



STATE COLLEGES

This South Florida volleyball powerhouse won another national title

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It was bittersweet. There were tears of joy everywhere. Miami Dade College's women's volleyball team won their second consecutive junior college national title.

But there were also tears of regret.

"We were sad for the sophomores because this is our last year together," said MDC libero Camila Hernandez, a 5-3 native of Colombia. "We started to cry right there on the court."

Hernandez is one of five Sharks sophomore starters whose junior college eligibility expired with Saturday night's 25-13, 25-21, 25-18 straight-sets win against Southern Idaho in the NJCAA title match at Hutchinson, Kansas.

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The Sharks (34-0) have won 44 consecutive matches dating to last season. MDC's volleyball program has also won 10 national titles overall, including the past two under coach Kiko Benoit.

MDC was pushed to five sets only twice this season: against College of Central Florida and Jacksonville College on Sept. 29.

The Central Florida match was MDC's first games after Hurricane Irma forced the cancellation of four dates, and the Jacksonville match came just one week later.



"We went two weeks without practicing," Benoit said, "and 22 days between matches."

After that storm-induced rough patch, the Sharks volleyball machine found its gear, and Massiel Matos was named the MVP at nationals for the second straight year.

Benoit said Matos, a 6-foot outside hitter from the Dominican Republic, has more than 50 offers from four-year universities, including Texas, Penn State, Ohio State, Miami, Alabama, Arizona and others.

"She's a powerful hitter, and she can jump," Benoit said. "She's an elite-level athlete."

Hernandez and Sun Wenting, a 5-11 outside hitter from China, also made the all-tournament team at nationals.

MDC's other sophomore starters are 5-10 outside hitter Rafaella Bonifacio and 6-0 middle blocker Paola Barbosa Louro, both from Brazil. The freshmen starters are 6-0 middle blocker Fiorella Murillo (Colombia) and 5-9 setter Tiziana Baumrukova (Czech Republic).

Benoit said Wenting is a "smart player" with all-around skills. But the coach saved his highest praise for Hernandez.

"Camila is our leader," Benoit said. "She keeps the team together and rarely makes mistakes. She should've been named MVP. That award rarely goes to defensive specialists. But everyone on our team knows she's the MVP."

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