

SK girls coast to Section 4 crown; boys' club falls in heartbreaker

Lady Rams advance to play in State Tourney

By John Bernhardt

The bigger the game, the higher the stakes, the greater the return from Tori Rockefeller. SK's shooting guard was at it again Friday night at SUNY Oneonta, hitting five, three-point shots as part of a 22-point effort to lead the Rams to a 56-37 Section IV, Class D, girls' basketball championship.

SK, undefeated and the top ranked girls' Class D team in New York State, withstood a stiff challenge from Tri-Valley league champion Milford. But, the Rams have too much speed and too many weapons to be denied the title as they rolled to the victory.

Rockefeller had her long-range game going from the start, hitting two shots from behind the arc in the early going as SK built a 14-8 first period lead.

Changing tactics

Milford switched up its defensive tactics employing a box-and-one to slow down Rockefeller in the second period. The tactic served that purpose as the Wildcats temporarily shut down SK's high-flying guard. That's when several other Rams got in the act. Sam Acuna netted six points, Brianna Laing five and Lexi Dubois a pair of field goals as SK extended their advantage to 29-17 by the half.

The Wildcats were scrappy. Back-to-back field goals with less than three minutes to play in the third period drew Milford within seven points at 37-30, but SK went on a five-point run and was never headed.

Eventually, Rockefeller shook free and found enough room to crank up her offensive game once more. The junior guard hit three additional three-point shots in the second half in her game-high, 22-point night.

Acuna added 13 points and Laing 12 more for the Rams. Lexi Dubois chipped in with nine for the Rams. SK had a hot hand from the foul line sinking nine of 11 shots from the free throw line.

Addy Lawson paced Milford with 13 points. Raleigh Griffiths had 11 more.

SK (23-0) advances to the state tournament regional round squaring off with Section IX champion Eldred Friday night at Saint Mary College in Newburgh. Tip-off is scheduled for 8 p.m.

South Kortright boys

Time stood still Saturday night at SUNY Oneonta. With precious seconds melting off the clock, the game on the line, and just 12 seconds left to play, South Kortright's Griff Metzko did what he does so well; he took the ball to the basket.

The Rams trailed Laurens, 46-44, with the Section IV Class D boys' basketball title hanging in the balance. Metzko received a pass on the left side of the floor, took the ball hard to the hoop, and absorbing contact from a Lauren's defender, launched an off-balanced shot toward the hoop. The referee's whistle blew as the SK junior's shot passed through the net,

Metzko and Leopard defender Anthony Monaco crashing to the floor. It was as if time literally stopped as several thousand people collectively held their breath as the game official made his call.

Charging foul. Metzko's potential game-tying hoop was waved away and euphoria turned to agony for the SK faithful. The Rams were then forced to foul but gained a last gasp chance to tie the score when, after sinking his first charity shot, Mason Weir's second foul shot rolled off the rim with 7.7 seconds to go.

It was Metzko, again, who would try to even the score, but his shot from behind the three-point arc bounced off the rim, as Laurens brought home their first Section IV boys' basketball crown since 1973.

3-pointers and free throws

Three-point goals and free throws would play a huge role in the outcome of the game. In some respects, the championship game was two basketball events rolled into one with a high scoring offensive shoot-out in the opening half giving way to grind-it-out defensive warfare after intermission.

Laurens' Jared Conklin's long-range arsenal kept the Leopards in the game in the early going. Conklin buried a pair of three-point goals in both the first and second periods to keep Laurens within range of the Rams.

SK, too, depended heavily on shots from behind the arc in building a 31-26 halftime lead. The two teams played to a 12-12 first-period tie, Conklin's two treys added to two Mason Weir three-point bombs accounting for all 12 Laurens points. Brandon Porter and Ty Lampert each registered a three point shot in SK's 12-point total.

Porter added two more long-range goals and Ryan Slighter a third as SK outscored Laurens, 19-14, in a fast paced second quarter. Metzko added three traditional field goals for the Rams in the period.

The offensive outputs slowed to a trickle in the second half. Metzko managed SK's only field goal in the third quarter, but five points from the foul line allowed the Rams to add a point to their advantage. SK led Laurens, 38-32, heading into the homestretch.

A fine line

Foul shooting proved decisive as Laurens hit eight of 10 shots from the line in the final period. Mitchel Berra was clutch netting seven of his eight shots in the final frame. SK missed all three of their charity tries in the fourth quarter and hit only five of 13 foul shots in the second half.

Even so, the score was knotted at 44-44 with just 30 seconds to play before Jarrett Benjamin finished a drive to put Laurens ahead to stay.

Berra and Conklin took game high scoring honors with 16 points apiece. Conklin hit five, three-point goals in the contest.

Metzko scored 13 to pace SK followed by Porter who had 12 and Lampert with 10.

SK, the Delaware League champions, finished the season at 20-3.



DRIVING IN — Lexi DuBois of SK goes hard to the hoop as she gets past Milford's Mariah Waters in Friday's sectional championship game. The unbeaten Lady Rams roared to a 56-37 victory. — Photo by Dick Sanford



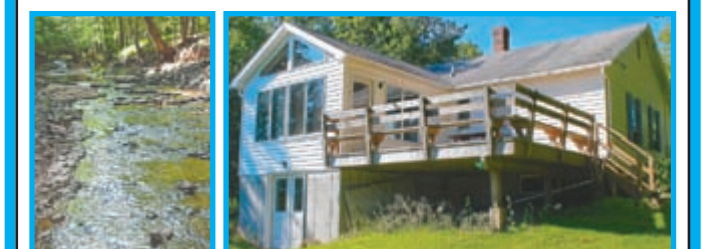
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