

Yellowknife rules the court

Potential Volleyball Club U18 girls and Yk Blue win titles in NWT Volleyball Championships

by James McCarthy
Northern News Services

The men's and women's finals of the NWT Volleyball Championships were a case of the kids being alright when it comes to volleyball, especially in Yellowknife.

Both championship contests featured youth outfits as the Arctic Winter Games (AWG) boys team managed to make it to the men's final and put up quite the fight against Yk Blue. The adults, though, took down the kids in a five-set thriller with the deciding set going the distance, 15-13 in favour of the champs.

Mike Mathison of Yk Blue said it was a final where the legs were starting to get a bit weary on his side but the endurance held out.

"It was getting to the point where we were getting pretty tired," he said. "It was a long round-robin – six games in total – and we had a tough semifinal." The final result was a reversal of fortunes as the AWG boys team defeated Yk Blue in straight sets, which gave them top spot heading into the playoffs. The boys beat Hay River in their semifinal while Yk Blue had to overcome Frosted Tips.

But the final saw Mathison pull double-duty. Not only was he playing but he was also coaching. You see, Mathison is the head coach of the AWG boys team and he had to focus on trying to beat his young troops while giving them advice on how to beat his side at the same time.

"On timeouts, I called over to Terrel (Hobbs), who was helping me out," he said. "We just talked about strategy in general, nothing specific about what we were going to do on the other side."

Yk Blue won the first two sets and anyone who's played in a best-of-five final will tell you it's the worst lead to have in volleyball. The AWG boys climbed their way back into the contest by winning sets three and four to set up the drama of a fifth set, which Yk Blue managed to pull out.

Mathison said he was happy to get the win but he was impressed more about how his AWG boys handled themselves in that situation.

"They've come a long way and played really well," he said. "Going into the tournament, I wouldn't have picked them to be in the final but there was always the possibility."

On the women's side, the Potential Volleyball Club took down That's What She Set in a rematch of the Canadian Tire Open women's final from back in December. That final went all five sets but this time around, Potential won



The Potential Volleyball Club's 18U girls outfit claimed top spot in the women's division of the NWT Volleyball Championships at Weledeh Gymnasium this past Sunday. They are, front row from left, Emily Carroll, Makenna Genge, Katie Genge and Alanna Zettler; back row from left, head coach Darren Horn, Mia Landry, Denae Lafferty, Brianna Helyar, Grace Christie, Katharine Smallwood and assistant coach Joe Borkovic.

photo courtesy of Darren Horn

in straight sets, 25-15, 25-15, 25-18.

Darren Horn, the team's head coach, said the big reason behind the success can be attributed to training.

"They're on court two to three times per week and they're working on things like ball control and serving," he said. "Serving was big for us on the weekend. Brianna Helyar is one of our stronger blockers but she was great on the serving end this time. Our net play was strong, we won a lot of the 50/50 balls (at the net) and

kept the ball in play."

It wasn't a perfect weekend as the ladies lost their opener which Horn said could be chalked up to jitters.

"It could be first-set jitters, sometimes it comes down to ball-handling errors, not getting the bounces, little things like that," he said.

From there, the team started rolling, although there were some matches which went the distance and Horn said that's good for the girls to experience.

"It shows them that you can't take your foot off of the gas pedal because anything can happen," he said. "If you're going to lose a set in a best-of-three, the first one is the best one to lose because it snaps you back to attention."

The team won't be back in action until April when they head to Calgary for the Alberta Volleyball Provincial Championships, which are followed by the Volleyball Canada Nationals in Edmonton in mid-May.



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