By Ken Wunderley

Tri-State Sports & News Service

 JOHNSTOWN - Hannah Rowe dropped to her knees and let out tears of joy after her block registered the final point in Knoch's 3-2 win over defending champion Allentown Central Catholic in the PIAA Class 3A championship match, held at Johnstown Richland High School.

 "I didn't even know how to react," said Rowe, a sophomore middle hitter. "It was insane. The moment it happened felt so surreal. I don't even know how to describe it. It was an amazing feeling."

 The victory ended an improbable comeback from a 2-1 deficit and gave Knoch its first PIAA girls volleyball title. The Knights are also the first girls team in school history to claim a state title.

 Senior libero Carly Bozzo was still emotional 20 minutes after accepting her gold medal from coach Diane Geist.

 "I'm so amazed and proud of this team," said Bozzo, who found it hard to hold back the tears. "It was our goal. We worked so hard all season. I'm still in tears. I still feel like it’s not real life. I'm just so happy for my team and coach Geist."

 Allentown Central, the District 11 champion, was making its seventh appearance in the finals and finished second for the third time.

 "I'm kind of in a dream world right now. It's unbelievable," said Geist, now in her 32nd year. "I am just so proud of the girls."

 Knoch (24-0), the District 7 champion, built a 16-10 lead in the first set, but Allentown Central scored the next six points. The two teams traded points until the Knights pulled out a 26-24 victory.

 Allentown Central (22-4) rebounded in the second set with an impressive performance. The Vikings led by as many as ten points and came away with a 25-17 victory. Knoch led only once in the third set and dropped a 25-20 decision.

 "Everyone said take it one at a time. Just relax and play our game," said sophomore middle hitter Kennedy Christy, when asked what was said in the huddle after the third set. "Whatever happens happens. Just try as hard as we can and we know we will come out as winners."

 The Knights took those words to heart as they jumped out to a 4-0, eventually built a 17-10 lead, and walked away with a 25-18 victory. That set up a fifth and deciding set.

 "I had faith in my team," Rowe said. "I knew from the start we were going to win. We just had to pull through and get extra momentum, the extra push that we've been getting all year."

 But Knoch didn't get the final push until midway through the final set. Allentown Central had built a 10-7 lead when the Knights rallied to score eight of the final ten points to pull out a 15-12 victory. Rowe accounted for the final three points with two kills and her match-winning block.

 "We are all just so competitive, and we fought for every point," Christy said. "It didn't matter what the situation was, we kept fighting."

 Knoch was led by senior middle hitter Sarah Armahizer, who recorded a match high 21 kills and 14 blocks.

 "We were not able to contain their big hitter," said Allentown Central coach Laurie Corcoran, referring to Armahizer. "Her hitting and blocking played a big part in their victory."

 Rowe (12 kills and six blocks) and Christy (nine kills and nine blocks) also turned in impressive performances.

 "They blocked us how many times and we weren’t able to recover," Corcoran said. "Everything we were putting down on the floor, they were bringing up. Their defense, all-in-all, was very good."

 Allentown Central was led by junior outside hitter Rachel Hess, who had 21 kills and 25 digs, junior middle hitter Grace Barr, who had 17 kills.

 "It's a great accomplishment to play in this game two years in a row," Corcoran said. "I'm very proud of what the girls were able to accomplish this year. This was all in the plan to get to the state finals and to win the state championship. But second place, runner-up, isn't too shabby."