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CLIMAX - Winning a tight volleyball match the first time a team is tested can go a long way in determining the success that team will have the rest of the season. After eight fairly easy victories to start the new season, Providence Grove found itself in a battle this week against rival Eastern Randolph.

The Patriots, who entered the non-league battle with five straight-set victories and three 3-1 wins, found itself in a fifth-and-deciding set against the Wildcats, who had battled back from a 2-0 deficit to win Game 3 and 4, 25-23 and 26-24..

"Anytime we play them, if we're 0-20 and they are 10-0, it's going to be a battle," PG veteran coach Tim Brown said.

The fifth set was just as intense as the Patriots recorded a thrilling 15-13 win to remain undefeated on the season at 9-0. A three-game sweep over Northwood on Wednesday pushed the Patriots' record to 10-0 and that is the mark PG will take with them next week against Central Carolina Conference foes West Davidson and Trinity.



*Patriots' volleyball coach
Tim Brown.*



Adalyn Whitaker (5) and Kolbi-Jo Lineberry (12) are two of the spark plugs for the Patriots. Photo provided

"What they learned is they could persevere through anything," Brown said of his team's win over the Wildcats. "We have a lot of good leaders with our senior group."

Setter Cailyn York and outside hitter Kolbi-Jo Lineberry lead that senior class that also includes Anniston Johnson, Hannah Davis, Anniston Bunnell and Lea Morton.

"We had a good infusion of talent coming in from the ninth grade and the varsity has been together for three or four years and they know what it takes," said Brown, who is in his 18th season.. "We all started working out in the spring and we had good attendance every day. We did our summer workouts and would have 15-20 show every day."

The Patriots also participated in a volleyball camp hosted by Catawba College at PGHS. The seven-hour day was for both junior varsity and varsity.

Along with the seniors, junior Adalyn Whitaker is off to an incredible start to the season. After moving from middle hitter to outside hitter, she has thrived, ranking fifth in the state in kills.

"We moved Whitaker outside and she has been amazing," Brown said. "That has been big. She's athletic and played with the Zoo City team, playing outside and got more familiar with it. She plays a really good back row and hits it as good as she does from the front."

Lineberry has played a key outside hitting role again this year with Bunnell and Caroline Wilson handling the middle.

Freshman Emma Wilson has stepped into the Libero position and excelled. Oakley Quakenbush, a cheerleader who is also playing volleyball, has given the Patriots a lift.

"The main thing is that these girls are having fun," Brown said. "They stay after practice for extra reps and they want to stay and hit more and hit more and hit more. They all love each other and get along well, they just want to win."

That's exactly what they have been doing.