

Tohatchi netters blank Wingate, 3-0

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Senior Cheyenne Begay shines in win

The Tohatchi High School Lady Cougars withstood several comeback attempts by Wingate and won the Aug. 30 non-conference contest 3-0 in a match played at Wingate High School. Tohatchi improved to 4-0 and Wingate fell to 0-3 on the year.

Both teams went to state last year, but lost in the early rounds. The Aug. 30 outcome was 26-24, 25-17, and 25-17 in favor of the Lady Cougars.

“We just played very good defense and [Cheyenne Begay] was a factor in the win,” Lady Cougars first-year Head Coach Darrell Howard said. “They made moves in each of the three games, but our defense showed up and made stops.”

Begay, who plays outside hitter for the Lady Cougars, has impressive defense and offense skills in volleyball, and is also an all-state basketball player for Tohatchi.

Game One

The District 1-3A Lady Cougars jumped out to a 7-1 lead in the first set behind a slew of Wingate net errors. The usually consistent Lady Bears couldn’t get hits off set ups by senior setter Paige Pinto.

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Wingate Head Coach Karen Malone said the team misses Ashanti Antonio, Nizhoni Young, and Keziah Pine. The trio graduated, and Antonio proved the perfect complement to Pinto, whose eye-popping eight assists per game last year were, in part, the result of getting the ball to Antonio near the net or flying slams from the corners.

The high-flying Antonio, who was all-state for three years, was a superstar at the net, and when Antonio wasn't hitting kill shots, Pine was at the net waiting to finish.

Wingate (District 1-4A) stormed back late in the first set, but Begay was just getting warmed up, and the Lady Cougars pulled together to hold Wingate at bay. The Lady Bears tied the game at 14-14 and that was the closest they got, other than a 24-24 tie near the end of the first set.

"We're still getting used to each other," Malone said. "We lost our whole starting team from last year."

Game Two

The second game started much like the first. The Lady Cougars got out to a 9-2 lead, and most of the Wingate home fans in the Bear Den were waiting for Pinto or senior middle hitters Tonya Fuson or Ricondra Yazzie to pick things up.

Howard made some substitutes, but kept athletic Begay in the game for most of the second set. Junior Vaneisha Cecil was strong on defense for the Lady Cougars and Tohatchi never trailed the rest of the game.

Pinto, who has already been accepted to Haskell Indian Nations University in Kansas, was all over the court in defense for Wingate and couldn't position herself long enough at the net on offense to set up the taller Yazzie or Fuson.

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Game Three

The third game saw Begay turn things up a notch on offense. At one point, she effortlessly hit consecutive behind-the-back dippy-do shots for winners. The Lady Cougars led 6-0 with less than four minutes off the clock, and Wingate looked like they were wondering what hit them.

The answer? Begay, whose defensive and offensive efforts were simply too much for the Lady Bears.

Begay played a complete game and finished with eight kills, four digs, and a pair of aces. Junior Lady Cougar Brianna Denetso recorded eight aces in the win. Cecil had four kills and three digs for the Lady Cougars.

***By Bernie Dotson
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