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MECHANICSBURG - The fifth set of the PIAA Class 3A title match between Palmyra and Southern Lehigh, held at Cumberland Valley High School, was so long that Cougars coach Clark Sheaffer lost track of the score.

Sheaffer was a little confused when his squad started celebrating after junior middle hitter Allie Stovall drilled her game-winning spike down the line to provide the deciding point in Palmyra's 19-17 victory, thus ending a five-set marathon.

"I didn't even know we were up one and all the kids ran onto the floor after Allie's hit," Sheaffer admitted. "Shows you how much I was paying attention."

Stovall had a similar reaction.

"I didn't think it was real," said Stovall, when asked about the kill that clinched Palmyra's first PIAA title. "I didn't even realize it was the last point until everybody started swarming me."

Stovall and teammate Taylor McInerney each had four kills in the final set, which looked to be settled when Palmyra took a commanding 12-6 lead.

"When you get up by five or six points in a fifth set, the other team usually gets down," McInerney said. "But Southern Lehigh kept fighting and we kept fighting. I thought the match would never end. We just kept swinging until Allie came up with the final kill."

McInerney, a two-time PVCA All-Star, led Palmyra with 24 kills, 14 digs, and four blocks. Stovall added 14 kills and 10 digs.

"I'm still in shock. This is just amazing. I am so proud of my team today," McInerney said. "It doesn't get any better than this."

Sheaffer was impressed with the performance of his squad, but had special praise for his five seniors.

"This was a good team win as everybody contributed tonight," Sheaffer said. "Our seniors have been together since middle school and they will be missed but they went out the right way, with a state title and unbeaten."

Sheaffer also complimented the Cougars opponent, who rallied from a 2-1 deficit to send the match to a fifth set.

"Southern Lehigh is easily one of the best teams we have faced all season," he said. "They put us to the test. Fortunately, we passed the test."

Southern Lehigh coach Don West Jr. was also impressed by the performance of his squad.

"I am so proud of every girl on this squad," West said. "I love every one of them. I'm proud of what they they were able to accomplish. I watched every game that my seniors played when they eighth graders. It's exciting to see where they were then and where they are now. They are great students, great people. They spoke so highly at the end to all of the underclassmen. They're devastated but they thanked the entire team for the experience of playing in a PIAA title match."

Southern Lehigh's squad featured a pair of two-time PVCA All-Stars: senior outside hitters Mackenzie Feight (27 kills, 12 digs) and Cortney Kylish (18 kills, 11 digs).

"Mackenzie is one of the best we've ever had. Cortney is one of the best we've ever had. They fought and gave everything they had," West said. "All of these girls are champions. We may not have gotten the gold medals, but these girls are champions. I could not ask for a better fight between two great teams."

Southern Lehigh opened the match with a 25-20 victory in the first set. Palmyra evened the match then took a 2-1 lead with a pair of 25-21 victories. The fourth set was tied 14 times until Southern Lehigh took a 15-14 advantage. The Spartans then scored 10 of the next 15 points to pull out a 25-19 and force a fifth set.

Palmyra jumped out to its 12-6 advantage in the fifth set. Southern Lehigh rallied to tie the match and served for match point on three occasions (14-13, 15-14, and 16-15), but failed to come up with the winning point.

"We want to enjoy this," West said. "It was a great year, now it's time to rest, recover and look back. When we sit down at our banquet in a couple weeks there will be tears. But the joy and memories they're going to have will last forever. It's a great moment and they will look back at that trophy and know how good they are."

Southern Lehigh advanced to the title match with wins over West York (28-26, 25-20, 18-25, 25-11), Villa Maria Academy (25-23, 25-16, 25-16), and Garden Spot (21-25, 25-16, 25-12, 25-18).

Palmyra earned its berth with wins over Hollidaysburg (25-20, 25-20, 25-22), Thomas Jefferson (25-17, 26-24, 25-22), and Knoch (25-27, 25-23, 25-18, 25-9).