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## SPORTS

### Panthers win second straight CIC contest, triumph over Eagles

By Sean Douglas

At times in Wednesday night’s Grant County matchup between the Eastbrook Panthers and the Oak Hill Golden Eagles, both teams played excellent volleyball.

At other times, there were struggles – misplaced attacks, hitting and service errors, and a lack of communication.

However, despite the inconsistencies and a tough loss in the second set, the Panthers pushed through, winning their second straight contest and securing their eighth victory of the season with a four-set triumph over the Golden Eagles (25-20, 20-25, 25-16, 25-22).

“I was proud of them,” Havens said. “Game two was a little more of a struggle, but we came out and we won. That, to me, speaks volumes because we didn’t stop. We moved forward and we did not give up. The fact that they pulled it out, even going four, I loved it.”

With a young team full of inexperience, Oak Hill had their share of mistakes as well, coupled with signs of growth. Kristi Carmichael and the Golden Eagles have focused on becoming more attack-oriented and improv-

ing communication and team movement. At times, particularly in the second set, Oak Hill showed flashes of how good they can be once they put it all together.

“I see signs of improvement,” Carmichael said. “Yes, we had some let-downs, we missed some serves, we did some things that if we would have fixed, it could have been a different ball game, but I was much prouder of the team effort tonight.”

Eastbrook built an early 6-1 lead in the first set and never looked back, leading by as many as nine points and holding off a late Oak Hill surge to grab the early advantage.

In the second set, Eastbrook looked to be in control, using an 8-0 surge to take a 15-10 lead, but Oak Hill came roaring back. A 7-0 run turned a five-point deficit into a two-point lead, and the Golden Eagles outscored the Panthers 8-5 the rest of the way to tie the match at one set apiece.

While Oak Hill was unable to build on their second set victory, they showed that they are capable of playing volleyball at a high level, and it is something that Carmichael hopes to build on going forward.

“They were so excited,” Carmichael said. “I told them, ‘Okay, now you know you can do it. Just go out and do it again.’ Building some confidence, we just need that going forward. I think confidence is a big key.”

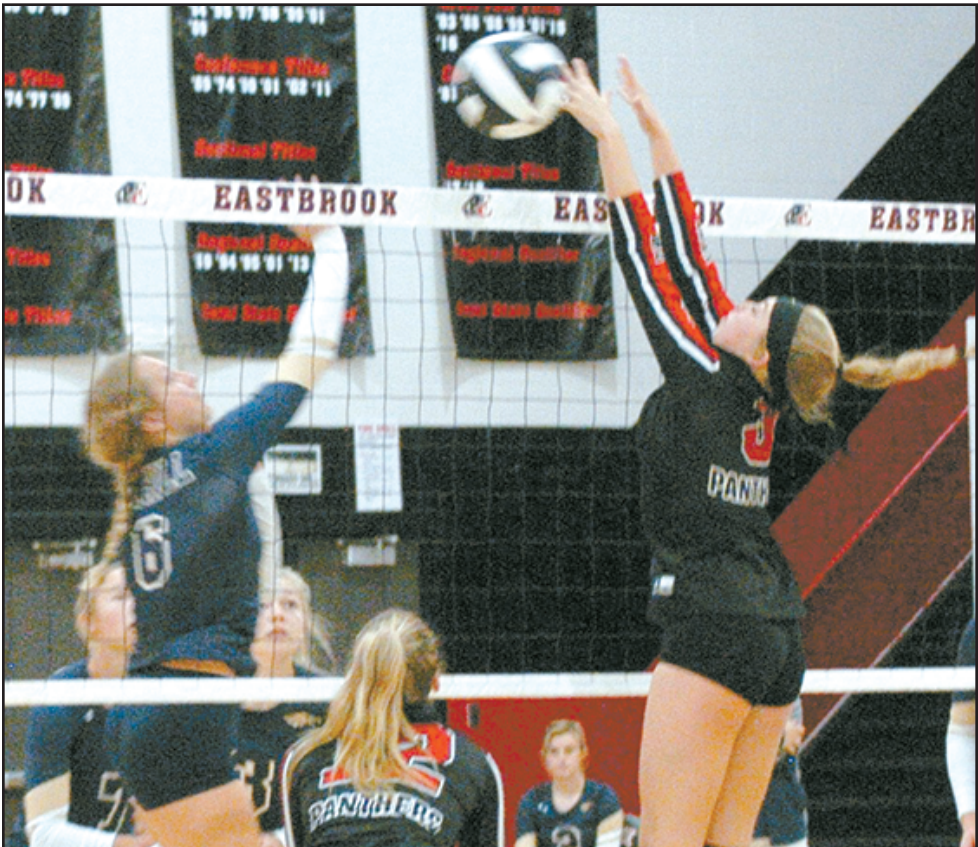
Eastbrook bounced back to win the final two sets, putting their rough performance in the second game behind them quickly.

“I think we got too comfortable in game two,” Havens said. “I made the comment of, ‘It’s an incline 24/7, you never plateau.’ I’m not saying that I gave them all the right words, but they definitely picked it up.”

The Panthers built a 12-7 lead in the third set and led by as many as seven en route to a nine-point triumph, and in the final game, they withstood another Golden Eagle rally, scoring six of the final eight points to improve to 8-7.

“We are getting there. They are working hard,” Havens said. “You can see it in different spurts. But the moment they figure it out on both ends, it’s a done deal.

“A lot of huddles and a lot of talk at practice and after games is the inconsistency. It’s a matter of being



Eastbrook’s Chloe Poe records a huge block against Oak Hill in the Panthers’ four-set triumph. Photo by Sean Douglas

here mentally but also physically. Once we can get that and stay committed 24/7 on both aspects, we will have a different team.”

Eastbrook’s ever-improving group of front-line hitters take advantage of Oak Hill’s smaller lineup throughout the evening. Lexi Binkerd led the Panthers’ offense with 14 kills, while Chloe Poe played one of her best matches of the

season, collecting 12 terminations.

“She had one hit against Elwood [the other night] that was phenomenal. It was straight down and it was beautiful. [Tonight,] I said, ‘Chloe, I want at least 17 of those tonight.’ She showed up. Obviously, she had moments where she made mistakes, but she to me was the player of the game. I was proud of her tonight.”

Ava Walters recorded 32 assists for Eastbrook, while Binkerd also led the defensive effort with 18 digs.

For the Golden Eagles, Julianne Gosnell and Alyssa Thompson co-led the Oak Hill offense with eight kills apiece, while Alivia Shaw collected 17 assists. Mia Edward led the Golden Eagles’ defensive effort with 14 digs.



Sol O’Blenis ran well again on Saturday, finishing in under 16-and-a-half minutes, Oak Hill senior Kinzie Robey medaled for the Golden Eagles in the girls red race.

Photo by Sean Douglas.

### Oak Hill performs well at Wildcat Invitational

By Sean Douglas

Coming off their first and third place finishes at the Columbus North Invitational, respectively, the Oak Hill boys and girls cross country teams faced an even tougher challenge on Saturday at the Wildcat Invitational.

The boys ran against a loaded field that included No. 3 Noblesville, No. 4 Fishers, No. 6 Hamilton Southeastern, and No. 22 Westfield. The girls went up against the likes of No. 4 HSE, No. 14 West Lafayette, and No. 19 Westfield.

However, the Golden Eagles were not fazed, as both

teams put together tremendous performances in each of their races. The girls finished in eighth with a score of 203, and each of their top five runners finished in under 21:35. The boys finished in fifth with a score of 181, just 20 points behind Westfield and three points ahead of perennial powerhouse, Penn.

“We preach in our program - our hashtag we put on everything - ‘Be Uncommon.’ We don’t want to just have that tag of, ‘You’re a really good small school,’ or, ‘You’re one of the best small-school programs.’ We want to be in that conversation with the schools that are just absolute juggernauts.

“To come to meets like this and beat the Penns and the West Lafayettes and the Valpos who are just traditional powers, and to lose to only four teams who are ranked in the top 20...hopefully it boosts their confidence and gives them a better understanding as to what we are trying to do on a bigger picture.”

Kinzie Robey and Selah Jackson, who have both missed time this year due to injuries, were back at full strength on Saturday. Robey finished as a top-35 medalist, finishing in 20:23.7, while Jackson placed 42nd in 20:53.0.

“Our pack is doing really

well right now,” Brunner said. “We had Kinzie back today. We haven’t had very good luck on the girls’ side with staying healthy. Kinzie and Selah both missed time but getting them back running in the mid-to-low 20’s is good.”

Freshman Leah Highley came in 54th (21:15.2), senior Kate Hornocker finished in 55th (21:15.6), and Sadie Wisner rounded out the top five with a 60th place finish (21:28.3).

All in all, it was an encouraging day for a group who has struggled with injuries all season long. With Grace Geller out indefinitely with a leg injury, the Golden Eagles are still trying to see Oak Hill, Page 7