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HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Behrens downs HBA in Punahou's victory

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The conversion is complete.

Juliana Behrens is a hitting machine. The 6-foot-1 senior soared for 13 kills with just two hitting errors as top-ranked Punahou swept Hawaii Baptist 26-24, 25-20 last night in girls volleyball.

A crowd of about 200 at HBA's Dan Liu Gymnasium saw Punahou improve to 5-0 in the Interscholastic League of Honolulu. Behrens made the transition from middle blocker to outside hitter this year, giving coach Jim Iams two 6-footers at the position.

"It's a lot more exciting. You get to pound the ball a lot more," Behrens said. "The setting (by Malia Patterson) was really good."

She was lethal — and clutch — on a night when the visiting Buffanblu seemed a bit rattled. They lost an eight-point lead in the opening set before rallying for the close win.

"We came out really nervous at first," Behrens said. "We weren't talking. It was quiet until the last few points of the first set."

Coach Jim Iams had warned his team about HBA's tradition of great defense.

"He told us they're going to dig up a lot of balls," Behrens said.

Carina Thompson had seven kills (.429), while Brigette Russo and Tai Manu-Olevao had five each. Patterson dished out 29 assists.

"We were so sloppy at times," Iams said. "This was the day to get Punahou."

Seventh-ranked Hawaii Baptist, the two-time defending state champion in Division II, dropped to 5-1. C'era Oliveira led HBA with 10 kills (.333). Sarah Palmer, double-teamed through the match, finished with nine kills (.350). Kayla Kawamura had a team-high 23 assists.

"We expended too much energy coming back," HBA coach Myles Shioji said. "We dug too much of a hole, but I'm proud of the girls for coming back."

Ali Santi had back-to-back aces, and Patterson was in a groove early, connecting with Russo for a couple of kills. Manu-Olevao had a block and a kill as Punahou surged to a 12-4 lead.

Kills by Oliveira and an ace by Taryn Bohan helped rally the Eagles to within 15-13, but Behrens steadied the ship for Punahou. She had three more kills as Punahou took a 20-16 lead.

However, hitting errors plagued the Buffanblu, and Oliveira's consecutive kills gave HBA its first lead, 22-21.

Patterson then went to 6-foot-2 middle Thompson for two kills in a row as Punahou regained the lead. Two Buffanblu errors, however, gave the lead back to HBA at 24-23.

Thompson tied it with another kill from the middle, and a key dig by Kat Brooks led to another Behrens kill for a 25-24 Punahou lead.

A hitting error by Palmer from the back row gave Punahou the first set.

"We missed too many serves in the first game," Iams said.

Behrens had six kills early in the second game as the Buffanblu sprinted out to a 14-6 lead and never looked back.

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