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Double dig! Working in the back row, Forest Park's Lexi Gussert and LibbyShamion both lunge to keep the ball in play during the match with Bark River on Oct. 25.

CRYSTAL FALLS—The boredom and doldrums of mid season are long gone. Forest Park's volleyball team seems to be peaking at the perfect time—as Kingsford and Bark River-Harris found out last week.

After stopping Kingsford in a five-set thriller Oct. 23, the Lady Trojans wrapped up the regular season with a 3-0 shutout of Bark River Oct. 25, completing another perfect 12-0 season in the Skyline Conference. FP takes a 27-3-3 overall mark into the post-season. __PUBLIC__

The Lady Trojans host the Class D District 127 tournament this week. Their first match is on Halloween night.

Stepping up: The battle at Kingsford went back and forth before Forest Park won on scores of 25-23, 23-25, 25-17, 20-25 and 15-8. "That's what we've been looking for," Coach Kim Bjork said later. "The girls stepped up.

"I love having this match at the end of our season," she added. "Kingsford has a well-rounded team, and they pushed our girls to play at a level they haven't played at in a long time."

Ahead 2-1 after three sets, Forest Park had a chance to end it in four. "We didn't rise to the occasion," Bjork said, "but we did close it out in the end. That was the main thing.

"We had a really good fifth set—they were struggling on their serve-receive, and our girls did a great job of capitalizing on that."

Chatterboxes: Vital to volleyball success: communication among the players on the floor. "You can't get pumped up without people constantly chattering," junior middle hitter Lexi Gussert said. "Everyone's got to be calling it out—if you don't call it out, your pass isn't going to be good.

"Communication is the most important thing we need to keep up on our team."

Winning over Kingsford was a challenge, she said, but "That's what we're going to be facing the rest of the way, so it's good practice.

"Yeah, we got tired, so we know what it feels like now—and that we can pull through."

Digging it: Big stat numbers from the team's leaders. Gussert led with 23 kills, four blocks and 45 digs. Gina Graff added another 41 digs. Mindy DeNell had 17, and Maria Stankewicz, Libby Shamion and Abby Sommers all had from six to nine. FP was digging the ball out all night.

"It was nice to see our girls pull together," Bjork said.

Numbers: Lexi Gussert, 23 kills, 45 digs, 3 aces, 4 blocks; Mindy DeNell, 5 k, 16d; Gina Graff, 41 d; Abby Sommers, 4 aces, 6 d; Maria Stankewicz, 4 k, 5 aces, 9 d, 36 assists; Libby Shamion, 4 k, 9 d; Kendra Campbell, 5 k; Mary Grandahl, 2 k; Sam Nylund, 4 d.

Talking point: Back home to wrap up the season, the Lady Trojans stayed pumped up as they swept out Bark River 25-10, 25-16, 25-11.

The girls looked excited and engaged. Fans could hear their chatter close-up: "I've got it." "Mine! Mine!" "Here!" Much more chatter than in past weeks. Music to the coach's ears.

It was also senior night—the final regular season home match for DeNell, Graff, Sommers and Maria DeMuri.

In the final two sets, the starters built up big leads and yielded the floor to the other girls, who finished out the match before the home fans.

“There’s no downers on our team,” said Gussert. “Everyone’s good. Everyone can play.”

Numbers: Gussert, 19 k, 2 aces, 7 d; DeNell, 7 k, 3 aces, 6 d, 2 asts; Graff, 26 d; Sommers, 3 aces, 5 d; Stankewicz, 4 aces, 5 d, 27 asts; Shamion, 2 k, 4 d; Nylund, 2 k, 9 d; DeMuri, 3 k.

• Coming up: Forest Park hosts the district tourney and plays in the second semifinal match Oct. 31 at about 6:30 p.m., against the winner of the Oct. 29 Bessemer vs. Wakefield-Marenisco match.

With a win, the Lady Trojans play again Nov. 1 at 6 p.m. against the winner of the first semifinal (Ewen-Trout Creek vs. Watersmeet).

“I’m excited to have districts home,” Gussert said. “I think we have a pretty good chance as long as we play to our full potential, like we’ve done these last couple of games.

“We can make it really far again this year.”

The District 127 winner advances to the Class D regional tournament in Kingsford, which starts Nov. 6.