

HUNTERDON/WARREN/SUSSEX GIRLS VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT - 2011

Hunterdon Central (1) at North Hunterdon (2), Hunterdon/Warren/Sussex Tournament, Final Round - Girls Volleyball

Star-Ledger, November 05, 2011 8:36 p.m.

By Carolyn Freundlich

Senior Zuzanna Reszka and her North Hunterdon teammates waited four years for this moment.

As a tightly contested match-up ensued for an hour and twenty minutes and they held off Hunterdon Central for the Hunterdon/Warren/Sussex Tournament championship, it seemed to take just as long to get there.

“We’ve been defeated so many times here,” Reszka said of North Hunterdon's second-place finishes to Hunterdon Central in the past three tournament finals. “This year we knew it was our time to win. We wanted it more.”

That energy enabled Reszka, an opposite, middle Katie Jennison and outside hitter Katie Gunter to fortify North Hunterdon’s front row with big blocks and powerful, well-placed kills. Libero Terry Li’s aggressive dives and timely hits from the end line offset the opponent's strength during the long, quickly set rallies and kept the ball and her team alive when North Hunterdon, No. 4 in The Star-Ledger Top 20, defeated No. 11 Hunterdon Central, 25-23, 18-25, 25-20, in the H/W/S final yesterday in Hackettstown.

North Hunterdon (23-1) avenged not only its losses to Hunterdon Central (28-5) in the last three finals, but the team’s sole loss this season, a 2-1 decision on Oct. 11.

“Hunterdon Central is our biggest rival and even though we were tired, we played through it,” said Jennison, the tournament MVP, whose powerful, well-placed kills and consistent blocks produced a match-high 12 kills and six blocks. “They hit deep, with a lot of power and mixed it up, but we wanted this so badly. When I went up for a kill or a block, it made me jump 12 feet higher.”

The back-and-forth nature of the first two sets continued into the decisive third, where Lauren Westervelt’s hard topspin serve, opposite Shannon Russel’s strong hits and setter Emily Drew’s court sense and ball control moved Hunterdon Central ahead, 11-6.

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“The rallies were really long, and their hits were strong and unpredictable, but we kept our energy up,” Li said. “They have good hitters and a really good setter. A lot was expected from me and that made me step up.”

Li sprang this way and that along the back row, while Jennison led the team’s offensive attack with three kills and two blocks during a 7-1 rally that moved North Hunterdon into a 13-12 lead. It was tied three more times over the next 15 minutes, but Jennison’s big net play had already given North Hunterdon the momentum it needed. It was 17-17 before North Hunterdon pulled away for good behind Gunter, who strategically placed two tips in pulling the team ahead, 21-17.

“When the girls got behind they fought back,” North Hunterdon coach Kirk Hissner said. “They never gave up. Their motivation and determination carried them through. We’re hoping to fill up that banner. We won our conference, today our county and I think this will give them the confidence needed to accomplish the third goal in states.”