

Seniors Shine as Lobos Top Utah State on Senior Night

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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ALBUQUERQUE — Hannah Johnson had the final word as she spoke to the Johnson Center crowd after playing her final home match as a Lobo on Senior Night.

“I remembered today that we had to do a speech and I knew I had to do this, so I wrote it all down,” Johnson said.

But, along with fellow senior Skye Gullatt, she also had the final word against Utah State Nov. 18.

Johnson dished out a game-high 35 assists and connected with Gullatt for the game’s final kills as New Mexico volleyball turned away Utah State in three sets, 25-18, 27-25, 25-21 on Senior Night.

“At game point, I knew I had to give it to Skye,” Johnson said. “I wanted to do everything in my power to get her to finish off her season with a kill.”

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And Johnson was able to do just that, helping power the Lobos (16-123, 9-7 Mountain West) over Utah State (6-24, 2-14 MW) as New Mexico sent out its three seniors — Johnson, Gullatt and Simone Henderson — with a win.

Johnson and Gullatt also continued their ascent of the UNM record books, as Johnson is now just 94 assists from breaking the program record in career assists and Gullatt is 16 total blocks from eclipsing the all-time mark in blocks.

But Wednesday night's game was a team effort as the Lobos fought off a scrappy Utah State team.

"It was good to get a win on our last home game on the court," Johnson said. "I thought our defense looked phenomenal. ... This win was a whole team effort. It wasn't one individual person."

Cassie House led New Mexico with a match-best 14 kills, while Devanne Sours, Juliea Warren and Henderson each had seven kills. Johnson added six kills and Gullatt contributed five.

Defensively, Gullatt led the team with seven total blocks, ahead of six for Johnson and five for Henderson.

Ashley Kelsey notched a game high-tying 18 digs, while Warren chipped in 13 digs.

"Overall though I felt that our defense was really good, both floor defense and blocking," head coach Jeff Nelson said.

As a team, New Mexico hit .202 (46 kills, 21 errors, 124 attempt), while holding Utah State to just a .094 hitting percentage (35-23-128).

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The Lobos also had more total blocks (12 to 7), digs (55 to 50) and assists (43 to 33) than Utah State, which dropped its 14-straight true road match dating back to last season.

Utah State opened the match scoring the first three points, but New Mexico quickly knotted the first set up at 4. Both teams would keep it close through an 11-11 tie, but the Lobos eventually posted a 4-1 run to go up 15-12 at the first-set media timeout.

UNM extended that 4-1 streak into a 9-3 streak to go up 20-14 on the Aggies. Utah State would score just four more times in the set as New Mexico cruised to a 25-18 set win.

The Lobos hit .273 (14-5-33) in the set with Henderson (four kills) and Johnson (three kills, 10 assists) leading the way offensively. UNM held USU to just .026 hitting (9-8-38).

Set two started with New Mexico leaping out to a 7-2 lead, but Utah State responded with a 7-1 run to take a 9-8 lead. UNM scored four of the next five to go up two points at 12-10, only to have a persistent Aggie squad tied the set at 15.

Each side then traded runs (5-0 for UNM followed by 4-0 by USU) and battled back and forth into another tie (one of eight in the set) at 22-all. Utah State moved ahead to set point at both 24-23 and 25-24, but the Lobos fought off both points and scored the final three of the set to win 27-25.

Both teams hit .156 in the set, with New Mexico converting 16 kills against nine errors on 45 attempts, while Utah State posted a 14-7-45 line. House had five kills — including the set winner — and Sours tallied four in the set.

“Cassie House really picked it up in the second and third set,” Johnson said.

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Out of intermission, Utah State took control early, going up 7-2. However, the Lobos reeled off a 6-1 run to tie the set up at 8, sparking another tight match. Both teams played to eight more ties en route to an 18-18 tie.

But UNM went on a 5-1 run to take a 23-19 advantage, and staved off two late Aggie points for a 25-21 set win.

New Mexico captured its 10th sweep of the season in front of a vocal crowd announced at 1,120 that chose Lobo volleyball over the UNM men's basketball team, which also won Wednesday night.

"I think it was a great crowd," Nelson said. "... It was one of the bigger crowds. It was fun and I'm glad we could win for them and for the seniors tonight. Our fans are always awesome."

The Lobos close out their 2015 season with a pair of road matches as they play Boise State Nov. 21 at 2 pm. and on Tuesday night at Air Force at 6 pm.

NOTES: New Mexico now leads the all-time series vs. Utah State 14-10, but is 17-2 since 1984 ... The Lobos improve to 10-5 in three-set matches this year ... UNM is now 15-5 when winning the first set, 14-2 when winning the second set and 12-3 when winning the third set ... New Mexico's win combined with UNLV's 3-0 loss to No. 13 Colorado State puts the Lobos alone in fourth place with two games remaining. However, the best New Mexico can finish in the MW is fourth ... Johnson needs 24 digs in her final two matches to reach 1,000 in her career, and four more block assists to reach No. 10 in program history