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Fans who attended the PIAA Class 2A Boys Volleyball title match at Penn State's Recreation Hall were treated to a roller coaster ride in the first four sets as the momentum shifted back and forth from Meadville to Lower Dauphin.

Both teams showed the talent and desire required to hoist the coveted PIAA championship trophy.

The fifth set was a much different story, as unforced errors led to Meadville's demise and allowed Lower Dauphin to claim a second straight PIAA Class 2A title.

"It's extremely hard to win a state title. It's even harder to go back-to-back," Lower Dauphin coach David Machamer said. "These guys just continued to fight, continued to battle, especially when we were down 2-1."

Meadville was making its third consecutive appearance in the finals, as the Bulldogs won the title in 2019, but had to settle for a second straight runner-up trophy.

"It was a big battle and that is a good team that made plays when they needed to," said Meadville coach Nick Bancroft after watching his squad lose in the title match to Lower Dauphin for the second straight year. "We had some errors at key times, and they didn't. That was the difference."

The two teams traded punches in the opening set until it was tied 13-13. Meadville took charge from that point, leading by as many as four points and finishing with an impressive 25-19 victory. Junior outside hitter Jackson Decker led the way for the Bulldogs with seven kills and one block for a point.

Decker recorded eight kills in the second set, but five of them came after Lower Dauphin had built a 22-15 lead. The Falcons used a balanced attack, which included three kills each from senior opposite Luke Gibbs and senior outside/middle hitter Liam Carney, and two each from senior outside/middle hitter Colton Waters and junior setter William Sierer. Lower Dauphin pulled out a 25-22 victory.

"It took us a little time to get used to the gym," said Gibbs, one of Lower Dauphin's captains. "Once we got used to it, we were able to play our game."

The momentum Lower Dauphin picked up in the second set carried over to the third set, as the Falcons built leads of 4-1 and 13-9. At that point, Meadville went on an 8-0 run and never looked back in a dominating 25-18 victory. Decker recorded seven more kills and senior outside hitter Julian Jones added three more.

The fourth set featured Gibbs and Decker trading kills. The set was tied eight times before Lower Dauphin took charge in a 25-20 victory. Gibbs recorded nine kills, but junior outside/middle hitter Toby Waters came up with the winning kill. Decker had eight kills in a losing effort.

"The turning point was when we went up 18-15 in fourth set and they called a timeout," Machamer said. "They were feeling the pressure. In the huddle, I told the kids that (Meadville) thought they had won the match when they went up 2-1. I told them that if we won the fourth set, we would win the match."

Gibbs agreed.

"It was a whole new game in the fourth set as we were able to control the outside," Gibbs said. "And the momentum we picked up carried over to the fifth set."

Meadville took a 2-1 lead in the fifth set, but five consecutive hitting errors proved to be their downfall. Gibbs recorded three more kills, but senior middle hitter Craig Patrick had the honor of scoring the final point on a tip.

"It's pretty cool to go out as seniors with a win in our final match," Patrick said. "To get the final point made it even more special."

Gibbs finished the day with 18 kills, 5 blocks, and 4 digs. Toby Waters had 10 kills, 3 blocks, and 6 digs. The Falcons balanced attack featured five others who had five or more kills. Colton Waters and senior outside hitter Derrick Colon each had 7 kills, while Patrick and Carney each had 6. Sierer had five kills, 59 assists, and 11 digs.

Decker had a match-high 33 kills. Jones had 11 kills and 13 digs. Senior middle hitter Cam Schleicher had eight kills and 12 digs. Senior setter Caden Mealy had 46 assists and 10 digs.

"We were hoping to end with a win, but stuff happens," said Jones. "I feel like even though we took second two years in a row, that's still a good legacy to leave. I had the opportunity to play in three state championships and most people never get to play in one so it's pretty cool."

Lower Dauphin (23-1) earned its berth by winning its second straight title in District 3. The Falcons advanced to the finals with wins over Frankford, by forfeit in the opening round; Blue Ridge, 3-0 in the quarterfinals; and Christopher Dock, 3-1 in the semifinals.

Meadville (19-1) qualified by winning its third consecutive District 10 title. The Bulldogs advanced to the finals with wins over Ambridge, 3-0 in the first round; Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, 3-0 in the quarterfinals; and Cochranon, 3-0 in the semifinals.

"We played a good match," Bancroft said. "These kids gave it everything they had. There's nothing to be ashamed of."

Both teams will be hit hard by graduation. Lower Dauphin's roster featured seven seniors, while Meadville had six seniors.