Lady Bisons clinch championship

MATT PRICE  Sports editor

Hands were raised in the air in victory as a crowd rushed onto the court of the Rhodes Field House Nov. 15. Hugs were distributed like candy on Halloween. Tears were shed. Harding had done the unexpected.

The Lady Bison volleyball team achieved a milestone no other volleyball program has accomplished since joining the Gulf South Conference in 2003: winning the CSC championship by defeating the Lady Lions of the University of North Alabama 3-1. Game scores were 25-30, 30-28, 30-28, 30-27.

The victory could be considered even more monumental in that it came against UNA, winners of seven straight conference championships and a 33-match winning streak in the conference tournament.

"The potential we had to win was endless, but it really hasn't sunk in yet," head coach Keith Giboney said. "It's a David vs. Goliath story. [UNA] had won seven years in a row. We set our sights on beating them and we knew we could do it.

With the win, the Lady Bisons clinched an automatic birth in the NCAA II National Tournament starting Nov. 23. Because Harding was ranked tenth in the South Central Region, a loss in the tournament would have ended an automatic birth in the NCAA II National Tournament. Harding defensively.

Senior Shaila Farley (2) raises a hand in glory after winning the Gulf South Conference championship Nov. 15.

"We have to give him credit," head coach Matt Peck said. "It's an incredible," Harding fieldhouse. "Everything's on even keel, not too high, not too low. We haven't really realized how many we've won in a row but we're pleased that the Lady Bisons were able to win their first conference championship at home in the friendly confines of the Rhodes Field House."

"We couldn't be prouder of these kids," Harris said. "This is huge for the whole athletic program. We've worked hard in cross country in the past, but Harding hadn't won a "heirs" championship yet. This is amazing."

Harris was also pleased with Giboney's coaching efforts throughout the season.

"[Gib's incredible," Harris said. "Everything's even keel, not too high, not too low."

For now, the Lady Bisons will celebrate their championship, but the team realizes that it must look ahead to further victories at the national tournament this weekend.

"We'll just go in the locker room and savour it," Giboney said. "We're going to some more goals and ride this thing. I don't know how many we've won in a row but we're going to make sure we're representing [south-central region]."

The players plan to take the satisfying feeling of winning a championship with them as they advance to the national tournament.

"[The feeling] will go with us," Farley said. "We're going good, and I think we're going to do well at nationals."

Senior Shaila Farley (2) raises a hand in glory after winning the Gulf South Conference championship Nov. 15.

Junior middle blocker Kate Kennedy (10) and senior outside hitter Shaia Farley extend above the net to block a shot against the University of Montevallo Nov. 15 in the GSC Tournament Semi-Finals. The Lady Bisons defeated the Lady Falcons 3-1 en route to clinching a position in the conference championship match with the University of North Alabama. The Lady Bisons will face UNA at the NCAA Nationals.


Rivalry continues: HU to face UNA at NCAA II National Tournament

MATT PRICE  Sports editor

The celebration over the Lady Bisons' conference championship will continue as the team prepares to face the University of North Alabama for a fourth time this season.

The re-match of the top two seeds from the Gulf South Conference Championship will take place at the NCAA II National Tournament Nov. 20 at 7:30 p.m. in Kirkville, Mo., on the campus of Truman State University.

The Lady Lions will be the fourth seed in the tournament, while the Lady Bisons are seeded fifth.

Head coach Keith Giboney said he went into the GSC championship match with the idea that it would not be the last time the two teams would meet this season.

"We've got to be ready to play everybody in order to play everybody else in this tournament," Giboney said. "I had an idea we'd play at nationals only because I talked to [UNA's head coach Matt Peck] before the match and he said, 'you know, if you beat us we'll probably play again at nationals.' Giboney said he is fine with the opportunity to play North Alabama again this season."

"They beat us twice, we beat them once," Giboney said. "We played them twice at our home and once over there. This will be a neutral site. I don't know if we'll have the crowd advantage, but I think we're ready for them."

Giboney also believes the Lady Bisons are excited about playing the Lady Lions for a fourth time this season.

"It's kind of become a little rivalry," Giboney said. "I don't think they care how many times we play. The road is going to be tough here on out. But, they aren't intimidated. They think they beat us this season once already and we know we can do it again!"

Harding and UNA are two schools out of the field of 48 in the NCAA II National Tournament. The winner of Thursday's match will advance to the Regional Championships on Saturday, Nov. 22.
The Lady Bisons began the day Saturday as spectators for the semi-final match-up between Gulf South Conference Eastern rivals the University of North Alabama and the University of Alabama-Huntsville.

The Lady Lions had no problem with the Lady Chargers, winning in three straight games to take the match.

The Lady Bisons knew a victory over the University of Montevallo in the semi-finals would give them the opportunity to face top seed UNA in the championship, a team who beat them twice previously this season.

However, the match against the Lady Falcons was not as easy one. Montevallo eliminated Harding from the GSC tournament in 2000 and 2001. The Lady Bisons worried first about defeating Montevallo.

"We were definitely focused on Montevallo," freshman Lynn Pat­ten said. "We didn't want to get ahead of ourselves." The Lady Bisons took the role as eliminators in the semi-finals, defeating the Lady Falcons for the first time this season.

The Lady Bisons entered the GSC tournament 3-1. Game scores were 30-22, 30-14, 25-30 and 30-27.

Junior middle blocker Kate Kennedy led the Lady Bisons with 21 kills and no errors in 41 attacks.

The Lady Bisons were relieved to finally defeat Montevallo and move into the championship match against UNA.

"In the match with Monteval­lo, we really did a great job of setting goals for ourselves and going out and accomplishing them," Giboney said. "Everything fell in place." The Lady Bisons played in the nightcap Nov. 14 against the Uni­versity of West Florida.

The Lady Bisons outplayed the Lady Falcons for three straight games, but came up short each time to lose the match 3-4. Game scores were 30-26, 37-35 and 30-28.

Each game came down to the noise as the Rhodes Field House can handle when Harding has done something good. These key players are the fans of the Lady Bisons.

A crowd of 300-plus sounded like 3,000 Saturday night. Their performance was key in ensuring that UNA did not leave Saycey with its eighth straight championship.

Also in his speech, Salant said "I wish they would come in num­ bers two by two. When the other team makes mistakes they hear about it. When we do something good we hear about it. It's a huge mental advantage in helping them win the GSC championship." The Lady Bisons defeated UNA 3-0.

Senior outside hitter Shalaie Farley scored a dig against the University of North Alabama Nov. 15. The Lady Bisons defeated UNA for the GSC championship.

"I'm happy for our team," Salant said. "The fans want to serve as a "honorary member" of Harding athletic teams.

"We just want to be the sixth man in basketball or the seventh man in volleyball," junior Na­thaniel Barnett said.

The Lady Bisons players also believe the fans were instrumen­tal in helping them win the championship. The fans could have done it, but it wouldn't have been much harder. We have the greatest fans. I know what the basketball team means now. We definitely had those Rhodes Field House advantages.

Congratulations emotion specialists on earning your first Academic All-District team.

Players win on court, in classroom

Three named to Academic All-District team

MATT PRICE

Players win on court, in classroom

Three named to Academic All-District team

MATT PRICE

Players win on court, in classroom

Three named to Academic All-District team

MATT PRICE

Players win on court, in classroom

Three named to Academic All-District team

MATT PRICE

Players win on court, in classroom

Three named to Academic All-District team

MATT PRICE