

By Ken Wunderley
Tri-State Sports & News Service

The North Allegheny High School girls volleyball team turned in a record-tying performance at Saturday's PIAA championships, held at Cumberland Valley High School.

North Allegheny became the third school in PIAA history to win four consecutive titles with its 25-14, 25-22, 25-20 sweep of Unionville in the Class 4A title match.

The other two schools to four-peat were Norwin and Merion Mercy. Norwin achieved the feat twice by winning eight consecutive Class 3A titles from 1976-83. Merion Mercy became the second with four Class 2A titles from 2007-2010.

"I am stunned," said senior outside hitter Paige Miller, a starter on all four championship squads. "I never expected us to win that easily. We peaked at the right time and showed them what we had. This match showed what NA volleyball is all about."

North Allegheny finished the season with a perfect 18-0 record and concluded their four-year reign with a 88-1 mark. Their only loss was to Canon-McMillan in the 2019 WPIAL final. Unionville, the District 1 champion, finished with a 14-1 mark.

"Winning four in a row is amazing," said Tigers setter and Louisville recruit Paige Morningstar, while struggling to hold back her tears of joy. "I'm really going to miss my teammates, my coaches, and this place. It's a great way to end my career."

Morningstar was masterful feeding North Allegheny's hitters by recording 30 assists. Mia Tuman led the Tigers offense with 15 kills and Paige Miller added 12. Caroline Curran led the defense with 16 digs.

"This was our best match of the season," said Tuman, a sophomore outside hitter. "Paige (Morningstar) did a great job of spreading the ball around and we passed really well which got them out of system."

This was the last high school match for North Allegheny coach Heidi Miller, who is stepping down after 23 years with the program, including the last nine as head coach.

"I'm more emotional than I was for any of the other ones," said coach Miller, who also found it tough to hold back her tears of joy. "I can't believe we actually got to play this season. To have it end this way for me, for my last kids and my seniors that I care so much about, it's amazing. They played so clean and focused. I'm so proud of them. We certainly peaked at the right time."

The title also breaks North Allegheny's record of three consecutive titles which was set by her father-in-law, Bob Miller, who led the Tigers to consecutive titles in 1992, 1993, and 1994.

"He will be proud that his legacy was carried on," coach Miller said. "He could not attend the match since he is at home recovering from knee surgery, but he was watching the match on TV."

Coach Miller was also emotional because it was the final high school match for her daughter Paige. Miller's other daughter Abby, now a freshman in college, joined in on the festivities.

"This title is so big for me, my mom, my sister, and our family," said Paige Miller, a Mercyhurst University recruit. "We worked so hard for this. We deserve it. It feels great. It ends an era for the Millers."

When reminded that this title breaks the record her grandfather set, Paige Miller's reply was: "I have a feeling he's at home crying tears of joy. I think he will be okay with that."

North Allegheny, the District 7 champion, was making its ninth appearance in the PIAA finals and claimed its seventh title. The Tigers earned their title berth with wins against District 10 champion Erie McDowell, 3-0 in the quarterfinals; and Landisville Hempfield, 3-2 in the semifinals.

Unionville, the District 1 champion, was making its title match debut. The Indians advanced to the finals with wins against District 12 champ Archbishop Carroll, 3-0 in the quarterfinals; and District 11 champ Parkland, 3-1 in the semifinals.

"North Allegheny has been in this position multiple times before," said Unionville head coach Stephanie Smith. "They came out a little bit calm, and we came out with some nerves, and it took us a little time to get caught up. We knew defense was going to win this game, and North Allegheny had some big hitters that we were unable to shut down."

And don't be surprised to see North Allegheny in the title match again in 2021, as the Tigers lose only four players to graduation. The four seniors are: Paige Miller, setter Paige Morningstar, middle hitter Madison Beer, and opposite Leigh Ivory.

Unionville also has a young squad. The Indians have only two seniors: outside hitter Sophie Brenner and setter Ashlyn Wiswall.