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## Miami Dade College women's volleyball team return to nationals

BY WALTER VILLA - SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD

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The Miami Dade College women's volleyball team has advanced to the 16-team national championships for junior colleges, which is set for Friday through Nov. 22 in Casper, Wyoming.

It is MDC's first trip to nationals since 2011. The last time the Sharks won a national title in volleyball was in 2004. Overall, MDC has won 42 state titles and eight national championships.

"The girls were very excited when we won state because it's been three years since we've been to nationals," MDC coach **Kiko Benoit** said. "We are a united and confident team."

MDC (27-3) is ranked fifth in the country and swept through last weekend's state championships, beating Polk 3-2, Santa Fe 3-0 and Manatee 3-0.

**Eirini Chatziefstradiadou**, a 6-1 middle blocker from Greece, was named the tournament's most valuable player. Three of her MDC teammates made the all-tournament team: 5-10 outside hitter **Silvia Galeano** of Colombia, 6-2 right-side hitter **Katie Hogan** from Missouri, and 6-0 middle blocker **Merrisa Murphy** of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

All four of those players are sophomores.

MDC's other starters are 5-8 sophomore setter **Carelis Rojas** of Puerto Rico, 5-6 freshman setter **Kelsey Taylor** from Miami's Westminster Christian, 5-9 freshman opposite hitter **Thalia Torres** of Puerto Rico and 5-9 freshman outside hitter **Yorgelys Jaspe** of Venezuela.

Among the teams advancing to the national finals are No. 1 Iowa Western (42-1), No. 2 Blinn (36-1), No. 3 Tyler (35-4) and No. 4 Southern Idaho (32-2). Blinn, the defending national champion, and Tyler, which finished second, are Texas schools.

MDC is 7-3 against teams that made it to nationals, including a 3-1 loss against Iowa Western.

## UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

The Hurricanes' women's volleyball team entered Friday in fourth place in the ACC with a 10-3 league mark, 17-7 overall. The Canes are 11-1 at home.

Miami has lost to the three teams ahead of them in the standings — Florida State, North Carolina and Duke. The Canes lost 3-2 at home to FSU and were swept by UNC and Duke.

Of Miami's final home matches, the Canes are ranked higher than all but one team — FSU. The Canes end their regular season at FSU on Nov. 28.

Leading the way for Miami is outside hitter **Savanah Leaf**, who has won three ACC Player of the Week awards this season. Leaf, a 6-foot senior from California, leads the ACC in kills per set (4.64).

Another Canes star is **Haley Templeton**, who has won four ACC Freshman of the Week honors. Templeton, a 6-foot setter from Georgia, is second in the ACC with 10.94 assists per set. She is also seventh in the league in service aces per set (0.33).

Special mention goes to Miami senior **Emani Sims**, a 5-11 middle blocker from Illinois. She is fourth in the ACC in hitting percentage (38.4) and eighth in blocks per set (1.25).

**Kalysta White**, a 5-5 junior defensive specialist, leads the team in digs in her first year following her transfer from the University of Minnesota.

The top five Canes in kills are Leaf, Sims, 6-1 sophomore **Kelsie Groot** of California, 5-9 junior **Taylor Scott** of California (by way of Mississippi State) and 6-1 **Sakile Simmons** from Texas.