By Ken Wunderley

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 University Park, Pa. - North Allegheny set a PIAA Boys Volleyball record with its appearance in the Class AAA title match, June 10 at Penn State's Rec Hall, but the Tigers just can't beat Central York.

 North Allegheny made its 15th appearance in the finals, breaking the record it shared with Peabody since 2104. Central York was making its 12th PIAA title appearance and claimed its seventh title with a 3-1 victory.

 It was the fifth time North Allegheny and Central York faced off in a PIAA title match. The two teams also met in 1982, 1985, 2011, and 2014. Central York came out on top in all five matchups.

 "There is no other program in the state that we respect more than North Allegheny," said Central York coach Todd Goodling, who took over as head coach this year after serving as an assistant. "North Allegheny and Central York have remained relevant over the course of 40 years. That kind of longevity in high school athletics, through multiple coaching staffs, talks about what PIAA athletics should be and the specialness of the sport of volleyball.

 "Anytime we get to step on the court with North Allegheny is fun. To get to do it in the last match of the year is spectacular. Congratulations to North Allegheny for a great season. We are thrilled to play such a great program and come away with a win."

 North Allegheny coach Dan Schall had similar feelings.

 "We have so much respect for Central York," Schall said. "We saw them three times this year, so we knew it would be a close match. We knew it would come down to who played best for two hours on Saturday."

 The respect the two coaches referred to was illustrated after the match. The two squads posed for a team photo after accepting their medals and trophy. Then came a photo of the two teams combined, celebrating their appearance in the finals, something rarely, if ever seen after a state title match.

 "We did that at the NA Tournament at the start of the year," Schall said. "Our varsity and JV teams played Central York in the finals of both tournaments. I asked them to join us for a combined photo for both tournaments. Todd [Goodling] asked me if we could do the same after the state tournament. We may be on different teams, but we're competitors who respect each other."

 North Allegheny got off to a good start, as the Tigers dominated the first set. With numerous players making a contribution, the Tigers posted a 25-20 victory.

 Ever more important in that set, the Tigers shut down Central York's big gun, 6-7 junior outside hitter Cole Johnson. But that didn't last long. Johnson, another player being recruited by Penn State, was a force in the final three sets, as he finished with 22 kills.

 "We were just not playing Central volleyball," said Goodling, when asked about the first set. "I think the guys got a little ticked and came out and played aggressive in the second set. I didn't panic. I think it was just a case of remembering what the formula was."

 Central York posted a 25-21 victory in the second set, as Johnson and Braden Richard, a sophomore outside hitter, each had five kills. The two teams traded points in the third set until the match was tied 14-14. Central York scored the next four points and pulled out a 25-22 victory.

 "Sometimes you get caught up on the physical skills that Cole possesses," Goodling said. "In my humble opinion, Cole's best attribute is that he cannot tolerate losing. I think that was evident today."

 The fourth set was tied 13 times, but Central held on for a 25-23 victory.

 "We've always felt we could accomplish this goal," said senior libero Zakery Kalos. "I joined the team in my sophomore year and our goal was to win a state title by the time we graduate. When this season began our goal was to win four titles: league, county, district, and states. We accomplished all of those. So we felt we had every right to be here and win this game. We prepared and done what we needed to do be here."

 Goodling was especially impressed by the performance of senior setter Cole Luckenbaugh, who recorded five kills and dished out 45 assists.

 "We run a very different offense than any other team," Goodling said. "That system is not run from the sideline. That offensive system takes a good two or three years to learn. It takes an exceptional athlete, who is also a student of the game, to run our system. Carter has both of those attributes."

 Schall felt the difference in the title match came down to passing and serving.

 "When you have horses on both sides of the net and the offense was collegiate level for both teams, it comes down to who passes and serves the ball better," Schall said. "They had three servers in a row that were like facing the meat of the order in a baseball lineup. We knew we had to stop their runs. They didn't get on track in game one, but were able to in the other three sets."

 The PIAA titles won by Central York and Class AA champ Northeastern marked the fifth time in 11 years that District 3 schools swept both titles. It's also the 17th year in a row that a District 3 team claimed a state crown.

 "I'm sure coach [Matt] Wilson would agree that both programs feed off each other," Goodling said. "I think that Northeastern and us have a distinct advantage when we go into postseason play because of the competition we play during the year."