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Pope John Paul II coach Ryan Sell had an interesting way of dealing with the pressure of being a defending PIAA champion.

"With the majority of our roster returning, we've been dealing with the pressure of repeating since last year," Sell said. "We talked with the girls about it before the season began. I consider it more of a privilege than a hindrance. We cultivated that feeling with the girls and they handled the pressure really, really well.

Pope John Paul II claimed a second straight PIAA Class 3A title with a 3-1 win against Hampton on Nov. 18 in the third of four championship matches held at Cumberland Valley High School.

"I think this is better than last year. I know last year was five sets, down-to-the wire type of game," said Panthers senior setter Madison Monahan. "But this year it was so much harder, all the expectations were kind of weighing down on us and we were able to push through that and win again. That just feels even better than last year."

It was a battle of unbeaten teams, as both squads came into the match with a 24-0 record.

In the first set, the two teams traded points until the score was tied at 9-9. Pope John Paul II scored the next four points and led by as many as six before claiming a 25-20 victory. Hampton's Emmy Schrom had seven kills and one block for a point, while Pope John Paul's Hutton Cordrey countered with six kills and a block.

Hampton had a more balanced attack in the second set, as Schrom, Marin Katona-Bock, and Payton Galetti each had three kills. Galetti also recorded two blocks for a point and the Talbots pulled out a 25-21 victory.

"We tried to slow Schrom," Sell said. "She got her kills, but she scored only one point on her jump serve. She actually abandoned her jump serve in the last set."

Pope John Paul II dominated the third set with Maeve Gallagher registering five kills, while Cordrey and Natalie Ricevuto each had four. The Panthers recorded a 25-15 victory as the Talbots recorded only nine kills in the set.

Schrom opened the fourth set with four kills and a block for a point as the Talbots matched the Panthers until the score was 10-10. Pope John Paul took over from that point on and posted a 25-21 victory, thus ending Hampton's title hopes.

"Our game plan was really good," Sell said. "Sometimes when you have a really good game plan, the kids forget," Sell said. "But today for the most part our kids remembered what they were supposed to do in certain situations. Hutton (Cordrey) scored like five or six points on the tips, which we talked about all week. At a high level, if you can execute a game plan and the other team doesn't adjust, just keep going with the game plan."

Pope John Paul's balanced attack was Hampton's downfall. The Panthers had four players reach double figures in kills. Cordrey, a senior outside hitter, had 17 kills at 20 digs. Ricevuto, a senior opposite, had 14 kills. Gallagher, a junior outside hitter, had 12 kills. Norah Busch, a sophomore middle hitter, had 10 kills.

"It's surreal to do it again because it's so hard," said Cordrey.

Pope John Paul II (24-0) earned its PIAA berth by winning the District 1 title. The Panthers advanced to the title match with wins against: Engineering & Science, 3-0 in the first round; Middletown, 3-0 in the semifinals; and Spring Grove, 3-0 in the semifinals.

"I'm really excited," said senior libero Gabriella Cooper, who had 17 digs. "I can't stop smiling. It's crazy because almost all of us have been playing together since we were 12. I think that's just great that we came this far all together as a team. Even though some did split up in some (club) teams, we still come together and push through."

Hampton earned its PIAA title berth by winning its first WPIAL title. The Talbots advanced to the finals with wins against: Oakland Catholic, 3-0 in the first round; Bald Eagle Area, 3-0 in the semifinals; and North Catholic, 3-0 in the semifinals.

Schrom, a senior outside hitter, led all hitters with 19 kills, but was the only Talbot who reached double figures in kills.

"I'm extremely proud of the way the girls battled today," Hampton coach Dainen Holler said. "We faced a very good team that played great in all aspects of the game."

Pope John Paul II loses eight players to graduation, but Sell likes their chances next year.

"I will miss this team so much," said Monahan, who had 47 assists and 23 digs. "This has been the best team I've ever been on. The family-like culture that we have, it's unmatched."

Hampton also loses eight seniors to graduation.

"This was a very special senior class," Holler said. "They will be missed."