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HARDING
UNIVERSITY

BISON the

GULF SOUTH CONFERENCE
LADY BISON 2003 VOLLEYBALL
CHAMPIONS

SPECIAL EDITION

NOVEMBER 18, 2003

www.harding.edu/thebison

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 unthinkable.

The Lady Bison volleyball team achieved a milestone no other Harding volleyball program has accomplished since joining the Gulf South Conference in 2000: winning the GSC championship by defeating the Lady Lions of the University of North Alabama 3-1. Game scores were 25-30, 30-25, 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 23-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. 20. Because Harding was ranked tenth in the South Central Region, a loss in the tournament would have ended the Lady Bisons' season. Harding's victory Saturday was also the 500th in the history of the volleyball program.

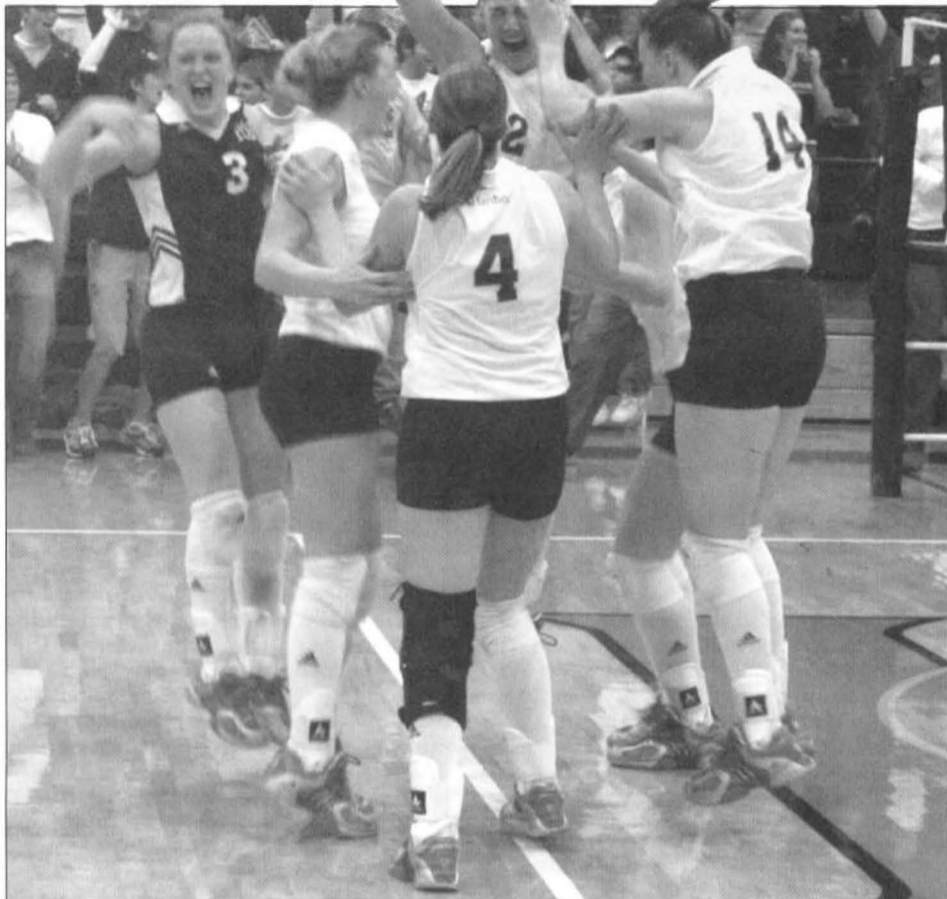
The Lady Bisons were led by senior outside hitter Veronica Piech's double-double. Piech had 23 kills and 11 digs. Senior outside hitter Shaila Farley had 14 kills, while junior middle blocker Kate Kennedy had 10. All three of the Lady Bisons were selected to the conference's All-Tournament team for their efforts.

Senior setter Lydia Kelly led Harding with 54 assists, while junior libero Amie Morrison contributed a match-high 15 digs to lead Harding defensively.

The tournament's most outstanding player, UNA's Yana Ninova, had 28 kills to lead the Lady Lions.

Kennedy was named the conference's Offensive Player of the Week — for the third time this season — before the tournament began Nov. 14. But she said winning the GSC championship is the best feeling of her Harding career.

"It's awesome. I haven't had a feeling like



CURTIS SERIGHT / The Bison

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

this since high school," Kennedy said. "More glory goes towards us. We took [UNA's] reign away. Hopefully it will keep on going."

Kennedy believes Harding's defense was key in winning the championship.

"Defense is one of our main things," Kennedy said. "If you have a good one you can frustrate people. Obviously they were frustrated."

Winning the championship in her senior season was a crowning achievement for Farley.

"This is by far my best volleyball moment," Farley said. "At the beginning of the season you always get those surveys that ask you what your favorite volleyball moment is, well

this is it. I get to play volleyball next week and that's the biggest thing."

The seniors' desire to win the conference tournament was felt throughout the Harding locker room before the championship match.

"Amie Morrison said she had never seen anyone who wanted to win so bad," Farley said. "We love to play. We love this team. For [our careers] to end with a loss would have been awful."

Winning the conference championship in their first season makes the freshman members of the team hungry for the next two years of their careers.

"I haven't comprehended it yet," fresh-

man Lynn Patten said. "It's too good to be true. I hope this continues and we go even farther. I hope we go past wherever we get this year in nationals and keep moving to the next step."

Winning the championship against UNA was also special because the Lady Lions beat the Lady Bisons in two non-conference matches previously this season.

"They beat us at our place [Sept. 22]," Giboney said. "When we went to their place [Oct. 17], I said in the locker room that I wanted to beat them. I said it didn't have to happen tonight. But, I wanted to beat them at the conference tournament and that's what we did tonight."

The players believe the two meetings with UNA earlier in the season helped them know what to expect in the championship game.

"It helped us a lot," Kennedy said. "It's hard to beat a team three times in one season."

Athletic Director Greg Harnden was 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," Harnden said. "This is huge for the whole athletic program. We've dominated in cross country in the past, but Harding hadn't won a 'team' championship yet. This is amazing."

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

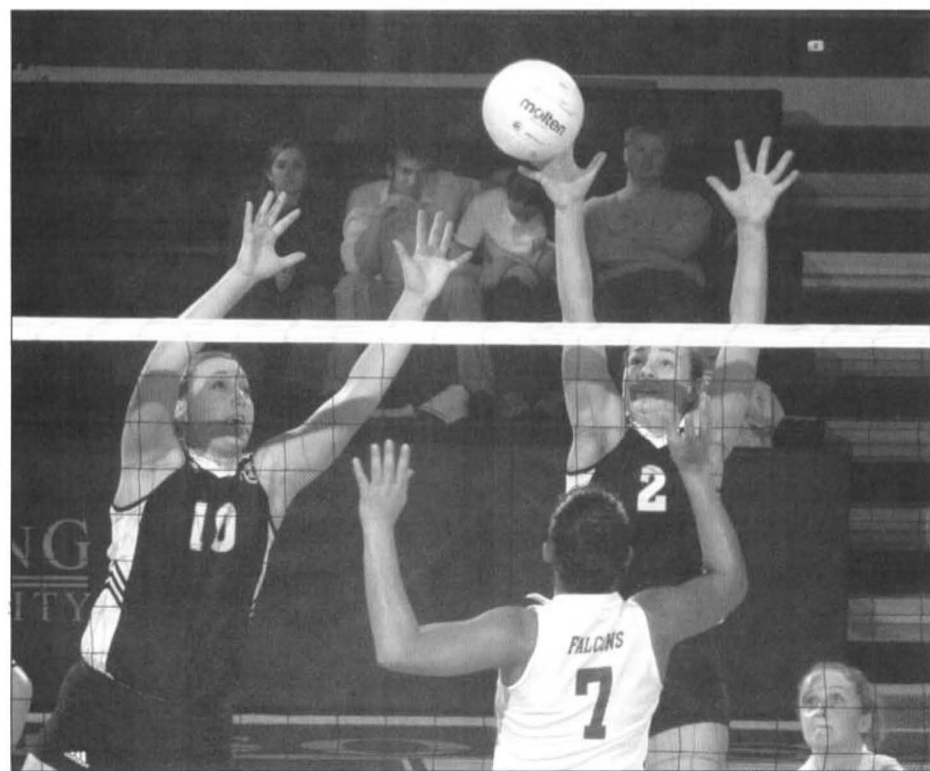
"Gib's incredible," Harnden said. "Everything's on even keel, not too high, not too low. You have to give him credit."

For now, the Lady Bisons will celebrate this 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 savor it," Giboney said. "We're going to set some more goals and ride this thing. I don't know how many we've won in a row but we're playing good ball. We're excited about [nationals]."

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 playing good ball right now. I think we're going to do well at nationals."



CURTIS SERIGHT / The Bison

Junior middle blocker Kate Kennedy (10) and senior outside hitter Shaila 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 against the University of North Alabama. The Lady Bisons will face UNA again 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 Kirksville, 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.

"You'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 home 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 who they play. The road is going to be tough here on out. But, they aren't intimidated. They think, 'hey, we beat this team 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.

Road to championship not easy for Lady Bisons

MATT PRICE
Sports editor

The Lady Bisons began the day Saturday as spectators for the semi-final match-up between Gulf South Conference Eastern Division 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 fellow top

seed UNA in the championship, a team who beat them twice previously this season.

However, the match against the Lady Falcons was not an 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 eliminator in the semi-finals, defeating the Lady Falcons for the first time in the GSC tournament 3-1. Game scores were 30-22, 30-14, 27-30 and 30-20.

Junior middle blocker Kate Kennedy led the Lady Bisons with 21 kills and no errors in 41 attacks for a .512 attack percentage. Senior outside hitter Veronica Piech had a double-double with 14 kills and 16 digs, while fellow senior Shailla Farley registered 15 kills and 21 digs. Junior libero Amie Morrison led Harding defensively with 25 digs.

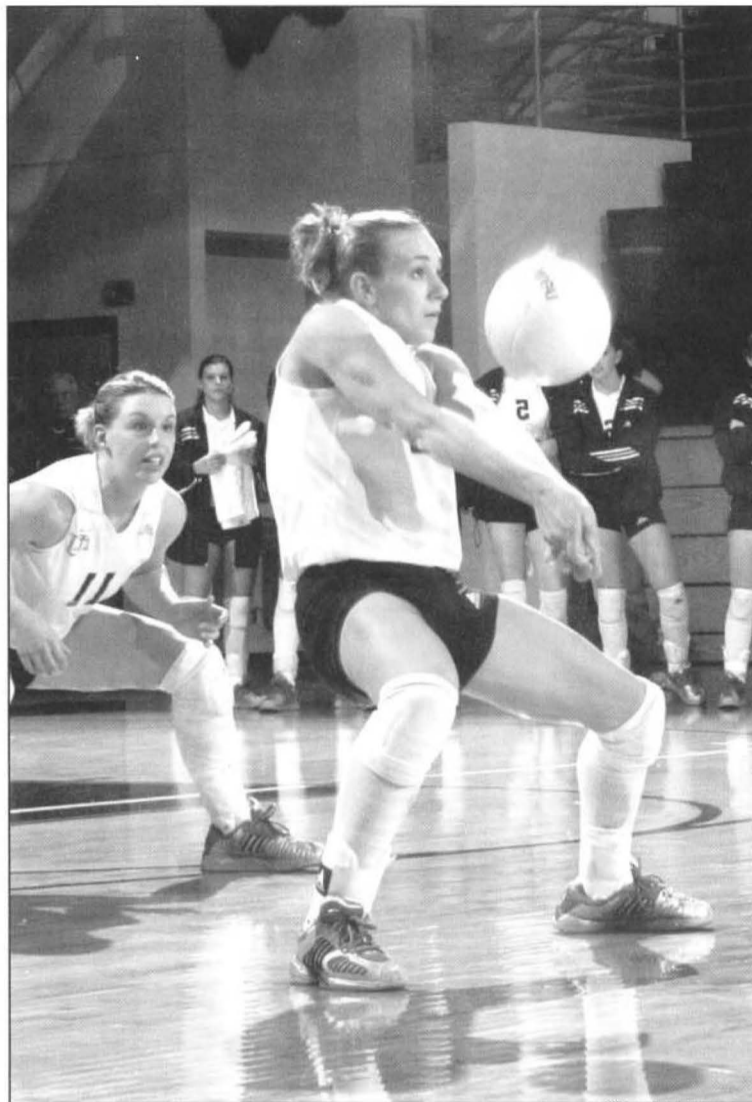
The Lady Bisons were relieved to finally defeat Montevallo and move into the championship match against UNA.

"In the match with Montevallo, we did a great job of setting goals for ourselves and going out and accomplishing them," Giboney said. "Everything fell into place."

The Lady Bisons played in the nightcap Nov. 14 against the University of West Florida.

The Lady Argonauts fought the Lady Bisons for three straight games, but came up short each time to lose the match 3-0. Game scores were 30-26, 37-35 and 30-28.

Each game came down to the



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

wire. In game two, the score was tied 20 times before Harding finally took the win. The Lady Bisons also eliminated West Florida in last year's GSC tournament.

Harding was led offensively by Farley and Kennedy, who each had 13 kills. Defensively, Harding was led by Morrison's 25 digs.

The Lady Bisons believed the

match against West Florida set the tone for the way they played the remainder of the tournament.

"I think playing a good team like West Florida on Friday gave them confidence going into Saturday," Giboney said. "Anyone who was there at the West Florida match knows it was much closer than a 3-0 victory."

GSC TOURNAMENT RECAP

from the Rhodes Field House

QUARTER-FINALS

Nov. 14

S. Arkansas vs. Ala.-Huntsville
30-22, 30-27, 18-30, 30-27, 15-9

N. Alabama vs. Henderson St.
30-19, 30-25, 30-24

Montevallo vs. Central Arkansas
30-26, 30-17, 30-24

Harding vs. W. Florida
30-26, 37-35, 30-28

SEMI-FINALS

Nov. 15

N. Alabama vs. Ala.-Huntsville
30-21, 30-24, 30-26

Harding vs. Montevallo
30-22, 30-14, 27-30, 30-20

FINALS

Nov. 15

Harding vs. N. Alabama
25-30, 30-25, 30-28, 30-27

Emotion specialists play role in GSC championship

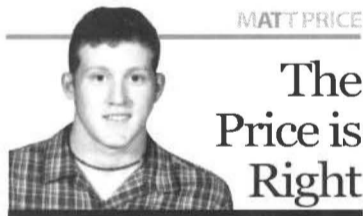
The book of Revelation in the New Testament refers to the number seven as a Holy number.

For the University of North Alabama seven was also an important number. Since 1996, the Lady Lions had won seven straight Gulf South Conference championships. In short, UNA owned the GSC when it came to volleyball.

The Lady Lions had twice beaten the Lady Bisons in 2003. One of those victories came Sept. 22 at the Rhodes Field House, where the Lady Bisons won 11 matches in the regular season. Following a 30-25 victory in the conference championship's first game against the Lady Bisons Nov. 15, it seemed as if UNA would reign once again as conference champion.

But the Lady Bisons had other plans. Harding won three straight games en route to winning its first conference championship. UNA's reign was over.

Dominance must be a very tough thing to deal with. Once you've won seven straight championships, eight should



MATT PRICE
The Price is Right

seem easy, almost routine. Losing seemed difficult for the Lady Lions that night. In his trophy presentation speech, GSC Commissioner Nate Salant said to UNA head coach Matt Peck, "That standing ovation [from the crowd] was for you."

When a volleyball team prepares to take the defense against a serving team, a defensive specialist is allowed to take the floor.

The specialist position is called a libero. A team's libero wears a different colored jersey than all the other players in order to show they are specifically defensive-oriented. The libero must stand on the back row and is not allowed to serve.

Harding's libero is junior Amie Morrison. Throughout the regular season, she led the GSC in digs with 632. Digs are Morrison's specialty.

In addition to a defensive specialist, the Lady Bisons also possess other key players. I like to call these players emotion specialists.

They are clad in black, white and gray t-shirts that read Harding Volleyball. Their specialty is letting an opposing team know good and well when they have made a mistake. They also specialize in making as much

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 insuring that UNA did not leave Searcy with its eighth straight championship.

Also in his speech, Salant said "I travel a lot throughout the GSC and I honestly, truly stand here and say to you that the most enthusiastic and spirited fans are right here."

Once these words were uttered the fans lifted a boisterous cheer seeming to pat themselves on the back for a job well done.

Following the ceremony, I met with Salant. He reiterated the comments made in his speech that the best fans in the GSC are in Searcy. He said teams look forward to playing at the Rhodes Field House because they do not receive the same type of atmosphere at other venues.

"That says a lot," Salant said. "The emotions the fans imparted tonight created an atmosphere worth something. When I first came to Searcy, [Harding Athletic Director Greg] Harnden was very edgy towards my reaction to the fans. I have no problem with what goes on here. The key thing is that the fans behave. You don't hear any swearing or see any lude gestures."

The fans performance throughout the GSC tournament also made an impression on other administrators in the GSC.

"[Assistant Sports Information Director] Tim Andrzejewski made a comment about the noise," Salant said. "I told him if you think this is amazing you should see basketball."

Players win on court, in classroom

Three named to Academic All-District team

MATT PRICE
Sports editor

In addition to the honors served on the volleyball court, three Lady Bisons were honored for their performance off the court Nov. 13 in being named to the College Sports Information Directors of America 2003 Academic All-District VI Team.

Senior outside hitter Veronica Piech earned First Team honors. Junior middle blocker Leanne Lackey was named to the Second team and junior libero Amie Morrison was named to the Third Team.

Athletic Director Greg Harnden believes that because volleyball is such a mental game, it is important to have players who are skilled mentally as well as physically. He believes that mentality is developed in the classroom.

"The overall make-up, including [grade point average], says a lot about the character of a team," Harnden said. "Their work in the classroom has paid off. There's a lot to our team."

Piech ranks first at Harding and fifth in the Gulf South Conference in kills, averaging 3.90 per game. A communication disorders major, she also carries a 3.75 GPA.

This is Piech's second CoSIDA Academic All-District Award. She earned Second Team honors last season.

Lackey, an early childhood development major, carries a 3.92 GPA. She ranks second on the team with a .260 attack percentage and 81 blocks on the season. This is her first Academic All-District Award.

Morrison is also an early childhood development major and also carries a GPA of 3.92. She leads both Harding and the GSC in digs, averaging 5.31 per game. She ranks eighth in NCAA II in digs. Morrison garnered Academic All-GSC honors last season.

Because Piech earned First team honors, she will automatically be added to the Academic All-American ballot. To be eligible for the award, the student-athlete must be of sophomore level in both academics and athletics and carry a GPA of 3.20 or higher.



LACKEY



MORRISON



PIECH

BISON

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