

Bobcats Primed For Matchup With No. 14 Bulldogs

Written by Staff Reports

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The Lees-McRae College women's volleyball team, fresh off the program's 13th Conference Carolinas regular season and tournament championship in the last 15 years, is primed for a deep run into this weekend's NCAA Division II Southeast Region Tournament.

Lees-McRae (27-8) is in the midst of another strong season, having posted its second consecutive undefeated record in conference play to run its league-record winning streak to

49 matches against conference opponents. The eighth-seeded Bobcats will face host and top-seeded Wingate University (30-0) for the second straight year, who defeated Lees-McRae in straight sets during this season's opening weekend. Each team is ranked among the national leaders in several statistical categories, as the Bobcats enter the tournament listed fourth in service aces per set (2.74), with the Bulldogs tied for first with California State University, San Bernadino sporting a perfect winning percentage of 1.000.

The Bobcats are led by senior outside hitter Megan Epperson (St. John, Ind.) and junior setter Megan Mitchell (Minden, Nev.), who each earned a spot on the All-Conference Carolinas First team earlier this fall. Epperson and Mitchell each reached several career milestones this season, as Epperson became the program's all-time leader in kills, digs, service aces, and points while Mitchell eclipsed the school-record in assists.

Both teams enter the NCAA Tournament in superb form, with each squad capturing their respective conference regular season and tournament championships in addition to a pair of impressive winning streaks. The Bulldogs have yet to taste defeat this season, entering the tournament ranked 14th in the nation with an unblemished 30-0 record, while the Bobcats have won 25 of their last 27 matches entering this weekend's Southeast Regional.

Led by South Atlantic Conference and Daktronics NCAA Division II Southeast Region Player of the Year Liz Willis (Raleigh, N.C.), who enters the tournament ranked first in the SAC and fourth in the nation with 11.79 assists per set. Willis leads a Wingate offense that ranks ninth in the nation in kills per set (14.4), and has notched nine double-doubles this season, including 13 40-assist performances.

The Bobcat offense has been tremendous this season as well, with Epperson and junior outside hitter Taylor Clendenin (Statesville, N.C.) each averaging well over three kills per set this fall. Clendenin is in the midst of a career season with the Bobcats, recently becoming the second player in program history to earn Daktronics all-Southeast Region honors, while averaging a personal-best 3.11 kills per set to go along with a .250 hitting percentage.

Wingate features a pair of impressive outside hitters in sophomores Anna Hilton (Hickory, N.C.) and Cory McGowan (Pittsburg, Pa.), who are both averaging 3.22 kills per set this season to each earn Daktronics all-Southeast Region honors. The Bulldogs also employ a dangerous middle blocker on the attack in junior Grace Krauser (Louisville, Ky.) enters the tournament averaging 2.91 kills per set while attacking at a .291 clip.

Both teams also deploy outstanding liberos in Lees-McRae's Sariah Suryadevara (Cincinnati, Ohio) and Wingate's Maggie Malone (Chicago, Ill.), as each enters the tournament averaging at least 4.9 digs per set. Suryadevara has burst onto the scene this season, leading Conference Carolinas in digs per set (4.93) and ranking second in the conference and 11th in the nation in service aces per frame (0.63), earning Conference Carolinas Co-Freshman of the Year honors

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in addition to a spot on the all-conference first team. Malone is in the midst of a strong senior season as well, averaging 5.43 digs per set to pace the Bulldogs.

Tonight's match promises to be one of the most hard-fought and high-energy matchups of the weekend, with two of the region's most dominant teams in their respective conferences taking the floor with a spot in Saturday's second round on the line. Both teams have earned the right to step onto the court tonight and square off in the second season, with each side eyeing a deep run into the NCAA Tournament.

Fans not traveling to the match can tune into either a live statistics feed or a streaming webcast via lmcbobcats.com, the official web site of Lees-McRae athletics.