

El Camino College women's volleyball team wears down, finishing 3rd in state

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REDDING -- El Camino College's pursuit of a fifth California Community College Athletic Association women's volleyball state championship came up short following a pair of heartbreaking five-game losses at Shasta College.

The Warriors entered Sunday unbeaten this season in three five-game matches, but couldn't protect a two-game lead in the winner's bracket final against Pierce College. Then they relinquished a three-point lead late in the deciding game of an elimination match against Santa Rosa to suffer an 18-25, 25-20, 25-23, 21-25, 15-13 setback, resulting in a third-place finish.

"It's a tough way to go out, but I'm so proud of our team and the way we played, the way we fought the whole weekend," said Kaitlyn Edwards, who recorded 22 kills against Santa Rosa.

"I was a little (fatigued), but our coach kept telling us, 'even if you're tired, fake it.' We just wanted to leave it all out on the court, but again it's a tough way to go out."

Following a five-game victory Saturday over Cabrillo, El Camino (25-4) was forced to play 10 games in less than five hours Sunday, with the possibility of more against two-time state champion Pierce (33-0) had it outlasted Santa

Rosa (30-4).

Pierce became the first team since El Camino won back-to-back titles in 2007 and '08 to repeat as champion following a 25-19, 25-21, 26-24 victory over Santa Rosa.

El Camino became the first team to relinquish a two-game lead in a state

tournament match since 2007, snapping an 18-match winning streak, but the Warriors rebounded from the 19-25, 15-25, 25-22, 25-20, 15-9 loss to Pierce to win the opening game against Santa Rosa.

After the Bear Cubs scored five of the final six points in the second to level the match, El Camino had a chance to regain the momentum with a 23-22 lead in the third. But consecutive kills by Margaret Barnes, Karimah Hay and Olivia Urban helped Santa Rosa secure a two games-to-one advantage.

El Camino responded again in the fourth, with Kaitlyn Edwards recording seven kills to spark a wire-to-wire victory that forced another deciding game.

The Warriors faced a two-point deficit when the teams traded sides at the midway point of the

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fifth, but Teuila Barnes (15 kills) and Tarryn Luafalemana (20 kills) accounted for five of El Camino's next seven points to produce a 13-10 lead, forcing Santa Rosa to use its final timeout.

But Urban wouldn't be denied, recording the final two of her match-high 27 kills to tie the score at 13-13, and returning all-state selection Taylor Nelson (17 kills) served consecutive aces to complete the comeback, providing a stunning end to El Camino's bid for a third state title in five years.

"I was thinking the whole time that we could do it. All year long, we've found a way to pull through, to stick it out, to get it done. But we just couldn't pull it off this time," Kaitlyn Edwards said. "I just wanted to end my season with no regrets. I wanted to leave everything I had out on the court and I think I did that."

Lauren Edwards, who combined for 20 kills in both matches, secured all-tournament honors for El Camino, along with Luafalemana and Sarah McFadden.

Luafalemana had a team-high 16 kills against Pierce and McFadden had a combined 93 assists for the Warriors, who received a tournament-high 28 digs from libero Keely Stevenson against Santa Rosa after she recorded 14 digs against Pierce.

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