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UNIVERSITY PARK, PA. - It was North Allegheny versus a District 3 school for the fourth consecutive season in the PIAA Class 3A boys volleyball title match. And the Tigers came away with a third straight title.

In 2017, North Allegheny was defeated by Central York in the state title match. It would be the last time the program suffered a defeat.

One year later, the Tigers made a return trip to Penn State and beat Landisville Hempfield in the title match.

In 2019, coach Dan Schall's squad made a third consecutive appearance in the title match and avenged its loss to Central York with a second straight title.

North Allegheny's run of title match appearances was put on hold in 2020 as COVID-19 forced a cancellation of the season.

With 2020 in the rear-view mirror, North Allegheny claimed its third consecutive title with a 3-1 win over Central Dauphin on June 12 at Penn State's Recreation Hall.

"It speaks to our depth and our consistency," said Schall, when asked what it meant to three-peat. "It means a lot, especially when you consider this is a completely different group of kids. It speaks to selflessness and speaks to delaying your reward until you get a chance to get on the court. Some of these guys would have been playing as freshman in another program. But they had to wait their turn in this program. They were ready to shine when they got their chance."

The title ties North Allegheny with Peabody for second place on the PIAA's champions list with eight titles. Landisville Hempfield holds the PIAA record with 10 titles. It was the 18th title match appearance for the Tigers, which is a PIAA record. No other school has made more than 14 title appearances.

"Coming up behind some of the greatest volleyball players who have gone through NA's program, like Canyon (Tuman), A.J. (Schmidt), Trevor (Treser), and Drew (Hunker) just to name a few, we got to see what it took to win a championship," said senior opposite Garrett Hrvoich, referring to members of North Allegheny's 2018 and 2019 championship teams.

Hrvoich was the only member of the 2021 squad who played in the 2019 final, and his role was as a sub.

"Even though we were not instrumental in winning those championships, it showed us what to do," said Hrvoich, who recorded seven kills and two blocks in a starting role. "Losing last year (to COVID-19), we were hungrier than ever. We wanted to come out and do what those guys had done before us. It feels so awesome to follow them and win this title."

"It was no surprise to see another District 3 team in the finals," Schall said. "Three of our four opponents in this year's bracket were from District 3."

North Allegheny (19-0) earned its PIAA berth by winning its 21st WPIAL title. The Tigers earned a return trip to the finals with wins over District 3 fourth-place finisher Cumberland Valley, 3-0 in the first round; District 3 runner-up Northeastern, 3-0 in the quarterfinals; and WPIAL runner-up Seneca Valley, 3-0 in the semifinals.

Central Dauphin (20-3) qualified for the state tournament by placing third in District 3. The Rams advanced to the title match with wins over District 11 champion Parkland, 3-0 in the first round; District 1 champion Pennridge, 3-0 in the quarterfinals, and District 3 champion Landisville Hempfield, 3-2 in the semifinals.

But it didn't start out well for North Allegheny, as Central Dauphin pulled out a 29-27 victory in the first set. The Rams (20-3) were making their second title match appearance and first since 2009.

"We had a little bit of nervousness," Tigers senior outside hitter Michael Mosbacher said. "We got it out in the first set."

Schall wasn't concerned.

"I reminded them it's a long match and that was only one set," Schall said. "These guys have been through so many different situations this year. We were so fortunate to play a really tough schedule this year. This is no knock to any of our opponents, but Seneca Valley was one of, if not the toughest opponent we faced all season. And we faced them four times. So dropping a set, while it wasn't the way we wanted to come out, these guys are cool. They have a 0-0 mentality. They were not fazed by being down a game. They trust one another. That's a big thing."

Central Dauphin's fine start was fueled by senior outside hitter Nathan Wickenheisser (four kills) and senior opposite Logan Tinsley (3 kills, 1 ace).

"We came out swinging. We came out hard," Rams senior outside hitter Wickenheisser said. "We passed great and served even better. We let them make the mistakes."

North Allegheny pulled it together in the second set. A ferocious offense along with a stingy defense allowed the Tigers to pull out a 25-15 victory. The Tigers recorded five blocks for a point, with Hrvoich and senior outside hitter Garrett Owens recording two each.

"In the second set, we started making mistakes," Wickenheisser said. "And we made more mistakes as the match went along. It started getting in our heads."

North Allegheny was equally impressive in the third set, recording a 25-14 victory.

"Once they played Sweet Caroline, it was all over," said Mosbacher, referring to a Neil Diamond song played during a timeout in the third set.

The fourth set was close early, as it was tied 9-9, but North Allegheny took over from that point on and recorded a 25-16 victory.

David Sanfilippo led the Tigers with 12 kills and seven blocks. Other contributors for North Allegheny were: Mosbacher (10 kills, two blocks), Cole Dorn (6 kills), Caleb Schall (46 assists), and Peter Carioto (17 digs).

Central Dauphin was led by: Nathan Wickenheisser (12 kills), Tyler McConnell (12 kills, 4 blocks), and Jacob Miller (30 assists).

"It was great to get here," Tinsley said. "That was our goal. We may have come up short, but it's a great accomplishment to get this far."

Central Dauphin coach Josh Brenneman knew it would be tough to beat such a powerhouse program.

"North Allegheny has a big program," Brenneman said. "They sometimes get 100-plus kids coming out for their program pulling from a large area. We knew coming in their block was going to be a problem because of their height advantage. We thought we could give them a good run, and we did in the first set, but they honed in on what we were doing. They are a great team and spread the ball well."

Brenneman was proud of what his squad was able to accomplish.

"Overall, we had a great season," Brenneman said. "We went through a lot this year, including losing Nathan for eight matches with an injury, but finished as one of the top two teams in the state. This state is recognized as one of the premier areas in the country, so being top two is a great accomplishment for these guys. A lot of them have been starting since freshmen and sophomores, so seeing them reap the rewards of making it to the finals was pretty amazing for the group."

North Allegheny's win in the title match extended its consecutive win streak to 65 matches.