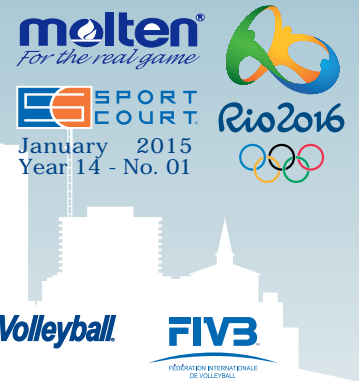




2016 Women's NORCECA Continental Olympic Qualification Tournament

Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
January 7-9, 2016



Olympic Games Ticket Up for Grabs in Lincoln



Lincoln, Nebraska, USA (Jan. 6, 2016) – Four women’s national volleyball teams from NORCECA will be battling it out this weekend in Lincoln, Neb., to earn the zone’s qualification into the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The U.S., ranked No. 1 in the world and reigning world champions, hosts No. 7 Dominican Republic, No. 15 Puerto Rico and No. 16 Canada in Lincoln, Neb., where fans are expected to pack the Pinnacle Bank Arena for matches Jan. 7-9. The tournament field was determined by the top four teams from the eight-team 2015 NORCECA Women’s Continental Championship held in Mexico. Team USA captured the title with a four-set win over Dominican Republic, while Puerto Rico won the bronze medal over Canada.

“It’s truly an honor and a privilege - and a phenomenal opportunity - to play on an American court, in front of thousands of USA fans, with these four teams battling for a ticket to the Rio Olympics,” USA Head Coach Karch Kiraly said.

With the Olympic qualifying tournament taking place in the middle of the international club season and right after the holiday season, all four teams have needed to assemble and focus quickly to get ready for this all-important tournament.

For Dominican Republic, they traveled to Tijuana, Mexico, for a training block with Colombia to keep the players’ minds focused on the Olympic bid.

“We spent a training period last week in Tijuana, Baja California, and the whole team used this opportunity to prepare very well,” Dominican Republic Head Coach Marcos Kwiek said. “We are very happy to be here to try to classify for the Olympics.”

“We had a short training block, but I assume all the other teams had the same issue with players competing overseas,” Canada Head Coach Arnd Ludwig said. “We started on Dec. 27 and had a really good preparation in the one week that we worked. It was really focused and I think we are

ready for this tournament.” Although USA is the strong favorite based on the world ranking, all four coaches feel their teams will put out maximum effort to either win the tournament or remain in contention for the World Olympic Qualification Tournaments this May. The second- and third-place teams remain alive for the 12-team Olympic Games field in August.

“At this NORCECA event, it is important that we finish second or third to keep our dreams for Rio open for as long as possible,” Ludwig said. “The clear favorite here is the United States, but I think we saw at the NORCECA Championship that we are really close to the other teams and have a chance against them. This is one of the biggest problems for us, that we need to believe in ourselves more than we did at the NORCECA Championship.”

The USA had a strong training block in California starting on Dec. 26 and has brought a team it feels can compete to win the coveted Olympic Games bid here in Lincoln.

“We’ve had a strong training block so far, with all 21 players here working very hard to make USA the strongest it can be going into the NORCECA Olympic Qualifier,” Kiraly said. “We chose the travel roster in the hope of maximizing our chances to accomplish our goal of qualifying for the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, and we’re excited to begin the battle, Thursday against Canada.”

Like the other three teams, Puerto had just a week of preparation time as a full team to get ready for the Olympic Qualification Tournament, but that is not stopping the squad from putting out maximum effort to get the ticket to Rio.

“It is important for us to play hard in this tournament,” Puerto Rico Head Coach Juan Carlos Nunez said. “We only had a short week of training to get ready as our best player played in Europe. The team is focused to try to win this tournament, or stay in second or third place to play in May at World Olympic Qualifier.”

Dominican Republic remains slightly short-handed in personnel. Bethania De La Cruz, who is one of the best players in the world, is unavailable for the tournament.

“One of our best players, Bethania De La Cruz, is not here because she is in a special situation for surgery,” Kwiek said. “We are okay, but I do not know if we have the same level that we had the recent World Cup.”

For fans unable to attend the Qualifier matches, live video streaming is available for free through the USA Volleyball web site at . All but the final match, USA versus Dominican Republic, will be streamed online.

USA hosts Dominican Republic on Jan. 9 at 8 p.m. CT and will be aired lived on NBC Sports.

Jan. 7
Dominican Republic vs. Puerto Rico, 5 p.m. CT
USA vs. Canada, 7 p.m. CT

Jan. 8
Canada vs. Dominican Republic, 5 p.m. CT
USA vs. Puerto Rico, 7 p.m. CT

Jan. 9
Canada vs. Puerto Rico, 5 p.m. CT
USA vs. Dominican Republic, 8 p.m. CT