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Sports

Liberty Upends Vikings

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Following a three-game loss in which the Emerald High School volleyball team gave up big leads in the final two games, Vikings senior setter Amber Green was left sitting on the bleachers at Westview Middle School wondering where her team goes from here.

Emerald lost quickly in the first game against Liberty on Thursday in a Region 1-AA match, but the Vikings took control in each of the final two games before eventually falling 25-11, 25-18, 25-16 to the Red Devils.

The Vikings have now lost their first six matches, including an 0-3 start in region. After dropping the first game, Emerald appeared on course for a comeback, but by the end of the match, the Vikings were wondering what happened to big leads. "I'm sitting here trying to figure that out myself," said Green, who led Emerald with four spikes, three digs, 12 tips and a block. "I mean, I see we get excited and then we mess up and it's like, 'Oh my God.'" "I know I need to show some ownership on that myself."

The Vikings led by as many as eight points late in the second game and by six in third, but Liberty rallied in both. Emerald coach Sherri Tommie had no comment following the match except to attribute the Vikings' defeat to poor on-court communication.

The Vikings lost the first game 25-11, as Liberty led throughout, but in the second game, Emerald built a 12-4 lead by elevating its defense. "Emerald has a strong serving team, and they did a great job of picking it back up after the first game," Liberty coach Frank Owens said. "They started playing a lot better defense and getting the ball back over on us. "We just had to play a little bit better defensively."

While the Vikings struggled with gaining a grip on the Red Devils' offensive strategy in the first game, they started getting a better handle on it in the

second. "Covering the middle (was big)," Green said. "We knew that was where they were looking at that because they don't hit deep. "Then they began hitting deep when they realized we were covering the middle."

Liberty began throwing off Emerald's defensive strategy midway through the second game by mixing up its attack offensively. Emerald got up 15-8 before Liberty rattled off seven straight points to tie the game and outscored the Vikings 17-3 down the stretch. "They just started switching it up: middle, out(side), middle, out(side)," Green said. "It's hard to adjust."

In the third game, Emerald led 13-7, but after a timeout from Liberty, the Red Devils went on an 18-3 run that was characterized by a string of unforced errors by the Vikings. "We really had to step up our defense," Owens said. "Emerald did a great job of getting the ball back over on us and for us to take that second and third game we needed to get our defense back moving again. "It kind of stopped and got complacent."

As a senior, Green knows her number of chances to help the Vikings turn their luck around is dwindling, but she was at a loss for a solution after the game. "We have a lot of things to improve on, but to tell you the truth I don't know (what)," Green said.