

Shanahan survives early jolt to win state opener

Upper Dublin >> District 1 4A champion Bishop Shanahan got an early jolt in its PIAA 4A state tournament opener Tuesday evening against District 3 third seed Hempfield.

The Eagles dropped the first set, 25-17, to the delight of the sizable, spirited contingent that travelled all the way from Lancaster County to Upper Dublin High School.

Fortunately for the Eagles (and their own vocal set of fans), Shanahan righted the ship the rest of the way, winning 25-15, 25-21 and 25-17 for a 3-1 win. The third set was nip-and-tuck, as the score was 19-19 before the Eagles pulled it out.

“Hempfield really came down to play tonight – all night long,” said Shanahan coach Greg Ashman. “I knew there were some really bad matchups we had against them. They served really well against us – they challenged us, and made us work really hard.”

Although the Eagles quickly evened the score in Game 2, the third set was a nip-and-tuck affair that was tied 19-19 late in the match before Shanahan went on a brief run to win a 25-21 nail-biter.

“The key for us was staying the course, staying with the game plan,” said Ashman. “Our net play is one of our strengths, our serving is strong; so we were able to neutralize them a little bit with our serves – they were bringing the ball back so we could play the ball tough on them.”

Another key midway through the Shanahan-Hempfield clash was Eagles’ outside hitter Brooke Burns, who came off the bench to contribute (seven digs, seven kills).

“We have such depth on our team so that if any one of our players isn’t on their game, we have people who can jump up and step in and fill those roles,” said Ashman. “Brooke did that tonight, I’m really proud of her. Our whole team did really well, but Brooke is the one who stepped up well

tonight.”

Other key contributors for the Eagles included outside hitter Cara Shultz (16 kills, 12 digs, four aces) and senior middle blocker/outside hitter Michaela Devlin (11 kills, three blocks).

With the victory, the Eagles (21-1) advance to the state quarterfinals, while they will face District 1 fourth-place finisher Downingtown West Saturday. The Whippets knocked off District 12 perennial champion Archbishop Carroll, 3-1, Tuesday to advance to the state quarterfinals for the first time in team history.

Ashman said, “I told our players after our game that we can’t take any team [at States] lightly, we have to come to play every time, because everyone comes after us to play hard. I don’t think we had a letdown after our district final win, I just think we might have taken [Hempfield] a little too lightly. That showed in the first set and then we corrected the course.”