Lady Trojan players and coaches are all smiles after defeating Lake Linden-Hubbell in three sets Sept. 15 to win the championship of the Forest Park Invitational.

CRYSTAL FALLS—Coach Kim Bjork said she was looking forward to seeing Lake Linden's volleyball team during the Forest Park Invitational Sept. 15.

She and the Lady Trojans saw plenty of the Lakes. The teams opened the tourney by splitting their pool match. Much later in the day, they met again for the tourney title.

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FP earned the win and still another trophy in three sets, 21-17, 18-21, 15-13. Earlier last week, the Lady Trojans earned 3-0 wins on the road against North Dickinson and North Central.

Forest Park's record is now 13-3-3. The team is 5-0 in the Skyline Conference.

At Nordics: The week started with a sweep at North Dickinson on Sept. 11, on scores of 25-16, 25-20 and 25-18.

The Nordics hung in there stubbornly against FP, and Coach Kim Bjork didn't like the passive game her team showed against a long-time rival.

"We didn't play at the level that we usually play," she said. "Great teams play at their level all the time, and we're not a great team—we're just good.

"We're beating teams, but we're not doing it the way we should."

Maria Stankewicz served in six straight early in the first set and Kendra Campbell followed with four. ND never got close. But in set two, the Nordics led much of the early going before Mindy DeNell served four for a 14-9 lead.

Neither team took command of the third set until early in the second rotation when Gina Graff served two and Abby Sommers followed with three. The last two sets, though, lasted into the third cycle, and the coach noticed.

"There was no energy tonight," said the coach, "and the girls were just lazy. North Dickinson, give them credit, they covered the floor, they played our balls, and they had a lot of touches on our blocks."

Numbers: Lexi Gussert, 14 kills, 17 digs, 3 blocks, 3 aces; Sam Nylund, 5 k, 6 d; Kendra Campbell, 3 d; Gina Graff, 16 d, 2 aces; Maria Stankewicz, 22 assists; Abby Sommers, 6 d; Mindy DeNell, 14 d, 2 k, 2 aces; Mary Grandahl, 4 k.

At Jets: The Lady Trojans had an easy win at North Central on Sept. 13, sweeping to a win on scores of 25-3, 25-13 and 25-10.

"Everyone contributed tonight," said Coach Bjork. "We did a nice job limiting our service errors." Many of the team's reserves saw plenty of action during the second and third sets.

Numbers: Gussert, 9 k, 4 d, 4 blks, 6 aces; Nylund, 3 k; Graff, 10 d, 2 aces; Stankewicz, 14 asst, 2 d, 5 aces; DeNell, 6 d; Libby Hansen, 2 k; Maria DeMuri, 2 aces, 2 d; Melina Doering, 2 d; Hannah Marinoff, 4 d.

Invitational: The Lady Trojans lost their opening set against Lake Linden, 19-21, but won the second set 21-12. They went on to sweep their remaining pool matches 2-0 (21-12, 21-10 vs. L'Anse, 21-11, 21-12 vs. Munising and 21-11, 21-13 vs. North Dickinson).

In the semifinals, they rolled past Stephenson 21-13, 21-15 to reach the finals. In the other semi, LLH defeated Iron Mountain (first place in the other pool) in three sets.

Trojans vs. Lakes for the tourney title. The teams fought each other at last November's regional tournament, and the quality of this match was right at that level. Both teams are blessed with with highly skilled players and powerful hitters who also have finesse.

Lexi Gussert's five-point serving spell (two aces and two kills by Mary Grandahl) led FP to a 10-6 lead they never gave up in the first set. In No. 2, Ciara Larson served LLH to an early lead. The Trojans' Gina Graff struck for five and a 14-10 lead, but the Lakes came back with three each from Larson and Sarah Audette for an 18-16 lead they never gave up.

In the deciding set (to 15 points), three by Graff and Maria Stankewicz put the Trojans up 8-4. The Lakes tied at 13 late when Brittni Kisul struck for five, but FP got the winning point on Gussert's kill.

Many long, hard-fought points, many strong plays and tough shots by both teams. The point Coach Bjork talked about later came early in the third set—when Gussert spotted an open patch of floor in a far corner and took aim. "She saw it and read it and put it there."

In another play, Gussert dove out of bounds to play the ball, then scrambled back to block a LLH attack. "Those were two big turning points for our team—putting it all out there, putting it all on the line. She's irreplaceable, honestly."

One of FP's outside hitters was missing, but Maria DeMuri, Abby Sommers and Michaela Steiro all played well. "All around, I think everybody had a really nice day. Everybody stepped up when they needed to—which we needed."

Numbers: Lexi Gussert, 75 k, 41 d, 14 blks, 10 aces; Sam Nylund, 21 k, 28 d, 3 blks, 6 aces; Gina Graff, 43 d, 6 aces; Maria Stankewicz, 10 d, 89 asts, 14 aces; Abby Sommers, 22 d, 2 aces; Mindy DeNell, 10 k, 53 d, 5 asts, 10 aces.

Coming up: The Lady Trojans hosted Rapid River Sept. 17, then get eight days to prepare for their visit to West Iron Sept. 25.