

Howard dethrones BC3 as Region XX volleyball champion

Pioneers fall 15-13 in fifth and deciding set

Oct. 29, 2017



Butler County Community College's Autumn Rodgers (22) collides with teammate Brittney Bianco (1) while Howard Community College's Alana Matson defends during the finals of the National Junior College Athletic Association Division III Region XX championships at BC3's Field House on Sunday, Oct. 29, 2017. At left is BC3's Mackenzie Craig (10). In foreground is Howard's Jessica Marquis (13).

(Butler, PA) The Butler County Community College volleyball team's two-year reign as National Junior College Athletic Association Division III Region XX champion ended Sunday

with a 15-13 setback to top-seeded Howard Community College in the fifth and deciding set of the best-of-5 finals at BC3's Field House.

Howard, which avenged a 3-0 loss to BC3 in the 2016 Region XX championships, moved to 16-9 overall after beating the Pioneers 25-21, (21-25), 25-17, (26-28) and 15-13. No. 3 seed BC3, seeking its ninth Region XX title since 1999, ends its season 18-6.



Howard Community College's Alana Matson hits the ball as Butler County Community College's Autumn Rodgers (22) and Brittney Bianco (1) defend during the finals of the National Junior College Athletic Association Division III Region XX championships at BC3's Field House on Sunday, Oct. 29, 2017.

set, at 12-6, and held on for the two-point victory.

"They are a good team," Howard coach Gary Troy said of BC3. "We lost to them in the finals last year. And if you look at the stats for the year, our teams are almost identical. We knew we were in for a tough match."

Howard, of Columbia, Md., advances to the District G title game, where it will face the champion of Region XII with a berth in the Nov. 10-11 national tournament in Rochester, Minn., at stake.

The Pioneers' loss overshadowed a season-high 49-assist effort by Brittney Bianco, a sophomore setter and Freeport High graduate who ends her BC3 career ranked No. 2 with 1,254 assists in 49 matches. Only Nicole Sebastian had more, with 1,360 in 57 matches in 2002-2003.

"Brittney was amazing," Howard's Alana Matson said. "She is good enough to play Division I. Her sets are that good."

Bianco; Mackenzie Craig, a freshman opposite and Karns City Area High graduate; and Emily Magusiak, a freshman middle hitter and New Castle Area High graduate; were named to the Region XX all-tournament team, as was Howard's Trinity Smith, Jessica Marquis, Sara Few and Matson.

Matson, a 5-foot-11 opposite, was named the tournament's MVP.

BC3 led only twice in the first set, at 1-0 and at 20-19 on Emily Beck's ace, before Howard scored six of the next seven points. Autumn Rodgers' kill gave BC3 a 25-21 victory in the second set. The Dragons snapped a 12-12 tie in the third set with a 13-5 run capped by Smith's kill. The Pioneers led by as many as six points in the fourth

BC3, which never led in the fifth set, scored four consecutive points to pull within 14-13 before Howard clinched the win, and the title.

“We started off too slow, and it’s too hard to come back,” BC3 coach Rob Snyder said. “You use all the energy to come back and it’s hard to push through that.”

Craig led BC3 with 14 kills, followed by Magusiak and Rodgers, of Butler, with 11 each. Magusiak had 28 digs; Bianco and Alexis Schmeider, of Butler, had 20 each; and Kelly Kabay and Haley Caldwell, both of Butler, added 19 each.

Craig had three aces and Rodgers, three blocks.

BC3 began the season with only three returning players – sophomores Bianco, Kabay and Rodgers – a sophomore and six freshmen, and finished with the program’s ninth consecutive winning season.

“Everyone improved a ton, and we played good volleyball, which I always say is the goal,” Snyder said. “Win or lose, as long as you play good volleyball -- which this really was. Another thing I say is that championships usually come down to two points, and this did.”