By Ken Wunderley

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A red card called against Bethlehem Catholic coach Paul Abi'Daher could have marked the demise of the Golden Hawks in Saturday's PIAA Class AA title match, held at Johnstown Richland High School.

Instead it became the spark his squad needed to rally from a 2-1 deficit to defeat Fort LeBoeuf and claim the school's first PIAA title by a female team.

"This feels great, I am so proud of the team and what we have accomplished," said junior outside hitter Jordan Young, who led the Golden Hawks with 22 kills. "Bringing the state championship to Bethlehem Catholic is an amazing feeling."

Abi-Daher received a yellow card and a red card during the third set. The lead had changed 14 times during the set and Fort LeBoeuf took a slim 23-22 lead.

On the next point, Abi-Daher argued a call with an official and was given a yellow card, which by rule forced the head coach to sit on the bench for the rest of the match. When the Bisons went up 24-23 a couple points later, Abi-Daher argued another controversial call. But since Abi-Daher got up from his chair, he received a red card and Fort LeBoeuf was given a penalty point as well as a 25-23 victory in the set.

That gave Fort LeBoeuf a 2-1 lead, thus forcing Bethlehem Catholic to win the final two sets to claim the title. That's just what the Golden Hawks did. And they did it in impressive fashion, as they dominated both sets.

"I'm very proud of them," Abi-Daher said. "Whenever a girl is down and not producing, the rest of the team picks her up. I got into an argument about a call. The girls saw what happened and learned to stand up for themselves. They rallied to show we are a championship team."

Bethlehem Cathoic (23-2), the District 11 champion, jumped out to an 8-3 lead in the fist set, but Fort LeBoeuf (20-1) rallied to pull out a 25-20 victory. Madison Lydic recorded three kills during the set and won six-straight service points for the Bisons to cap the victory.

The second set was dominated by Bethlehem Catholic, as senior outside hitter Jessica Hamati-Attieh recorded six kills and the Golden Hawks recorded a 25-17 victory.

Fort LeBoeuf, the District 10 champion, won the controversial third set to take a 2-1 lead.

"We were all frustrated with the call," said Hamati-Attieh, who had 18 kills in the match. "We used it as motivation and energy and that is what helped us win. We knew we had to win it as a team."

Bethlehem Catholic took out its frustrations on Fort LeBoeuf in the final two sets, claiming victories of 25-12 and 15-8.

"After the third set, we got really angry and I think that aggression really pushed us forward," junior setter Rachel Cray said. "We did what we had to do and we came out with the win."

"I’m so proud of our team and what we’ve accomplished, and how hard we worked to reach this goal," Young said.

Bethlehem Catholic was making its first PIAA title appearance since back-to-back silver medal performances while competing in Class AAA in 1990 and 1991.

Fort LeBoeuf was making its third consecutive PIAA title appearance and had to settle for the silver medal for a second straight year.

"To be a public school in the championship match for three years in a row is something to be proud of," Fort LeBoeuf coach LeAnn Johnson said. "I was very proud of the way the girls played. They deserved a better fate."

Madison Lydic led Fort LeBoeuf with 16 kills, while Miranda Gulnac had eight.