Special Feature

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ASHEBORO - From the start of a high school sports season to the state championship match at the end of that season, is a long journey. Most teams who earn that title shot have had to battle all types of adversity along the way.

Whether it's an injury or injuries, players moved to different positions or a certain opponent that must be defeated, very rarely does a team advance to a state championship without adversity.



The Uwharrrie Charter Academy volleyball team is headed to its second straight state 4-A title match, as the Eagles (31-4) will meet Lake Norman Charter (30-1) in a rematch of last year's state championship. But to get there, the Eagles faced adversity, plenty of it.

"It showed early," veteran coach Lee Kennell said of some things the Eagles had to adjust to in order to get to this year's state championship, which will be held Friday at noon at the Gilbert Craig Arena at Campbell University. "The added pressure knowing you want to repeat what you did the year before. You expect to be able to get back there and sometimes you forget about the process."

With girls taking over new roles and a number of injuries along the way, it took the Eagles some time to get to where they hoped they would be. A couple of losses in the event at Rock Hill, S.C., toward the beginning of the season and two Four Rivers Conference losses to Southwestern Randolph during the regular season may have sent up some red flags.

But this team, loaded with veteran talent and a coaching staff that has seen just about everything in the sport, fought back time and time again to earn its second opportunity for a state championship.

"They just wanted to go back and we lost the process at times, but they did a great job of figuring it out and I couldn't be prouder. Once we did focus on those things, that's when we started hitting our stride."

The Eagles went through a streak of capturing 34 straight sets, that included the end of the regular season, the FRC Tournament and the first four rounds of the playoffs.

Eleven consecutive sweeps and a Game 1 win against Carrboro in the regional finals Tuesday night gave UCA that 34-set streak before they were forced to battle back against the Jaguars and they did.

"We really had to come together instead of splintering apart," said senior Makenzie Cain after the Eagles captured wins in sets one, three and five (15-11). This could be our last time playing together. Play your hardest and have that confidence."

Cain has been playing with plenty of confidence this season. That is one of the many reasons this team has been so successful. She has given the Eagles another steady defensive performer to go along with a front line that is talented and deep.

"The transition from last year was a lot, from not playing a lot to being the Libero is a lot of pressure," Cain said. "That was something I struggled with at the beginning. There was so much pressure on me. I was talking to my coach and teammates and they helped give me the confidence I have."

Kennell said he was impressed with the way his team battled back against Carrboro after losing sets two and four.

"They would separate from us in the second and fourth sets, but we did such a good job of battling back," Kennell said. "We didn't quit and fought harder. We started playing to win."

Cain experienced the state title match last year. She'll play a much bigger role this time around.

"I'm looking forward to the whole thing," she said. "Getting to experience what not a lot of high school athletes get to experience once and we get to experience it twice. That's special, being able to play one last time with your teammates."

One final time for this team that has made so many memories this season. One final time for the ultimate memory.