Working from the back row, Lexi Gussert bumps the ball forward against North Dickinson on Oct. 2. Teammates nearby, from left, are Samantha Nylund, Maria Stankewicz (6), Mindy DeNell and Mary Grandahl (11).

CRYSTAL FALLS—Slump? Forest Park volleyball? Really?

That's what Coach Kim Bjork suspects after the Lady Trojans' back-to-back Skyline Conference matches early last week. Forest Park won both of them 3-0, as usual, but the girls aren't looking as sharp as their coach wants them to be. __PUBLIC__

On Oct. 1, the team visited Mid Peninsula and won 25-13, 25-20, 25-9. Back home Oct. 2 against North Dickinson, the Lady Trojans swept on scores of 25-15, 25-20, 25-23.

FP's record is now 9-0 in the Skyline and 22-3-3 overall. And she calls that a slump?

Coach's view: Well, yes, Coach Bjork is a little demanding. But look at things from her perspective.

The regular season is coming to an end—just two weeks to go before the district tournament. The team should be fine-tuning its skills and playing hard.

Instead, it seems to be battling boredom. Their schedule could be one reason why.

Except for moments like the Forest Park Invitational title match against Lake Linden, the Lady Trojans see few strong opponents during the regular season. This month, only the Oct. 23 match at Kingsford seems very challenging.

Then it's tourney time, when the water quickly gets much deeper, as the Trojans play do-or-die matches against tough foes. To survive, a team not only has to be really good but also must amp up its intensity.

The Lady Trojans are really good, but that intensity only comes in spurts—as North Dickinson found out last week.

At Mid Pen: Forest Park had some problems in the second game of a slow-paced match.

"We were inconsistent," said Coach Bjork later. "Our communication and focus were not up to par.

"We aren't putting together three solid sets at this point."

Numbers: Lexi Gussert, 7 kills, 12 digs, 2 aces; Mindy DeNell, 3 k, 6 aces, 13 d; Gina Graff, 6 aces, 9 d; Kendra Campbell, 3 k, 3 a, 2 d; Sam Nylund, Mary Grandhal, both 4 k; Abby Sommers, 3 a, 2 d; Maria Stankewicz, 3a, 16 assists.

Vs. Nordics: In the first set, Abby Sommers' four-point turn opened up a 19-11 lead, and the Lady Trojans never let the Nordics have the ball too long.

In the second set, Maria Stankewicz rallied the offense with four- and five-point spells on serve, including four aces. Her second turn with the ball helped break open a 14-12 match.

The Nordics wore their pink shirts to the match, and they were in the pink for most of the third set. Three four-point serving spells by Winter Steinbrecher built up a 20-12 ND lead, and the match seemed certain to go to a fourth set, especially after ND took a 23-16 lead. Bjork called a time-out.

Then something happened (Did Bjork locate the switch?) that shows why the Lady Trojans are so dangerous.

Turnaround: FP got the side-out on ND's next serve—setter Stankewicz surprised the Nordics with a kill on the second hit and took serve trailing 23-17. Next, Gussert fired in a kill. Time-out, Nordics, still up 23-18.

Another Gussert kill to the middle of the floor. Then Mindy DeNell's kill on the second hit, as two Nordics looked at each other--23-20. After losing two more points, ND called its last time-out at 23-22.

But FP tied it 23-all on Stankewicz's ace, went in front on Gussert's block and won it 25-23 when Gussert's shot deflected off an ND player out of play.

Right on cue, the Forest Park Marching Band entered the gym and played "El Capitan" while the Trojan cheerleaders led a cheer—the band was there for a nighttime practice on Homecoming week.

An impressive come-from-behind rally, sure, but, "It's frustrating to watch," Bjork said. "We have so much potential. I'm finding it difficult to break these girls out of their shells."

There have been good moments, she went on, but now the team seems to be slumping. "We need to find a consistent rhythm soon with the end of the season approaching,"

Numbers: Gussert, 16 k, 12 d, 2 blks. DeNell, 14 d, 5 k. Graff, 25 d, 4 a. Campbell, 6 d. Nylund, 3 d, 2 k. Sommers, 4 a. Stankewicz, 23 asts, 3 a. Michaela Steiro: 3 k, 2 blks.

Coming up: The Lady Trojans hosted North Central Oct. 8 and visit Rapid River Oct. 11. The JVs are at a tourney in Norway Oct. 13.

West Iron County will visit the Lady Trojans on Oct. 16. It will be "pink-out" night at Forest Park, with both teams wearing pink shirts on behalf of breast cancer awareness.

Tourney update: The draw for the District 127 tournament (Oct. 29 to Nov. 1 at Forest Park) was held last week.

The Lady Trojans will play the Bessemer/Wakefield-Marenisco first round winner at 6:30 p.m. on Oct. 31 in the second semifinal.

The winner plays the Ewen-Trout Creek/Watersmeet winner at 6 p.m. on Nov. 1 for the district title. The regional tourney starts Nov. 6 at Kingsford.