



PHOTO COURTESY OF RIMROCK VOLLEYBALL CLUB

The Rimrock 18 National Volleyball team recently returned from the United States Volleyball Association Junior National Tournament in Atlanta Ga. The team finished 10th at the 48-team invitational tournament. Team members are — Back Row: Coach Joel Kent, Kelsi Kemper, Kaitlyn Douglass, Kirsti Kelso, Rachel Buehner, Sarah Roshak, Braiden Johnston, assistant coach Greg Kemper. Front Row: Makayla Lindburg, Hannah Harrer, Calli Prestwood, Gabrielle Crowell, and Laney Hayes. Neither Douglass or Roshack played in the national tournament.

Lon Austin July 07, 2011

The Rimrock 18s National Volleyball squad went into the United States Volleyball Association Junior National Championships hoping to make it into the top half of a 48-team field.

The team not only made it into the top half of the field — they came away with 10th place in the championships.

“I was ecstatic,” said head coach Joel Kent. “We came in seeded 25th and Prepvolleyball.com didn’t predict us to get out of the first round of the tournament. We not only got out of the first bracket, but we worked our way into the top 16, and we played for a chance to get into the final eight teams.”

The Rimrock 18s team features four players from Crook County High School as well as players from Mountain View, Summit, and Sisters high schools.

The team traveled to the national tournament without their full squad, as right side hitter Sarah Roshak and setter Kaitlyn Douglass didn’t make the trip.

The missing players forced Kent to change his lineup for the tournament. The team went from running a 6-2 offense, which utilized two setters to running a 5-1 offense with just one setter. The change forced Crook County High School setter to play full-time during the course of the tournament.

“Kelsi Kemper played every play and every point the entire four days,” Kent said.

The team lost their first match of the tournament, 25-19, 25-18 to Surf City of Huntington Beach, Calif. However, the team quickly adapted to the lineup change.

"We all did our best I think," Kemper said. "Our first game was our worst game of the tournament. I think everybody had the jitters, but after that everyone played their hearts out."

After the first game, the team settled down and played their best volleyball of the year.

The team won their next three matches in a row. They rolled over FC Elite from New London, Wis. 25-15, 25-16, then defeated Ultimate out of Frankfort, Ill. 25-20, 23-25, 15-7. Rimrock then blasted El Paso Wild from El Paso, Texas 25-20, 25-9.

"Our hitting was very consistent," Kent said. "Our defense was phenomenal and our serving was the best it's been all year."

"I was very pleased with how we performed," said libero Braiden Johnston. "If there was an ideal way to finish out a season, that is exactly what we did. We all hit our peak during the tournament."

The team stumbled in their final game of pool play, dropping a three-set thriller to AP 18's Apex of Austin, Texas. Rimrock won game one 25-20, then fell 25-23, 15-11 in the final two games of the match. The loss dropped Rimrock to third place in the pool, but was still enough to move the team into the top 24 teams for the second half of the tournament.

"It was great," Kirsti Kelso said. "We were hoping to go and play our best, but the outcome was going to be relative. The fact that we went up there and placed 10th was great. We played a couple of teams that were ranked really high and we just persevered. We didn't let the rankings bother us. We played every team the same and it was exciting to see it all come together."

In the tournament's second round, the team knocked off the tournament's sixth seed, defeating Colorado 18s of Centennial, Colo., 25-22, 25-19. The team lost their next match 25-20, 25-23 to Six Pack from Cedar Falls, Iowa. Six Pack went on to defeat Surf City for the tournament championship.

Rimrock had one final chance to reach the gold bracket in the tournament. However, they dropped a 25-22, 25-15 match to Imi Iki from Honolulu, Hawaii. Imi Iki went on to finish tied for third in the tournament.

The loss dropped Rimrock to the silver bracket where they won their next two matches. The team defeated TCBB Jrs of Stewart, Fla. 25-21, 25-22, then squeaked by AMA Jrs of Cardinal Canyon, Texas 25-18, 19-25, 15-11.

"It was fun," said middle blocker Makayla Lindburg. "It was the best our team has ever played together. We adjusted really well."

Rimrock fell to Club V of Bountiful, Utah 25-21, 17-25, 12-15 in the finals of the silver bracket.

"They were huge, and they blocked like no others," Lindburg said. "We just couldn't find a way to hit around them."

In spite of the final loss, Kent was pleased with the team's performance during the tournament.

"I was extremely proud of the team," he said. "We had great parent support and we represented Oregon well. We showed that Oregon volleyball belongs at that level."

Kelso was quick to add that the opportunity wouldn't have been possible without support from Central Oregon.

"I just was amazed at how supportive Bend, Redmond, Sisters, and Prineville were," she said. "It was an expensive trip and we had a lot of financial support from all of Central Oregon. I just want to say thank you to everyone."

Only two players from this year's squad graduate so don't be surprised if the team returns to the national tournament next year.

"It was a joy to have such a talented group," Kent said. "Hopefully we can come back next year and get to an even higher level."