
TANDARA HELPS LIFT BRAZIL IN AN EPIC AGAINST CHINA

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Brazil's Tandara Caixeta led the way with 19 points as her side carved out an epic 3-2 (19-25, 25-23, 27-25, 10-25, 16-14) victory over China in women's third-round action at the FIVB Volleyball Nations League on Tuesday.

It was a result that could have gone either way right until the death and had the crowd inside the Jiangmen Sports Centre screaming to the rafters. But Brazil stole a small break in the last - and held on for dear life with wing spiker Caixeta's heroics being ably supported by middle blocker Adenizia Da Silva(14 points including seven blocks) and wing spiker Amanda Francisco (13 points).

Brazil coach José Roberto Guimarães wisely saw a Chinese finger touch the ball and questioned the call that decided the match. But there were heroic efforts from both camps across the court.

China's superstar spiker Zhu Ting had stepped up when it mattered against her team's arch-rivals, registering a sensational game-high 34 points that included 27 spikes and five blocks. Her efforts were backed by middle blocker Yuan Xinyue with 16 points and another promising effort from the 18-year-old opposite spiker Li Yingying who picked up 12 points - and plenty of court time.

China coach Lang Ping has been experimenting with her line-up over the course of the first three rounds of the VNL - and even allowed Zhu a break from all action entirely over the first two. But such is the strength of the teams they have drawn for this fourth round - added to the fact that they are playing in front of their faithful fans - that the smart money is on China giving their main stars plenty of chances to shine this week.

Centre of all the attention will of course be the 23-year-old Zhu and she was in the thick of things from the first set, using her incredible reach and leap to punish Brazil with some powerful spikes.

But there's no doubt Brazilian memories still reach back to the Rio Olympics and the marathon 3-2 loss to the Chinese that is now part of volleyball lore.

That China also came in on a four-match winning streak over the South Americans was also reason for them lift, if indeed any more was needed.

Brazil clawed their way back into the match in the second set - an enormous stuff block from Da Silva to make it 9-10 was a highlight - and gradually their defensive work started to gel. It was another disputed call that swayed the third set - right when it looked China's for the taking.

The Brazilians benefited from a ball that looked to graze a fingernail only at set point to China, before edging their rivals 27-25.

But the call only seemed to inspire China, and Zhu especially, as they powered through the fourth. The tension in the last was palpable - and the Brazilians held their nerve.

The reward for Brazil (9-1) is an encounter on Wednesday with fellow table toppers the USA (9-1), while China (5-5) will next face Russia (6-4).
