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Girls basketball: Complete domination and a state title

By Pat Ruff pruff@postbulletin.com Mar 18, 2018 Updated 8 hrs ago



Lyle/Pacelli teammates celebrate their 57-33 victory over Sleepy Eye on Saturday at Target Center in the Class A state championship game.

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MINNEAPOLIS — Sleepy Eye was attempting to become the first unseeded team in Minnesota girls basketball state tournament history to go 3-2-1.

It beat Class A No. 3 seed Ada-Borup in the quarterfinals, downed No. 2 Mountain Iron-Buhl in the semifinals, then had its eyes on No. 1 Lyle/Pacelli as the teams met in Saturday's Class A championship at Target Center.

Sleepy Eye (28-5) made a disappointing discovery. It's that there's a whole lot of difference between Lyle/Pacelli (32-1) and everybody else.



So different are the Athletics that they didn't just win Saturday's championship, they steamrolled to it, winning 57-33.

It landed an exclamation mark on the No. 1 ranking the Athletics have held all season and brought L/P its first girls basketball state title.

"This means so much to our community and to us," said L/P sixth-year coach Justin Morris, who announced early in the season that this would be his

last as L/P's coach, as he's moved to Omaha, Neb.

"There were nerves for us early in the game," Morris said. "But then we started making the extra pass. And we got to more 50-50 balls than we have in a long time. Plus, our defense was just phenomenal."

Add it up, and also factor in that L/P has the most imposing player in Class A — 6-foot-5 Kristi Fett — and the Athletics were simply way, way too much for Sleepy Eye.

Fett was at her imposing best in the title game (30 points, 16 rebounds, five blocked shots) and the Athletics were filled with surges of brilliance all game. That all led L/P to a decisive 31-22 halftime lead, and then a surge so strong coming out of intermission that this championship was all but decided with 14 minutes left to play.

Fett started that second-half blitz with an old-fashioned three-point play, Abby Bollingberg hit a free throw, Fett scored again, Olivia Christianson scored and Bollingberg hit another free throw.

While all of that L/P offensive fireworks was going on, there was nothing but silence offensively from Sleepy Eye, which had difficulty all afternoon operating against an Athletics 2-3 zone that is active out front with quick and sturdy guards Brooke Walter and Bollingberg, and scary inside with Fett in the middle of it.

In a state tournament where Lyle/Pacelli had one decisive run in each of its three games, this avalanche coming out of halftime — L/P outscoring Sleepy Eye 10-0 — was their defining one in the championship. Any serious fight that Sleepy Eye had left was now gone.

L/P had seen to it.

“Even when Fett missed a shot (an excellent 11-for-17 from the field and 8-for-11 from the free-throw line), she was right there to grab her miss,” Sleepy Eye coach Ryan Hulke said. “And their defense did a great job. Offensively, we tried everything. But their defense up front really hurt us. They took us out of our game plan.”

It would have seemed reasonable for Fett to have entered this title game with confidence diminished. She’d struggled some in the semifinals (at least by her standards) to finish shots. And now, the stakes were at their highest.

No matter. The senior was immediately back to her unstoppable self. Fett overwhelmed in the first half with 6-for-8 shooting and eight rebounds as Sleepy Eye was helpless against her.

It was more of the same after intermission, with her 5-for-9 shooting and eight more rebounds. She also drained 8 of 11 free throws for the game

“I knew I had to be there for my team (Saturday),” Fett said. “I had some bumps and bruises, but those will come and go. I can deal with those. But the memories we created here, those will last a lifetime.”

Said Morris: “If there is a better player than Kristi Fett in Class A, I don’t know who it is.”

As good as Fett is, L/P showed for the last time that it was anything but a one-girl show. The most obvious example of that was L/P’s team defense. It held Sleepy Eye to a miserable 24 percent shooting. The Athletics also dominated the boards, ending with a 35-23 rebounding advantage.

While it was doing all of that, L/P also managed to shoot a sizzling 53 percent from the field.

Junior guard Bollingberg joined Fett in double figures with 10 points and sophomore Christianson had eight. Those two combined to shoot 6-for-13 from the field.

There wasn't much missing on championship Saturday for Lyle/Pacelli, and it easily earned the Athletics their first girls basketball state championship.

Lyle/Pacelli 57, Sleepy Eye 33

LYLE/PACELLI (57)

Kendal Truckenmiller 3 P, 5 R, 1 3-PT; Olivia Christianson 8 P, 7 R; Brooke Walter 6 P, 4 R; Abby Bollingberg 10 P; Kristi Fett 30 P, 16 R.

SLEEPY EYE (33)

Brianna Polesky 7 P, 5 R, 1 3-PT; Madi Heiderscheit 8 P, 1 3-PT; Sarah Ibarra 7 P, 1 3-PT; Mya Ibberson 5 P, 1 3-PT; McKenzie Cselvoski 6 P, 7 R.

Halftime: LP 31, SE 22.

Free throws: LP 16-24, SE 7-11.

Three-point goals: LP 1, SE 4.

Pat Ruff

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Pat covers tennis, girls basketball, football, soccer, track and field, and baseball. He also writes about Gophers football and basketball, and the Timberwolves. He's been reporting for the Post Bulletin since 1994.