

# Taking care of business

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Cougars women's volleyball team gets back to .500 with a pair of Canada West home victories over winless Thompson Rivers

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The Thompson Rivers University WolfPack women's volleyball squad came to Regina looking to record their first Canada West victory of the season, but they left the same way they arrived: winless.

The Cougars held the WolfPack in check with a 25-17, 25-11, 25-19 victory on Friday at the Centre for Kinesiology, Health and Sport and followed it up with a come- from-

behind 16-25, 25-11, 25-14, 25-21 triumph on Saturday. By sweeping the WolfPack, the Cougars improved to 3-3, which puts them sixth in the conference.

From the outset of Friday's match, there was no doubt that Regina was the superior of the two teams. By recording 14 opening-set kills, against only a trio of errors, the Cougars let the WolfPack know they were revved up to play.

Entering the weekend, the Cougars ranked second in the conference in service aces, averaging 2.10 per set, and they continued that trend versus Thompson Rivers. Solveig Nilson led the Cougars in serving Friday night with four aces. She also tallied seven kills against only one attack error.

"We served really well," said Cougars head coach Melanie Sanford. "That took Thompson Rivers right out of their rhythm. Solveig had a great night [Friday]; they couldn't stop her."

Meagan Onstad of the Cougars led all players in Friday's contest with a dozen kills, and many of them were the result of a quick set offence. Tiffany Herman assisted on all but six of Regina's 37 kills and recorded 11 of the team's 33 digs.

On Saturday, at least in the opening set, points were a little harder to come by for the Cougars.

The WolfPack roared out to a quick 4-0 lead and pushed their lead to eight points at the second technical timeout by continuing to attack with Kelly Asleson off the left side. Even though the Cougars narrowed the WolfPack's lead to five points, Thompson Rivers was too strong in the opening set en route to notching a season-high attack efficiency of 29.6 per cent.

However, on the opening point of the second set, Nilson and Onstad teamed up for a huge block. The excitement from that play seemed to generate a spark among their teammates and the hometown crowd.

During the second set, Regina went on an 8-0 run and extended their lead to 15-3. They did it by going back to a quick set offence, a tactic that the WolfPack was unable to stop the previous night.

“I really felt that Thompson Rivers was flying very high and could do no wrong,” noted Sanford. “They’re not going to be able to play like that forever, so you got to be really patient and just play your game.”

It was like deja vu in the third set for the Cougars, as they built another double-digit lead at 15-4 before splitting the final 20 points of the set.

Despite once again falling behind in the fourth set, Thompson Rivers showed determination and grit by extending rallies, throwing themselves at loose balls and capitalizing on Regina’s mistakes. In the end, however, the WolfPack’s spirited final push came up short.

Once again, Asleson led Thompson Rivers in kills and digs with 12 apiece. For the Cougars, Onstad and Sweeting each registered 11 kills and Herman turned in another outstanding performance with a match-high 38 assists.

“We knew that they were going to play better [Saturday] for sure and my team did a good job of responding to that,” explained Sanford. “We did what we needed to do.

“Mentally, I think we showed really good energy and if we made an error, we came back and we scored again right away.”

The Cougars opened their four-game homestand with a pair of losses to Trinity Western University Spartans, but rebounded with two hard-earned victories over Thompson Rivers. The Cougars play their final two games of 2010 next weekend when they head on the road to face the 3-3 University of Calgary Dinos

“To do anything in this league at any level you can’t just win one [game] here and then win another one down the road,” said Sanford. “You’ve got to be able to put matches together.”