboree, playing only one set, which RHAM won 25-15. Coach Conti said there were few takeaways because Barlow was dealing with injuries, and it was early in the season.

Despite that, Conti said they knew a lot about RHAM. "We know they run a very different defense than anyone we've played this year, and we know that they are a very disciplined team," she said. She credited RHAM's coaching staff for preparing their players well. These teams have met before in the state tournament.

The state final went all five sets. It was the first time Barlow played a fourth set since Oct. 23 against Newtown and a fifth since Sept. 12 against Warde. Starting in the first set for Barlow were Olivia Sickinger, Maddie Furrer, Mia Roberts, Sylvie Candee, Zoriana Olexy, and Claire Rodrigue. Coach Conti called a timeout at 15-10 RHAM to stop an 8-2 run. RHAM won the set 25-14, led by 15 kills and two aces. Meredith Weir had seven of those kills.

In the second set, Barlow was more aggressive, and RHAM made more errors. Barlow took an 8-5 lead and maintained, winning 25-18. Mia Roberts was strong with six kills after one in the first set. Zoriana Olexy made five key digs, and Barlow's defense collected seven blocks.

The third and fourth sets followed the pattern of the first two, with RHAM winning the third and Barlow responding in the fourth. RHAM finished the third set on a 12-3 run, winning 25-12. After recording seven blocks in the second set, Barlow had none in the third. Barlow narrowly escaped the fourth set, which they won 25-21 after holding an 18-11 lead.

The fifth set was very competitive. RHAM started strong with a 10-3 lead. Barlow fought back to make it 12-10, but RHAM scored three final points to win 15-10. It was a tough, hard-fought match, but unfortunately, it did not end in Barlow's favor.