

Bobcats Rally For Five-Set Victory Over Bulldogs

Written by Whitney Noble

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Junior Efrain Negrón (Caguas, Puerto Rico) tallied a match-high 17 digs to lead the Lees-McRae College men's volleyball team to a thrilling five-set victory over Barton College in Conference Carolinas play on Friday evening. Lees-McRae (2-1, 2-

1 CC) won the match by scores of 27-25, 25-22, 22-25, 25-27, and 15-7, posting a hitting percentage of .218 while holding Barton (0-3, 0-3 CC) to a clip of .171 on the attack. The Bulldogs recorded 11 blocks to the Bobcats' seven in the match, as Lees-McRae tallied 54 kills and 38 digs.

Javier Jimenez (San Sebastian, Puerto Rico) and Brady Markle (York, Pa.) paced the Bobcats with 10 kills each, while Jose Ribas (Guaynabo, Puerto Rico) and Sam Sheers (Centerville, Ohio) both added eight smashes. Drew Blecher (York, Pa.) and Randy Ramirez (Guaynabo, Puerto Rico) chipped in 26 and 19 assists, respectively, as Negrón posted a match-high 17 digs.

Zach McCalla led the way for Barton with 13 kills, while Chandler Thomas added seven smashes and a team-high nine digs. Jordan Robison and Ladislav Lelkes each posted six kills and a .455 hitting percentage, as Lelkes recorded a match-high seven blocks (three solo, four assists). Robison also turned in a match-high 33 assists for the Bulldogs.

Barton jumped out to an early 15-11 lead in the first set before the Bobcats responded, launching a 9-4 run to claim a 20-19 advantage following a Jimenez kill and a Bulldog miscue. The teams would trade points over the remainder of the frame, with the Bobcats forcing set point at 25-24 and 26-25 before taking a 1-0 advantage in the match on a Ribas smash.

The Bobcats carried the momentum into the second set, claiming an early 10-8 lead on back-to-back miscues by the Bulldogs before pushing the margin to 15-11 following a kill by Kevin Morrison (Norfolk, Va.). Barton would battle back, cutting the advantage to 22-21 with consecutive smashes by Tanner Medina to cap a 10-7 run. Lees-McRae answered with a 3-2 spurt of its own, claiming a 2-0 lead in the match with a 25-22 win in the second set.

Barton responded in the third, opening the frame with a 10-6 run before the Bobcats answered with a 4-1 spurt of their own, cutting the lead to 11-10 following a Bulldog miscue. The Bulldogs would counter with a 6-2 run, pushing the advantage to 17-12 on a Robison smash before Sheers trimmed the lead to 17-15 with back-to-back kills.

After Barton countered with a 5-2 spurt to widen the margin to 22-17, and Lees-McRae answered with a 5-0 run to even the tally at 22-22 following a Sheers ace, Barton responded with three straight points to claim the set and cut the Bobcats' lead to 2-1 on a Lelkes smash. The Bobcats answered in the fourth, seizing an early 7-2 lead before Barton countered with a 9-5 run, cutting the advantage to 12-11 following a Bobcat miscue. After Lees-McRae responded with a quick 3-0 spurt to stretch the margin to 15-11, the Bulldogs launched an 8-3 spurt to claim a 19-18 lead on a block by Lelkes and Robison.

Lees-McRae would battle back, pushing the Bulldogs to set point at 25-24 when Joshua Jones (Christmas, Fla.) capped a 7-5 run with an emphatic solo block. A well-timed breather then set the stage for Barton to even the match and force a fifth frame, as the Bulldogs answered with a 3-0 spurt to claim the fourth set, 27-25 on a Bobcat miscue.

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The Bobcats responded in a big way in the fifth, opening the frame with a 6-1 run and never looked back, pushing the advantage to 13-4 on a Ribas kill before the junior outside hitter capped the set and the match with another emphatic smash.

Lees-McRae returns to the court on Saturday when the Bobcats travel to Mount Olive, N.C. to take on Mount Olive College in conference play at 7 p.m.

Photo Courtesy: Jose Ribas, LMC Athletics