By Ken Wunderley

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Johnstown - Just take a look at the final hitting stats and it’s easy to see why Allentown Central Catholic beat Somerset in the PIAA Class 3A final, held Nov. 19 at Richland High School in Johnstown.

Middle hitter Dana Roberts led the Vikings with 14 kills, but she had plenty of help. Outside hitter Rachel Hess recorded 13 kills. Middle hitter Olivia Rudjord registered 12 kills. Outside hitter Grace Barr had 11 kills. And right-side hitter Megan Nelson had 7 kills.

"It's great to bring the title back to Allentown Central, especially for our coach," Roberts said. "It's such an incredible feeling to be a PIAA champion."

It's the fourth PIAA title for Allentown Central, the first since back-to-back titles in 2007 and 2008.

"It's been a long time since our last title," said Allentown Central coach Laurie Corcoran, who has been the Vikings coach for 22 years. "This is my fourth title. I also had four teams finish second. It's great to be back on top again. I'm so proud of my girls."

Allentown Central (21-4), the District 11 champion, posted a 3-1 win over Somerset, the District 5 champs, in the title match.

"Our motto this year was unfinished business," said Corcoran, referring to the Vikings loss in the opening round of the 2015 state playoffs. "The girls were disappointed with the way we finished last year. Our seniors talked to the girls and had them buy into what we wanted to do. They made it their goal to win the state title."

Allentown Central almost suffered a similar fate in the opening round of the tournament, as they rallied from a 2-1 deficit to beat Pope John Paul II. The Vikings swept their quarterfinal and semifinal opponents and came into the title match with confidence that this was their year.

"Our girls have been playing so well," Corcoran said. "They came in with a lot of confidence in themselves. They never stopped attacking the ball. They never stopped pushing and pushing and pushing."

Allentown Central opened the match with a narrow 25-23 victory. Somerset responded with a 25-20 victory in the second set.

The third set was tied at 18-18 when Rudjord got hot. Rudjord recorded three kills and a block to lead the Vikings in a 7-2 run, thus completing a 25-20 victory.

"I kind of knew I had to step up and help the team and do everything we needed to do," Rudjord said. "I tried to make sure to limit my errors and be a motivator."

Allentown Central featured its many hitters in a 25-10 third-set blowout.

"We just have a team full of people that can all put the ball away," Rudjord said. "Everyone on the team has such a great impact and I think that really helps us out when we need to distribute the ball better."

Setter Julia Bradford ran the Vikings offense.

"We try to mix it up," Bradford said. "I have faith in all my hitters to put the ball away. It's hard for teams to defense us since we have so many good hitters. It feels so awesome to win the state title. We worked so hard all season. Everything we worked for led up to this moment."

Somerset (24-1) was led by outside hitter Jordyn Miller, who had 10 kills and 5 blocks, and Madison Reeping, 8 kills and 10 blocks.

"This team is an incredible team," Somerset coach Elizabeth Barron said. "Unfortunately, we weren’t able to get it done today. Hats off to Allentown Central. They played really well and were the better team today."

Somerset was a semifinalist in the 2015 playoffs.

"We've had two losses total in two years," Barron said. "That shows what great leadership we have and how great this team was. These girls battled back, but came up short."

Both schools were well represented as the stands were filled.

"We had an amazing turnout," Barron said. "I think half of the town was here. We had great support throughout the community. Unfortunately, we couldn't get it done for them. No. 2 in the state is pretty good."