

Wynot Wins Again

BY JEREMY HOECK
jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net

LINCOLN, Neb. — An opponent hitting 70 percent of their shots in the first half? No big deal. A double-digit deficit in the final quarter? Ho hum.

Composure, keyed no doubt by experience, didn't seem to allow the Wynot Lady Blue Devils to panic from being down by as many as 15 points to a Lewis & Clark Conference rival.

The result was a dramatic rally and a third consecutive Class D2 state title, 60-52, over Osmond in Saturday morning's championship game at the Nebraska State Girls Basketball Tournament at the Devaney Center.

"We just kept fighting. We knew we wanted it and knew we could come back," said Wynot junior Maggie Schulte, who had 13 points, 10 rebounds, four assists and four steals.

"We've done it before, and just never gave up."

After trailing for the first three and a half quarters, the Lady Blue Devils (25-4) suddenly flipped a switch in the closing minutes and became the aggressors.

Osmond's lead was 48-38 early in the fourth quarter, but Wynot reeled off 11 consecutive points to pull in front 49-48 — keyed by an Erica Burbach three-pointer and ensuing free throw after a foul.

The Tigers hit a pair of foul shots to regain the lead, but Wynot senior Ashley Heine drained a three at the 3:57 mark, and the Lady Blue Devils stayed ahead the rest of the way.

"We just regrouped," said Heine, scorer of 12 points and three 3's, said. "We weren't going to let this opportunity go to waste."

Playing in their fourth straight state title game, the Lady Blue Devils were dealt an early blow by up-start Osmond (19-3), which was making its first-ever championship game appearance — it was also the first time since 2000 the Tigers qualified for state.

Osmond made five of its first six shots and built a 12-4 lead five minutes into the first quarter. The Tigers, who led 25-15 at halftime, stayed in control and took an 8-point cushion into the fourth quarter.

Wynot's depth played a big role in the ensuing surge, according to head coach Steve Wieseler, who had 11 players see time.

"We had a little fresher legs going down the stretch, and it was that way the whole weekend," he said. "Everyone stepped up in the pressure times."

Though it rolled to an easy first-round win Thursday, Wynot had



The Wynot Lady Blue Devils rallied to beat Osmond 60-52, winning the program's third consecutive Nebraska Class D2 girls' basketball title.

ABOVE: The Wynot defense, keyed by Zoey Heimes (right), swarms Allison Schmit of Osmond during their Class D2 championship game Saturday morning at the Nebraska State Girls Basketball Tournament at the Devaney Center in Lincoln, Neb.

LEFT: Ashley Heine, leaping, and her Wynot Lady Blue Devils teammates celebrate their 60-52 win Saturday morning over Osmond in the Class D2 championship game at the Nebraska State Girls Basketball Tournament at the Devaney Center in Lincoln, Neb.

JEREMY HOECK/P&D



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Allison Arens of Crofton drives to the hoop against Olivia Thomas of Hastings St. Cecilia for a layup in Saturday morning's Class C2 championship game at the Nebraska State Girls Basketball Tournament at the Devaney Center.

Crofton Repeats In C2

BY JEREMY HOECK
jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net

LINCOLN, Neb. — In a small room away from the chaos of the Devaney Center basketball court, Aaron Losing is huddled with his players for a kind of impromptu meeting.

Between laughs and plenty of smiles, the Crofton girls' basketball coach finally has the time to say what he's been thinking since the Lady Warriors walked off the court as champions — again.

"It's been a long journey, with ups and downs. Not everything goes perfect, but you handled it," Losing told his team. "In order to be here, you have to go through those ups and downs."

There weren't many downs this season for Crofton, which capped off an undefeated 27-0 season with a 43-31 victory over Hastings St. Cecilia in Saturday morning's Class C2 championship at the Nebraska State Girls Basketball Tournament.

Winners of 34 straight games, the Lady Warriors won their second consecutive state title and fifth in school history — all within the last nine years.

Despite being favored to be the one celebrating Saturday in Lincoln, top-seeded Crofton still let loose plenty of emotion after the win.

"I lost it on the court. I thought, 'Here it is, this is everything,'" said senior Bridget Arens, who had 20 points and 14 rebounds in her final prep game.

"When you accomplish something like that, it's awesome. You can't hold back the tears."

The Lady Warriors, however, found themselves locked in a tight game with No. 2 Hastings St. Cecilia through one half of action. Both teams shot under 30 percent in the opening two quarters and the game was tied 15-15 at the break.

It was unfamiliar territory for Crofton, which hadn't been in a close game at halftime in a full month.

"In the locker room at half, there was a different feeling. It was a bit of, 'OK, we're in a ballgame now,'" Losing said during a post-game interview. "And I think the girls responded to that and put together a great second half."

A 12-0 run by the Lady Warriors in the third quarter turned a 2-point Hastings St. Cecilia lead into a 27-17 Crofton edge. From there, the favorites took control and "made all the hustle plays," Losing said.

"You always prepare for the worst, I guess, but it was pretty intense, but we know that we'd stay together," said sophomore Allison Arens, who had 11 points and three rebounds.

And staying together is what makes Crofton just as dangerous in future seasons.

The Lady Warriors will graduate two starters (Bridget Arens and Tiffany Tramp), as well as reserve Olivia Monaghan. Back to the starting lineup will be sophomores Allison Arens, Quinn Wragge and Maria Wortmann.

For as young as Crofton might have been this year, it was even younger a year ago when the Lady Warriors won the C2 title as a No. 6 seed.

"Last year we were young and inexperienced, and didn't know what to expect," Tramp said. "There was more pressure this team, but we handled it well."

All season, Crofton handled the pressure of being the defending champion and the school with a long winning streak.

"We had a great team this year, the girls deserve

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Knights End Yankton's Season

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
james.cimburek@yankton.net

SIoux FALLS — With six minutes to play in their Region 1AA matchup with Sioux Falls O'Gorman, the Yankton Gazelles sat in one point better shape than in their first meeting this season.

Unfortunately, this one ended the same way, with the Knights surging to a home victory.

O'Gorman scored the final 10 points of the game after coming back from a 12-point third quarter deficit, beating the Gazelles 40-31 on Saturday at O'Gorman High School. The victory sent the Knights to the South Dakota State Class AA Girls' Basketball Tournament, March 7-9 in Rapid City, while the Gazelles ended their season with a 5-16 record.

Yankton scored an early 6-0 run, then scored another six straight points to take a 12-4 lead early in the second quarter. After the Knights got back within five on a Rachel Townsend three-pointer, Andi Sprakel scored the Gazelles' final eight points of the half to give Yankton a 22-12 halftime lead.

"Becky Frick played a terrific game, and Andi Sprakel responded well to not starting," said Yankton head coach Doug Pesicka. "We started Whitlee Larson for defensive purposes, and that paid off.



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Yankton's Andi Sprakel shoots over the top of O'Gorman's Paige Leafstedt during the first half of their Region 1AA girls' basketball game on Saturday in Sioux Falls. O'Gorman rallied from a 12-point second half deficit to beat the Gazelles 40-31, ending Yankton's season.

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Dakota Valley Downs Vermillion To Claim District 8A Title

NORTH SIOUX CITY — The brothers duo of Blake and Brody Van Ginkel each scored 19 points to lead Dakota Valley past Vermillion 60-47 in the District 8A title game Saturday night in North Sioux City.

Dakota Valley (17-5) advances to face Tea Area in Tuesday night's Region 4A matchup in Harrisburg. The winner advances to the State Class A Tournament, March 14-16, in Rapid City.

Jason Lupkes grabbed 10 rebounds for DV, while Aaron Likness had six rebounds, Andrew Reiff had three assists and Blake

Van Ginkel added three steals.

In the season-ending loss for the Tanagers (13-9), Austin Krier scored 17 points, Jayce Huska had 11 points, J.T. Sorensen grabbed nine rebounds and Tanner Anderson dished out three assists.

VERMILLION (13-9)12 28 37 47
DAKOTA VALLEY (17-5)6 30 43 60

District 11B Boys

Ethan 52, Hanson 40

MITCHELL — The Ethan Rustlers used four players in double figures, including a double-double by Anthony Huber, to claim a 52-40 victory over Hanson in the championship of the District 11B Boys' Basketball Tournament on Saturday at the Corn Palace in Mitchell.

Blake Bartscher scored 13 points and Tyler Myers had 11 points for Ethan, which will face South Central in the

Region 6B final on Tuesday at the Corn Palace. Camden Myers and Huber each had 10 points, with Huber also recording 10 rebounds. Bartscher added four assists in the victory.

For Hanson, Jacob Paradeis scored 12 points and Matt Huber had 10 points, seven rebounds and three blocked shots.

ETHAN (13-7)4 22 35 52
HANSON (15-7)7 21 30 40

District 4B Boys

Colman-Egan 64, Howard 52

BROOKINGS — Matt Nelson posted 22 points and 11 rebounds to lead Colman-Egan to a 64-52 victory over Howard in the championship of the District 4B Boys' Basketball Tournament on Saturday at the Swiftel Center.

Colman-Egan used a 24-8 edge in the third quarter to advance to the Region 2B final on Tuesday against Arlington. Start time is 6:30 p.m. at the Swiftel Center.

Trenton Hemmer scored 15 points and Keaton West-over had 11 points for Colman-Egan. Riley Clark added nine points and 11 rebounds in the win.

For Howard, Cole Potter scored 17 points to lead the way. Andrew Schwader and Landon Lalibie each had 11

points, with Schwader also grabbing 11 rebounds.

COLMAN-EGAN11 25 49 64
HOWARD14 31 39 52

District 3B Boys

Arlington 63, Castlewood 51

CASTLEWOOD — Tage Hargens scored a game-high 21 points, going 10-10 from the line, to lead Arlington to a 63-51 victory over Castlewood in the championship game of the District 3B Boys' Basketball Tournament on Saturday.

Cole Van Bockern scored 11 points and Zach Warnke had 10 points for Arlington, which will face Colman-Egan in the Region 2B final on Tuesday in Brookings. Hargens and Warnke each had seven rebounds, and Andrew King had five assists in the victory.

Grant Fodness led Castlewood with 18 points. Adam Ching added 16 points and eight rebounds.

ARLINGTON13 31 46 63
CASTLEWOOD8 23 39 51

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Western Illinois Holds Off South Dakota

MACOMB, Ill. (AP) — Ceola Clark scored 27 points as Western Illinois held on for a 61-59 victory against South Dakota on Saturday night to set up a rematch in the Summit League tournament.

Jack Houpt added 15 points for the Leathernecks (21-7, 13-3), who are the No. 2 seed in the tournament and face the No. 7 seed Coyotes on March 9 in Sioux Falls.

Trevor Gruis and Juevol Myles had 19 points each for South Dakota (10-19, 5-11), which narrowly overcame a seven-point deficit in the final 49 seconds.

Myles' 3-pointer made the score 60-59 with 18 seconds remaining, and after Adam Link

missed the front end of a one-and-one, the Coyotes had the ball with a chance to go ahead. But Myles' jumper with six seconds remaining missed, and South Dakota could not get a shot off after Remy Roberts-Burnett hit 1 of 2 free throws with two seconds to play.

W. ILLINOIS 61, S. DAKOTA 59

S. DAKOTA (10-19)

Flack 1-6 0-0 2, Gruis 6-7 7-8 19, Boots 1-3 0-0 3, Myles 8-17 0-0 19, Kasperbauer 2-5 0-0 6, Tecker 1-2 0-0 2, Bos 2-7 4-4 8, Rowson 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 21-48 11-12 59.

W. ILLINOIS (21-7)

Houpt 5-11 2-3 15, Link 2-5 3-5 7, Ochereobia 2-3 0-0 4, Foster 0-6 1-2 1, Clark III 10-15 1-1 27, Roberts-Burnett 2-6 1-3 5, McAvoy III 1-5 0-0 2. Totals 22-51 8-14 61.

Halftime—Tied 23-23, 3-Point Goals—S. Dakota 6-14 (Myles 3-6, Kasperbauer 2-4, Boots 1-1, Bos 0-3), W. Illinois 9-21 (Clark III 6-11, Houpt 3-8, Foster 0-2). Fouled Out—Ochereobia, Rebounds—S. Dakota 34 (Gruis 9), W. Illinois 27 (Ochereobia 6). Assists—S. Dakota 6 (Myles 3), W. Illinois 12 (Clark III 4). Total Fouls—S. Dakota 15, W. Illinois 13. A.—5,089.