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JOHNSTOWN - One day before the PIAA Class 1A title match, Maplewood coach Sheila Bancroft found out her program would be moving back up to Class 2A in next year's PIAA realignment.

Bancroft's squad made the best of their final day in Class 1A, as the Tigers claimed the championship trophy with a 3-0 sweep of Marian Catholic in the first of four title matches played at Johnstown Richland High School.

Maplewood (23-4), the District 10 champion, was making its eighth PIAA title match appearance and claimed its fifth title. The previous four were in Class 2A. Bancroft, the Tigers coach for 31 years, celebrated her fourth title."

"We were in double-A for the other three titles," Bancroft said. "I thought I'd really like to get one in single-A, so this was our last shot at it, and we were able to do it. Thank goodness we had that chance."

Marian Catholic (23-1), the District 11 champion, had to settle for the runner-up trophy for the third time in four years.

"This is our sixth time in the finals," Marian Catholic coach Dr. John Fallabel said. "We've won two and lost four. We're 0-for-Johnstown. I'm not coming back to Johnstown ever."

Marian Catholic jumped out to a 3-1 lead in the first set, but Maplewood scored ten of the next 12 points to take a commanding 11-5 lead. The Tigers, behind the hitting duo of Sophie Varndell and Maggie Thomas, recorded a 25-14 victory.

Maplewood continued its offensive surge in the second set by building an 18-8 lead. Marian Catholic, behind the hitting of two-time PVCA All-Star Jazmine Mooney, rallied to tie the match at 21-21. Despite the rally, Maplewood pulled out a 25-23 victory to take a 2-0 lead.

"Everyone came to play today," Bancroft said. "We were passing the ball well and able to run our offense the way we wanted to."

It was just the opposite for Fallabel and his Phillies.

"It was our defense," said Fallabel, when asked to assess the Phillies loss. "If you can't get the ball up, you can't run your offense. So, they're the better team. They were stronger. They're good. They came at us from all different angles, and that's it."

Marian Catholic showed some life at the start of the third set by taking a 3-1 lead, but Maplewood dominated the rest of the set and came away with a 25-13 victory to clinch the title.

"We're so excited to be here," said Varndell, a junior opposite who led the Tigers with 15 kills. "We worked all season to get her. We're so fortunate to be state champions."

Varndell was quick to credit her defense.

"We can't run our offense without our defense," Varndell said. "We have powerhouses at the net, but our defense helped get us there. It was a good time for us to peak."

Teammate Maggie Thomas added 10 kills and four blocks in the Tigers 6-2 offense.

"Thomas and Varndell have been our go-to players, though we have been very balanced on offense," Bancroft said. "Our hitting percentage was out of this world. As a team, we hit .368 and had only eight hitting errors. That was a key."

Mooney paced Marian Catholic with 15 kills.

"We knew they were pretty two-dimensional on the offensive end, so we tried to contain Mooney," Bancroft said. "We knew she was a phenomenal hitter, front row and back row. We tried to put up double and triple blocks against her. We tried to contain her. We knew we weren't going to shut her down."