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Johnstown - Garnet Valley's 3-2 upset of two-time returning champion Parkland in the PIAA Class 4A final, Nov. 19 at Richland High School in Johnstown, could be the biggest upset in PIAA history.

Garnet Valley, the fifth-place finisher in District 1, recorded four upsets, including three that went to five sets, to earn the first title in school history. Parkland, the District 11 champ, was a two-time returning state champion and was making its fifth title appearance in six years.

A sampling of PIAA championship brackets since 2000 clearly shows that Garnet Valley is the biggest longshot to win a state title.

In 2000, the PIAA added a third classification to girls volleyball. From 2000-2015, a total of 48 PIAA tournaments were held. Of the 96 teams that appeared in those title matches, 81 were district champions, 11 were district runners-up, and four were district third-place finishers.

Of the four third-place finishers who made it to the PIAA finals during that 16-year period, only one claimed a title. The four previous instances are listed below:

\* In 2012, Landisville Hempfield won the Class 3A title after placing third in District 3.

\* In 2010, West Allegheny was the runner-up in Class 2A after finishing third in District 7.

\* In 2007, Garden Spot was the runner-up in Class 3A after placing third in District 3.

\* In 2001, Delone Catholic was the runner-up in Class 2A after finishing third in District 3.

The PIAA added a fourth classification for the 2016 season. In the Class 4A bracket, District 1 received five berths. With that in mind, Garnet Valley was the first fifth-place district finisher to appear in a PIAA bracket. And they surprised everybody by claiming the state title.

"We peaked at the right time," Garnet Valley coach Mark Clark said. "It took a lot of wins. Our loss to Council Rock North woke us up. Everything was do or die at that point. These girls really wanted to get to states."

Garnet Valley (24-3) lost to Council Rock North in the District 1 quarterfinals, then came back and beat Upper Merion and Avon Grove to earn the fifth berth.

"Then we traveled west," Clark said. "We flipped into the lower half of the bracket and went on the road like a minor league baseball team.

"We were taking a charter bus to every match. We played Red Lion two hours away, then played Baldwin 2 1/2 hours away. And our semifinal match against State College was a 1 hour 50 minute trip. I think it was the charter bus. Just kidding."

In the first set of the title match, Garnet Valley showed Parkland it was in for a battle. The Jaguars led most of the set and recorded a 25-19 victory.

Garnet Valley also led most of the second set and served for match point three times, but Parkland pulled out a 29-27 victory. The third set was tied at 13-13 when Parkland took charge and posted a comfortable 25-19 victory.

Despite being on the verge of defeat, Garnet Valley kept its hopes alive with a 25-20 victory, thus forcing a fifth and final set.

Parkland jumped out to a 2-0 lead, but Garnet Valley took charge from that point outscoring the Trojans 15-6 to complete a 15-8 victory. Outside hitter Erin Patterson had four of her 12 kills in the fifth set, including the last three kills.

"It was shocking," said Patterson of upsetting the two-time state champs. "It's such a great way to end the season. I just knew I was going to get the winning point."

It was the third consecutive five-set victory for Garnet Valley.

"Our last two matches we went five sets," Clark said. "The experience we gained in those matches absolutely helped us in the title match. It was a race to 15 and we knew it. My girls stuck together just like they did in the previous two matches."

Middle hitter Nicole Loan led Garnet Valley with 14 kills. Libero Lizzie Herestofa tallied a staggering 42 digs. Setter Gabby Davis recorded 48 assists.

Parkland (24-2) was making its fifth title appearance in six years.

"They were a senior-dominated team," Parkland coach Mike Krause said. "We were a young team and they took advantage of that. They were a great team and did a very good job. They deserved to be state champions."

The Trojans were led by outside hitters Sam Graver, 26 kills, and Grace Steurer, 21 kills.