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By HOWARD SENZELL
FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

As the contest between Montgomery and Santa Rosa reached the final stages on Wednesday, the Vikings were in a precarious position.

Down in the score, they had to win the final three doubles matches to defeat the unbeaten Panthers and move into a tie with the visitors atop the NBL standings.

In a finish that won't be forgotten by either team, Montgomery pulled out an 8-7 win and as a result, both schools are now 13-1.

With their team down 7-5, Samantha Bickart and Josie Fish started the comeback with a three-set win (21-16, 10-21, 21-14) over Serena Kumar and Karina Eames.

Then in another three-setter, the Vikings mixed doubles duo of Anthony Chui and Yingqi Fan eked out a win over Pasang Sherpa and Marisa Smith (11-21, 21-11, 21-18).

That made the team score 7-7 with only the No. 2 boys doubles match still on court.

Like the other two critical matches, this one went the distance.

At the start, it looked like Santa Rosa would hang on as Oliver Staten and his partner Christian Pounder won the first set, 21-11.

However, Montgomery's Dylan Freitas and Jeffery Nambayan took the next set 21-17 to set the stage for a winner-take-all third.

Again, it looked like Santa Rosa would survive as Staten and Pounder assumed an 18-16 lead and were only three points away from victory.

However, they would not get another point as Freitas and Nambayan ended the match on a 5-0 run.

The winning team changed strategy after losing the first set.

"At the start, I was trying to be too precise on my returns," Nambayan said. "I missed some shots that I should've made."

"After that, I concentrated on just getting the birdie over the net and waiting for an opportunity to smash. That worked much better for me."

Freitas, who served out the match, also analyzed his game after the first set.

"I knew the team needed us to win and I was too anxious," he said. "For me to play my best, I had to calm down. I just kept telling myself that, especially when I was serving for the match."

While Montgomery dominated the doubles, the Santa Rosa singles players won six of the eight positions.

The Panthers have the league's two best singles players.

Sophomore Liam Galbraith was outstanding in his win over Freitas (23-21, 21-12) while senior Claudia Rohrs was just as impressive while defeating Serena Uppal (21-17, 21-12).



Montgomery's No. 1 boys badminton player Dylan Freitas hits a return against Santa Rosa's Liam Galbraith. (JOHN BURGESS / The Press Democrat)

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The two got another point for the Vikings when they combined to win No. 1 mixed doubles over Thomas Wikle and Uppal (17- 21, 21- 11, 21- 13).

Montgomery and Santa Rosa were playing for the second time. Earlier in the season at the Panthers gym, Santa Rosa won 8- 7.

Like on Wednesday, the outcome hinged on the final match. That day, Santa Rosa prevailed.

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