

VOLLEYBALL

# How Tenafly girls volleyball knocked off Northern Highlands in the North 1, Group 3 final

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ALLENDALE — Zuzanna Buchnajzer decided to paint her fingernails green for the North 1, Group 3 girls volleyball tournament.

"It's a lucky color," the Tenafly senior said. "Like a four-leaf clover."

The No. 2 seed Tigers seemingly don't need much luck when Buchnajzer is on her game, as she was Monday. The outside hitter put down 14 kills, including 10 in the second set, to help her team knocked off No. 1 Northern Highlands, 25-19, 25-20, in the sectional final.

"She's one of the best in the state," Tenafly coach Jeff Koehler said of Buchnajzer. "And to play a team like this, you have to have a girls like that."

The Highlanders (12-2) came in having lost only to Immaculate Heart, the top-ranked team in the North Jersey Top 20. Their top outside hitter, senior Esmae Oehler, had been a force throughout the sectional tournament and helped stake the home team to an 8-5 lead in the first set.

A 6-0 run by Tenafly (13-3) near the end of the set swung things in the visitors' favor, and two big runs in the second set ultimately made the difference.

"It was great to play against a great team, so we could challenge ourselves," said Buchnajzer, a native of Poland. "We were very lucky that no one got injured, and no one got COVID during the process of the season."

## What it means

Girls volleyball is set to move back to its traditional fall slot for the 2021-22 school year, and the plan is to return to group-championship play.

The NJSIAA instituted sectional titles in 2010 – the year after Tenafly last reached a state final – and due to COVID, this is as far as the playoffs go for the specially-created Season 3.

"From the beginning, it was a goal to win the state [sectional] championship," Buchnajzer said.

## Key sequence

Northern Highlands started the second set on serve, and the Tigers got a side-out when Danielle Korenkov bumped the ball to Rylie Theuerkauf for a kill.

Buchnajzer scored the next six points – five off sets from sophomore Meghan Koehler (21 assists) and one by tipping a free ball into the shadow of the Highlanders' blockers.

"Zuzie definitely gives us the confidence," Theuerkauf said, "and also makes us feel like we could do anything."

## By the numbers

► **1982:** The last time Tenafly had officially captured an NJSIAA trophy. The Tigers defeated Garfield in the Group 2 title match, and the next four state finals in which they played (1983, 1985, 1991, 2009) were before sectional championships were awarded to each of the state finalists.

► **6:** Number of wins Northern Highlands posted against North Jersey Top 20 teams this season, including a rematch victory over IHA and three-set win against Wayne Valley in Friday's sectional semifinals.

## Players of the match

► Buchnajzer finished with 14 kills and six digs, while Theuerkauf added six kills and five digs.

► Defensively, Tenafly got three blocks each from Noa Ben-Ari and Sofia Bell.

► Oehler had eight kills and an ace for the Highlanders, who got 17 assists from Ruby van der Heide.

## They said it

“This is an amazing bunch of girls. And obviously, with COVID, I didn't get the chance to work with JV or freshmen. So it was just us – 11 girls and me the whole year. The scouting report that they put together [on Northern Highlands], we knew a lot about them, and that's a great program. ... This is a great win for all the girls in this program's history.” — Jeff Koehler

*Greg Tartaglia is a high school sports reporter for NorthJersey.com. For full access to live scores, breaking news and analysis from our Varsity Aces team, subscribe today. To get breaking news directly to your inbox, sign up for our newsletter and download our app.*

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