

Texas claims volleyball title

By GERALD ENSLEY
Democrat sportswriter

It offered everything a national championship should. But what it proved was an old axiom:

A good, big athlete will beat a good, small athlete.

Saturday night in Tully Gym, a tall Texas squad, making its first appearance in the national tournament, claimed the 1981 AIAW national volleyball title, by escaping the hustling charge of a much smaller Portland State team.

Texas, which had charged through the tournament undefeated, was extended to the full five games, winning 15-6, 4-15, 5-15, 15-13 and 16-14. Portland State, which had played two matches before meeting Texas, for the second time in the day, played its heart out, but ran out of gas.

"We were playing on third and fourth winds," said Portland State's Patti Snyder, a 5-foot-2 sparkplug whose high-leaping play won her many fans. "I thought we scrambled and played together a lot better than they did. But Texas is a great team."

Texas coach Mic Haley, whose team entered the tournament with a 54-6 record, thought for a while that his Lady Longhorns were in trouble.

"Our height hurt us early; we weren't mobile," said Haley. "It seemed we were in slow motion, then we got scared."

"We started subbing to try and hold it together. They seemed to win the first half of the fourth game, then

Nell (Fortner) got hot and ran off some points, and we won the second half of the fourth game.

"I'm still not sure how we did it."

Finishing third was Utah State, which Portland State downed 15-12, 13-15 and 16-14 in the finals of the losers' bracket.

Florida State, the lure that brought the 500-plus crowds that watched each of the three days of the tournament, finished fourth. It was the highest finish ever for the Lady Seminoles, who have competed in this event twice before, with a previous best finish of 18th in 1979.

Texas was the top-seeded team in this tournament which did not include the top eight ranked teams in the nation who opted to compete in the NCAA tournaments that lead to that organization's championship in two weeks. Ranked ninth in the nation coming in, the women from Austin featured at least five players who stood 5-10 or better. Portland State had only three players as tall, and two of them played sparingly.

But of the 12 teams in the tournament, few were as exciting to watch as Portland State. An urban school with an enrollment of 17,000, Portland State came to this tournament with a pedigree as notable as Northern Dancer, but a funding more befitting a plow horse.

The Lady Vikings were making their eighth appearance in this 10-year old event. Their highest previous finish, when the tournament in-

cluded 24 teams, was 10th in 1979.

The excellence that suggests is a tribute to coach Marlene Piper, a former star athlete in her native Canada who had never played competitive volleyball, much less coached it, until coming to Portland State in 1971 to teach physical education and work on her doctorate. Progressing to where she became a member of the Canadian national volleyball team, she has imparted a strong sense of achievement to her teams.

"We played with a lot of heart," said Piper. "But they outmanned us, outgunned us. We thought we had more experience. But their talent and size . . ."

Amazingly, Piper has created the Lady Vikings with one of the smallest budgets in the nation, as she has only 3.3 full scholarships to offer.

"I was a spaz when I came here," said Snyder. "Most of what I am now, I got from her. She doesn't recruit big tall players. She recruits athletes. She knows how to get the best from her players."

Snyder is as good a testament to that as anyone. At 5-2, 120 pounds, most of it in thighs that Bob Hayes would envy, Snyder has a vertical jump of 33 inches.

"We measured that last spring after practice," said Snyder, who like all her teammates lifts weights three times a week. "I think I'm stronger now. I know I jump higher in games, when I get the adrenalin going."

"Sometimes, I get so high up I feel

like I'm looking down over the net."

While her hustling 5-9 teammate Kristi Bowden ("Everybody keeps calling me Bow-den around here; Bowden is the way we pronounce it."), plus players such as Texas' Jenny Hayes and Utah State's Lauren Goebel gave the crowd its money's worth, it was Snyder who was the most exciting player.

The next to youngest of 12 children, ages 32 through 18, who competed together vigorously in all forms of athletics, she came to scenic Portland from Palo Alto, Calif. to play softball.

"She's a fun kid to watch," said Haley. "But they depend on her too much. She has to take more swings, so she has more chances at errors."

"I'm glad, of course, that they misused her. We knew if we shut off her and Bowden, we could beat them."

Piper agreed with Haley, but with a smile.

"They're my best setters and hitters," she said of Snyder and Bowden. "They both want to play both positions. I think it's kind of great they feel that way."

"If I wanted to be selfish, I wouldn't let them."

But because she's not, Portland State gave Texas all it could handle.

"I guess second place is OK," said a tear-stained Snyder. "The seedings has Texas, then us and Utah State."

"I guess the writing was on the wall."