

# Union Mine volleyball claims D-IV championship

By Jessica Pratt

Staff writer

IRVINE — The Union Mine Lady Diamondbacks beat the odds Saturday to take home the CIF Division IV State Volleyball Championship after their 25-18, 27-29, 19-25, 25-18 victory over two-time defending champion La Jolla Country Day at Concordia University.

After winning the first two sets but dropping the third, Union Mine pushed through the fourth game against the taller Torreys behind passion, drive and skill — proving one last time that heart trumps size when it comes to winning.

The D'backs started strong in the first set and played in what coach Mike Yates described as "classic Union Mine" fash-

ion — working extra hard in the beginning to get the lead before reassessing their techniques to bring in more focus.

That strategy was evident when the D'backs bolted to an early 9-2 advantage, thanks to a 7-0 service run from senior libero Madison Berridge and the hitting of Andrea Barnes. Union Mine held the lead the rest of the way to grab early momentum.

La Jolla bounced back to take the lead in the beginning of the second set but Union Mine never buckled, working its way back behind a game-high 14 kills from Mikayla Tucker to take the fight to overtime where the D'backs prevailed on Tucker's tip off the block.

Firmly in the driver's seat, Union Mine suffered a setback in the third set as the Torreys, behind Kendall Peterkin and

Maya Hood, kept their season alive with the six-point win.

La Jolla also angled for a fourth-set win before Union Mine came out of a timeout at 10-13 with a 5-1 run to grab the lead. At 16-all, the D'backs closed out the Torreys' hopes to three-peat with a 9-2 spurt to claim the program's first-ever title.

"Every step in the last three or four weeks has been a new, first step for this team," Union Mine coach Mike Yates said. "We had never won a section in the history of the school — we do that; we had never had a home state playoff game — we have three of them and win them all.

"It's basically the best feeling you can

▶ see D'BACKS B-10

## D'BACKS

continued from B-1

have. Accomplishing something you've worked so hard for — there really isn't a way to describe it, except that it's the accumulation of everybody's hard work."

Once again the D'backs entered the match as the underdog in the eyes of many. Union Mine was the smaller team Saturday going up against the traditionally tougher private school talent but the obstacles, nor conventional thinking, fazed the D'backs.

"We realized after a couple of losses earlier in the season that we can't focus on who we're playing — we have to just do our job and get it done," Yates said. "As long as we take care of our side of the court and as long as we do the things that we need to do, the other team against us is just another challenge."

After the last Torreys' spike landed out, a conglomeration of cheers, tears, and grinning faces erupted from the large crowd of Union Mine supporters in the audience.

Tucker finished with 33 kills to set a CIF Division IV State Championship match record. For her efforts, she was named MVP.

"It's unbelievably satisfying," said Tucker when reflecting on her accomplishments this season. "It's hard being an outside (hitter) that's on the shorter end, going up against

other players who are over 6 feet tall who can hit straight down and really hard. It's nice to know that just because they have the height, doesn't mean they can win."

While Tucker's hitting jumped off the stat sheet, Union Mine couldn't have done it without the play of Jaqueline Swarbrick and Sarah Phillis at the net, Berridge's stellar defense in the back, Lea Howton's pin-point setting, the solid all-around play of Malia Gonzales and Barnes, and several clutch aces from Jordan Buxton off the bench.

The D'backs victory also hinged on the quick, cat-like reaction by all the girls who repeatedly kept plays alive for Howton (39 assists) to set up Tucker, Swarbrick, Barnes, Gonzales and Phillis.

"We pride ourselves on defense," said Berridge who gutted out a variety of post-season ailments to lead the team's back row play.

Saturday's championship ended Yates' tenure with the team as he'll step away. Union Mine finishes with an overall record of 33-5.

*Notes: Union Mine High School and the CIF picked up the entire cost of the D'backs' trip to Irvine. The girls celebrated yesterday by bringing their magic to Magic Mountain.*