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How does a team with no seniors on its roster win a PIAA girls volleyball title?

Bald Eagle Area showed how it's done with a 3-0 sweep of Holy Redeemer in the Class 2A championship match, held Nov. 17 at Cumberland Valley High School.

"It was our goal from day one," Bald Eagle coach Larry Campbell said. "I knew we had the talent after our team went to Junior Nationals over the summer."

Campbell elaborated on the significance of that tournament.

"We lost to [2017 PIAA Class 2A champion] Freeport in the first round of the state tournament last year," Campbell said. "With every game we played at nationals, I compared them to Freeport. Nine of the ten teams played would have beat Freeport and we went 4-6 in those games. That showed me we had the talent required to win a title."

The Junior National trip to Orlando, Fla. was a good bonding experience for the girls.

"We had 30 people staying in one house in Orlando," Campbell said. "It gave the girls a chance to bond."

Bald Eagle Area, the District 6 champion, posted perfect 23-0 record en route its first WPIAL title in the sport of girls volleyball. Holy Redeemer, the District 2 champion, finished with a 24-2 mark.

"I'm so proud of these kids," Campbell said. "They bought into everything we wanted to do, and they worked so hard to get here. They have been through a lot this year with club and high school volleyball, but they have worked together. There is no finger-pointing if someone makes a mistake. They just help each other up."

Bald Eagle Area was led by Grace Hugar (15 kills), Madison Rockey (31 assists, 12 digs), Lexi Skripek (18 digs), and Lacey Barnhart (7 kills).

"We've been talking about this for so long. It's surreal wearing this gold medal," Hugar said. "I knew we were capable of reaching this goal. We worked so hard all year. It's great to see the payoff for all that hard work."

Hugar played despite suffering a sprained ankle one week earlier.

"Grace rolled her ankle a week ago," Campbell said. "We kept it in a boot until it was time to play. She was playing on one leg. She was very aggressive despite that."

Rockey was thrilled to finally reach the pinnacle of PIAA volleyball.

"It feels great, a very rewarding and humbling experience for us," Rockey said. "We've been working together since we were young kids. We just keep working hard with the goal of winning a state title."

In the first set of the championship match, Bald Eagle jumped out early to a 4-1 lead, but Holy Redeemer responded with a 6-0 run and eventually led 11-7 midway through the set. The Eagles rallied late with an 8-1 run en route to a 25-19 victory. Hugar had five kills for the Eagles.

"That was probably one of the worst serving and offensive days we've had," Campbell said. "As a team, we want to hit over .200, and serving over 90%. Today we were at 89% with 9 aces and 8 errors and we hit .189. We actually hit .105 in that first set. We looked like we first-timers in a state championship game. It was very evident. A lot of hitting errors.

"But you know, when you've got a kid like the [Grace] Hugar kid, you've got to jump on. Last match [she had] 16 kills and 1 error, today was 15 kills and 1 error; she's a heckuva player."

In game two, the Eagles jumped out again to a 4-0 lead. The Royals started to find their two big hitters Sarah Liskowicz and Skylar Osenkarski and rallied to take leads of 17-14 and 20-

17, but they couldn't hold it. The Royals held a narrow 23-22 lead when Elita Brown stepped to the serving line. Brown squashed the Royals hopes with three consecutive aces.

"Elita is our best server but I don't think we expected to see three straight aces," said Skripek, who led the Eagles with 18 digs. "This is something that I never dreamed about, but since it is here, we did it.

The third set featured eight lead changes, but the Eagles scored three of the last four points to complete a 25-23 victory. Rockey capped the victory with a kill.

"Madison Rockey did an outstanding job," Campbell said. "A lot of people watch the game and they oooh and ahhh with the blocks and kills, but they don't appreciate what a good job that setter does. Madison's physical as a blocker, she puts the ball in consistent locations, and she's the best leader for a high school kid that I've had in 18 years of coaching."

Both schools were making their first appearance in a PIAA title match.

"We had too many unforced errors, at least 14 in every game at the wrong times," said Royals coach John Kablick. "We just couldn't close out a game today. Today was a day where one mistake could hurt us, and we had many. We lost two games in the state championship 25-23. One point somewhere and that could have been a different outcome. We lost to a very good team who did everything they could to keep the ball alive. We had a great season, losing in the finals hurts but when you look at the big picture, it was a good season."

Holy Redeemer was led by Osenkarski (17 kills, 9 blocks), Liskowicz (11 kills, 4 blocks), Livia Moore (9 kills, 16 digs), and Korren Hicks (32 assists).

Bald Eagle Area advanced to the title match with wins over Serra Catholic (25-19, 19-25, 25-17, 25-15), Corry (25-17, 25-23, 25-23), and Freeport (25-16, 23-25, 25-18, 25-15). Holy Redeemer earned its berth with wins over North-Penn Liberty 1 (25-15, 20-25, 25-22, 25-15), New Hope-Solebury 1 (25-18, 23-25, 25-22, 25-12), and Delone Catholic (23-25, 25-13, 25-23, 18-25, 15-10).