

Deseret Morning News, Saturday, September 30, 2000

Fourth place never hurt so much

By Scott Taylor

Deseret News Olympics sports editor

SYDNEY — Logan Tom epitomized the emotionally spent United States women's volleyball team following its three-set loss to Brazil in the bronze-medal game of the Sydney Summer Olympics.

After the draining match against the world's third-ranked team, Tom lay back for a long time on the Sydney Entertainment Center court, looking skyward. Then, after a lengthy embrace courtside with her mother, Kristine, she finally made it to the post-match press conference, still teary and trying to compose herself after the 25-18, 25-22, 25-21 shutout loss.

"I'm not disappointed in anything that happened," said the former Highland High School star. "Of course, I'm a little emotional. We left a lot out there on the court, and we wanted to win a medal. But you can't be disappointed with fourth place in the Olympics. But it does hurt a little."

It hurts because the 10th-ranked U.S. team started the Olympic tournament with four straight victories in the preliminary pool, including upsets against defending silver medalist and fourth-ranked China and No. 8 Croatia.

And it hurts because following a come-from-behind triumph over No. 5 Korea to start the medal round, the Americans were one win away from a medal. They had joined No. 1 Cuba, No. 2 Russia and No. 3 Russia in the Olympic equivalent of the Final Four.

Following Thursday night's five-set heartbreaking loss to Russia, the U.S. team met Brazil, itself coming off its own tough semifinal loss to Cuba in five sets. Ironically, the bronze-medal match pitted the Americans against the system they had tried to pattern themselves after.

"We thought we could repay them by beating them, but it didn't work out that way," said U.S. Mick Haley, who saluted Brazil. "I think it's pretty exceptional to have a team finish third and only lose four sets in the whole tournament."

Besides losing the three sets in the semis to Cuba, Brazil also lost a set to the United States as both teams closed out preliminary-pool play earlier this week. But Saturday afternoon, the Americans couldn't manage to take even one set against the Brazilians.

Brazil broke open a close opening set, extending an 8-6 lead to 15-8 and 18-9 margins before finishing with a 25-15 opening-game victory.

The United States appeared to have the advantage in the second, leading 15-12 at one point and 19-17 later in the set, only to have Brazil even the score at 19-all and then edge its way to a 25-22 triumph.

And in the third, Brazil seemed to be set for a runaway, leading by as many as six points through most of the match. The United States was able to hold off the inevitable for a few minutes, having stymied three straight match points



Danielle Scott (2) and the rest of the U.S. volleyball team fell just short of winning an unexpected medal.

RAVELL CALL, DESERET NEWS

before falling 25-21.

"Brazil showed a lot of heart and determination," Tom said. "Unfortunately, they got too big a lead on us. If we couldn't have the medal, I'm glad they got it — they deserved it."

Said Tara Cross-Battle, one of only two Olympic veterans on the U.S. team: "We wanted to win a medal. We did everything we could to win one. But we came up a little short. We came in here ranked 10th, and nobody really believed in us but ourselves."

They were making believers along the way, said teammate Danielle Scott.

"I think at times we showed moments of greatness in this tournament," Scott said. "Unfortunately, today wasn't one of them."

Cross-Battle finished with a team-high 15 points, including 13 on attacks. Scott was second with 11 points (seven attacks), while Tom added 8 points on five scoring kills, a block and two service aces.

The Brazilian skywalking threesome of 5-foot-11 Erika Coimbra, 6-0 Virna Dias and 5-10 Leila Barros combined to score 42 of their team's 55 points on attacks.

Brazil coach Bernardo Rezende sang praise for the Americans.

"I saw this team for the first time in '97, and since then, they have gotten so, so good," he said. "I can see a bright future for this team."

Ready to return to Stanford for her sophomore year, Tom is expected to be a stalwart of the national team for years to come. The Americans have the building blocks in place, with the U.S. junior team having finished first or second in the major championships of 1998 and 1999.

"If we can just stay together, we could have a good team," said Cross-Battle, who herself returned from a lucrative pro career in Brazil to join Team USA in time for the Sydney Games. "We're having a new coach coming in. No one knows who it is, but we have some good young players." And a positive Olympic experience on which the U.S. squad can build.

E-mail: taylor@desnews.com

Contributing: Lee Benson

© 2000 Deseret News Publishing Company