

Aurora volleyball players Storm Waterloo

By Jeff Doner

The Aurora Storm under-13 volleyball team has brought home some hardware after winning the Division-1, tier-1 gold medal at the Ontario Provincial Championships in Waterloo.

"It was a long time coming," said veteran Andie Therkildsen. "We worked hard for two years for that moment. The biggest smiles were plastered on our faces and it was one of the best moments of my life!"



The Storm Typhoon players celebrate their win: Becky Tresham, Kayla Law-Heese, Salina Torresano, Sacha Lund, Andie Therkildsen, Julia LeBlanc, Karlee Mannella, LanVy Ho, Ingrid West and Rebecca Lewis. Coaches are Linda Therkildsen, Cheryl Cowl and Mark Heese. Submitted photo

On the first day of pool play the Storm went undefeated, downing the Oakville Thunder, Ottawa Fusion and Cambridge Scorpions all in two sets.

Headed into day two, the team faced a win or go home scenario and were more determined than ever to come home with the championship.

But standing in their way was the Stratford Stingers, however, the Storm prevailed stealing the win in two straight sets.

With a long break ahead of them, the girls remained focused and came back to the court and carried the momentum into another win in the quarters against Markham Stingers 25-11, 25-14. This win set them up to play a much improved Leaside Lightning team in the semi finals, but the Storm's incredible defense and smart attacking lead them to a 25-13, 25-17 victory.

"Lots of teams rely on a couple of kids but we have a really deep bench," Andie added. "We can put any 6 of our 10 on the court and we are still able to best teams."

And that really came through in the finals.

With the under-13 Ontario Volleyball Association gold medal within their grasp, the girls headed to the finals to face Durham Attack, a team that they had not played since the first under-13 tournament of the season. The girls came out strong in the first set beating Durham 25-18, but Durham was not prepared to let the second set slip away easily. After Storm jumped out to an early lead in the second set, Durham made some substitutions that got them back into the game and it became a point for point exchange.

However, the Storm kept their composure and nailed down the victory, clinching top honours.

"We did it," said player Karlee Mannella proudly. "Undefeated all year. We are number one in the province and I'm so happy for our coaches and my team. It was so exciting as all our family and friends were so thrilled for us. It was the best moment of my life."

Volleyball players all year round, Andie and Karlee attribute a large part of their success on the court this season, to playing beach volleyball in the summer.

?In beach there are only two of you, so you have a lot of court to cover so it teaches you to communicate better with your team mate as you have to know where your partner is,? said Karlee. ?Sand is a lot harder to move around in so it made me get to the ball faster in indoors.?

Andie added that she is looking forward to getting back on the beach for the summer and that all 10 girls on the team are paired up to play beach volleyball again this summer.

?I have played rep soccer since I was eight and quit this year to focus on volleyball,? she said. ?My partner and I had a lot of success on the beach plus it is great spending all day outside on the water. I will definitely continue playing indoor next season. I already miss it and can't for next year!?

Linda Therkildsen, who has coached the majority of the team for the past couple of years, said the girls have worked hard and also had some extra help.

?There's a bit of a story to our team, Mark Heese, he's an Olympic medalist who won a bronze at the Atlanta Olympics ? the first time beach volleyball was in the Olympics ? his daughter Kayla is on our team,? Therkildsen said. ?Kayla and a couple of the other girls won provincials in under-12 beach volleyball last summer and of the 10 girls this year, nine played beach volleyball last summer, which is one of the key reasons, I believe, that we were so successful this year.

?I couldn't have asked for a better group of girls to coach. I had a great assistant coach and we had Mark as an assistant when he was available and it was just a season to remember.?

In the meantime, both Andie and Karlee are raring to go again for next season.

?If I had my way volleyball season would never end,? said Karlee. ?I can't wait until next year to see what our coaches have planned for us as we face new challenges and go for gold again.?