

The first division champions 2016-17 Sliema Wanderers will face their Super League opponents Paola Volley for the first time during the incoming. This game will be a good preparation for both teams and will give a taste of what the season will be about. The Veteran Paola Volley are being coached by Mr. Lorenzo Robba and led by the captain, Ms. Martha Curmi while the neo promoted are coached by Mr. Kris Croker and led by the captain Ms. Linda Margeriatkova.

The first few points of the game showed that the game is not going to be an easy peasy for none of the teams. Both teams started to gain points with some hard spiking and good services together with solid defence. But after 11 points Paola took a 3 point lead forcing coach Croker to take the first time out at 4-7. Ms. Cheviron from Sliema is playing as a middle player which is a total new position for her. The rhythm of the game changed a bit with some mistakes during services execution from both sides. The three point lead for Paola was kept till 12-9. Paola Volley ensured to put some pressure on their adversaries thanks to the services of MS Daniela Bonnici till the score 15-9. Sliema Wanderers players managed to stop the momentum of Bonnici and thus reducing also the lead by 4 points leaving Coach Robba no other option other than to call a time out at 13-15. Paola Block composed of Sarah Spiteri and Maria Gatt made it difficult to the Wanderers to gain points thus resulting in Paola gaining advantage till 18-13 where Paola Volley Setter Ms. Roxette Caruana committed an error during service. The Wanderers failed to take advantage of the error committed thus making Paola Lead at 20-14. The pressure on the Wanderers was being felt as these committed further mistakes making Coach Croker calling for the second time out at 23-15. The first set ended with Paola Volley winning 25-15.

The second set started with Paola Volley having the same rotation as the first and some changes for Sliema. Paola volley started to dictate the pace of the set having a 3 point lead but the momentum was stopped temporary by Sliema Wanderers. Paola was conquering point after points with services of Ms. Daniela Bonnici and Ms Roxette Caruana putting Paola with a 6 lead advantage. Coach Croker was forced to call the first time out of the set at 1-7. Ms. Cheviron stopped again the momentum of Paola and starting reducing their advantage with 3 good services consecutively. The streak of the services was ended by a spike of Ms. Martha Curmi. Paola gained another point decisively but it showed that Sliema were started to changing gear as long rallies were started to be played. The experience of Paola started to play an important role as Paola Volley took the lead and maintained it till 13-6 at which Ms. Jolanta Szubert of Sliema Wanderers managed to pass through the block of Ms. Daniela Bonnici. With good positioning of both teams the rallies were becoming longer thus making it difficult for each other's opponents difficult to gain points. The rhythm changed again to a slower pace and this started to allow Sliema to gain couple of points. When Paola Volley started to dictate the pace of the game, it was at that time were these conquered 2 or 3 points consecutively. After Sliema Wanderers gained a couple of consecutive points. Coach Robba decided to to call for time at 18-14 in his favour. The time out effect was seen with a delay of one point and gain control of the gain at 18-16. Points were swinging from one side to another but the 5 point lead of Paola Volley at 22-17 forced Coach Croker to call for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time out. At this point Paola kept control of the game until a mistake was made at 23-17. Hard hitting spiking by Ms. Martha Curmi gave the first opportunity of a set point to the Paolities but a hard spike by Ms. Mikaela Galea was the reply obo Sliema Wanderers. The 2<sup>nd</sup> set was won by Paola 25-19

Third Set will be presenting an uphill challenge to Sliema Wanderers since they are 2-0 under with Set. It looks like the Wanderers were not going to be won easily because they receiving all the balls spiked by Ms. Alison Borg in every rally. For the first time during the game Sliema Wanderers managed to take the lead of the game and started to dictate their own pace with an advantage of 3 point lead

over Paola. It took once mistake from Sliema and Paola took advantage of that to reduce the lead of Sliema. The experience of the players in black helped them to equalize the score and take the lead by 2 point which was reduced to 1 after a long rally in which Ms. Mikaela Galea scored the said point. Another spike by Ms. Galea to equalize the score and service by Ms. Jolanta Szubert placed Sliema in the lead again. Another long rally which ended in favour of the players in blue forced coached Robba to call for the first time of the set. Sliema Wanderers started to look very confident during their play taking the lead to 4 points and putting extra pressure of their opponents. A tip by Ms. Sarah Spiteri stopped momentarily the momentum of Sliema but a hard spike by Ms. Galea was in reply to the previous point. Player Ms. Bonnici replied with a hard spike of her own giving the opportunity to her teammates to start working and equalize the score. Ms. Bonnici with another hard spike from position 3 placed Paola again to the lead. Ms. Cheviron on the other hand refuse to accept this and after a number of spikes which were received by the Paolities managed to equalize the score again. Seeing this happening Paola Volley but some pressure on their adversaries and took again the lead and kept scoring points one after the other. At a 6 point difference in favour of Paola, Sliema Wanderers coach called the time out 20-14 to stop the momentum of the blacks. The time out called was ineffective to stop the said momentum and attacks kept coming from all directions and the players of Sliema could not get their defence organized. At 15-24 Sliema Wanderers were given the opportunity to put some offence to Paola Volley. The Wanderers clinched 3 points before Ms. Alison Borg close the set make Paola win 25-18.

Referee :- Mr. Alex Spiteri

Final Score Sliema Wanderers - Paola Volley : 0 – 3 (15 – 25; 19 – 25 ; 18 – 25)

