

Commentary

Challenge has best hoops action on tap

The ECIC-MMA Challenge may only be a few years old, but it has already become one of the premier highlights of the Western New York high school basketball season.

By pairing up public schools against Catholic schools, Western New York's basketball community gains a showcase of contests that wouldn't normally be seen. The ECIC and Monsignor Martin Association don't often mingle, except in the few non-league games scheduled into the season. So having the two leagues match up for a series of games makes for one great weekend of basketball.

The Challenge, sponsored by Ad-Pro Team Sports, begins Thursday when Niagara Catholic takes on Depew and Canisius meets Lancaster. Friday pits Cardinal O'Hara against Williamsville North, St. Francis against Lackawanna and St. Joe's against Sweet Home. Saturday's trio of games, including St. Mary's of Lancaster versus Lake Shore, Nichols versus John F. Kennedy and Timon/St. Jude versus Hamburg, conclude the competition. All games will be held at St. Mary's of Lancaster High School.

While many of the games promise to be entertaining, close and well-contested, the St. Joe's-Sweet Home match-up should be among the best games anyone sees

this year. St. Joe's is the defending MMA and was New York State Catholic High School champion. Sweet Home won the Section VI Class A title and advanced to the state finals last year.

Notably, this is the first year in the Challenge that O'Hara does not play JFK. The two teams had been building up a rivalry over the past few years, based on the friendship of coaches Tim Dyrek and Tony Krupski. Both graduated from O'Hara High School and coached together. Dyrek resigned from O'Hara this past spring and is now an assistant with St. Joe's. The two were supposed to play again this year, but a scheduling conflict shuffled the lineup.

St. Mary's had also been slated to play Lancaster in a crosstown rivalry game, but that game was also scrapped due to scheduling difficulties.

The brainchild of St. Mary's of Lancaster Athletics Director Kevin Kelleher, the Challenge bridges the gap between the two leagues, which has become cavernous in other sports, mainly football. The idea was so popular after its first year, the league

organizers put together a second Challenge for the baseball teams in the spring.

There is talk that a third Challenge would take place in football. But that is going to take some doing, considering the standoffish attitude teams have against each other. Many coaches in Section VI refuse to schedule non-league games against MMA teams out of fear of having their best players recruited away by the Catholic schools. After years of trying to schedule games, and by doing so avoiding long bus trips to Ohio and Pennsylvania, some Catholic school coaches have given up trying to ingratiate themselves to their Section VI counterparts.

"It was successful right out of the chute," Kelleher said. "People want to see this kind of thing with the teams from the public and Catholic schools. There's always a lot of interest in it."

With eight games in three days, the Challenge makes for a busy weekend, but if basketball is your thing, it's the place to be.

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MATT KRUEGER

Sports Reporter

Defense leads East boys hoops to come back win over North; Spartans win Dick Harvey tourney

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

Dennis Belote has coached many crazy basketball games in his years at Williamsville East but nothing like his team's non-league win at Williamsville North on Dec. 4.

East scored 26 points in the first three quarters but tallied 29 in the fourth, including a 22-3 run, as the Flames came back to win 55-48.

North led 17-3 at one point in the second quarter thanks to strong half-court defense that forced many outside East shots and were ahead 25-20 at halftime and 35-26 by the end of the third quarter.

"We just picked up our defense a notch," said Belote of his team's play in the fourth. "Plus everybody on our team knew we had to live without (Brian) Wallden (who Belote said North was triple-teaming) and when we understood that, it freed him up and he got four points in that quarter."

Wallden finished with six points, grabbed 10 rebounds and blocked nine shots.

Another reason East won came from the play of Andy Heim, who Belote said took over offensively and defensively in the fourth. Heim finished with a game-high 19 points, seven coming in the fourth. He also scored nine in the second quarter.

"We put the ball in his hands and it freed up Nick Kanutsu on the wing," Belote said.

"I think he was the best player on the floor offensively and defensively," said North coach Chuck Swierski of Heim. "He really stepped up when East needed it. He was just dynamite."

Belote also lauded the defensive work from Kanutsu and Adam Kausch on North guard John Piaggione (11 points). Kausch finished with six points, including a crucial three to tie the score in the fourth.

East's Mike Ferguson also had a three-point play that tied the score in the second half.

Rick Silvestri scored 12 points, hit 3-of-4 free throws and grabbed nine rebounds.

Alex Barth (12 points) and Young (10 points) also scored in double figures for North.

East's other game was a 86-41 blowout over West Seneca East last Friday. East led 16-10 after the first quarter, 39-22 at halftime and 61-28 after the third.

Every East player scored. Wallden had 15 points and 24 rebounds in 16 minutes. Silvestri (11 points, seven rebounds, four assists), Heim (10 points), Justin Andreozzi (nine points), Kausch (eight points) and Chris Schiumo (eight points) were also major contributors.

Jeff Howard scored 25 for West Seneca East.

East (3-1, 1-0) played at Hamburg Tuesday but results were unavailable before The Bee went to press. They host Iroquois at 7:30 p.m. on Friday.

Williamsville North

After losing 69-41 at Jamestown last Wednesday, the Spartans' play improved as evident by their first place finish at the Dick Harvey Tip-off Tournament at Kenmore West last weekend.

North defeated Amherst, 62-50, in the first round on Friday and beat Kenmore West, 59-45, in the finals on Saturday.

Tournament MVP Ryan Young had a career-high 23 points, 12 rebounds and four blocks against Amherst and 15 points, nine rebounds and three blocks against Kenmore West.

Young was especially important against Amherst as he scored eight of the team's 10 third quarter points. Joe Greenwald scored North's other third quarter basket.

"Whenever we needed something offensively or defensively, he delivered," said Swierski.

"We just couldn't handle him inside," said Amherst coach Mike Chatelle of Young.

North overcame 24 turnovers, 15 coming in the first half and an up tempo Amherst offense, to lead 30-21 at halftime. The Spartans were ahead 40-35 after the third quarter.

Steve Barth (11 points) and Alex Barth (10 points) also scored for North.

Cordell Freeman led Amherst with 17 points. Troy Martin added 11 points. Andre Hakeem added eight. Viron Hale four points, 10 rebounds and two blocks.

Amherst shot 20-for-60 from the field. "We did a decent job of taking them off the dribble," said Chatelle. "We just couldn't finish."

In the finals, three Kenmore West three's put the Bulldogs ahead 18-13 after the first quarter but North switched from a zone to man to man defense that put the Spartans ahead 27-26 by halftime. North was up 40-37 after the third quarter.

The Spartans played a great fourth, including nine points and five rebounds off the bench from Alex Ullrich. Alex Calderon added strong second half defense and 11 overall points. Ullrich and Alex Barth (10 points) earned all-tournament team honors.

North also committed only 15 turnovers, a goal for the Spartans, said Swierski.

"It's hard to score if we turn the ball over all the time," said Swierski.

In the consolation, Amherst defeated Bishop Timon-St. Jude, 46-37. Amherst led 11-6 after the first quarter, trailed 19-18 at halftime, got the lead back at the end of the third, 46-37, then outscored Timon 16-8 in the fourth.

"We got some easy baskets in transition," said Chatelle. "We may have worn them down a little with our up tempo play. They only dressed nine so their bench was shorter than ours."

Freeman paced Amherst with 14 points, including eight in the fourth. Martin had 13 points. Hale scored two points to go along with 10 rebounds. Kurt Ebsary scored five points and made four steals off the bench.

Amherst shot 28 percent (16-for-58) in the game.

North was blown out against Jamestown thanks to Dominique Kendrick and Marcus McAfee, who outscored the Spartans, 42-41 by themselves.

"We went to a zone and they shot over us, and when we went to a man, they drove on us," said Swierski. "We probably changed defenses four times and every time we did it, it seemed like they knew what we were going to do."

Jamestown led 16-12 after the first quarter, 34-19 at halftime and 53-32 by the third quarter.

Alex Barth (11 points), Steve Barth (nine points), and Young (seven points) led North.

North played Frontier Tuesday but results were unavailable before The Bee went to press.

They play at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at Clarence and face O'Hara at 6 p.m. Friday at St. Mary's of Lancaster as part of the ECIC-MMA Challenge.

"I'm excited about how we're playing and am looking forward to playing those games," said Swierski.

Amherst opened its season with a 74-59 road loss at Canisius. Amherst trailed the entire game. They were down 21-12 after the first quarter and 43-29 by halftime. The Crusaders extended the lead to 64-38 after the third.

"They came out and pressured us a little bit and we turned the ball over early," said Chatelle. "They also made high-percentage shots and were doing a good job of moving to the ball and getting the shots they wanted. And we weren't very patient when we fell behind."

Freeman led Amherst with 24 points. Mike Yanity came off the bench to score 10 points. Viron Hale added nine.

Justin Young scored 28 points to lead Canisius.

Amherst played at Williamsville South Tuesday but results were unavailable before The Bee went to press.

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Sweet Home enters tough week

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

This will be a defining week for Sweet Home boys basketball.

The Panthers (3-1, 2-0) faced undefeated Jamestown Tuesday but results were unavailable before The Bee went to press. The Panthers play Catholic State champion St. Joe's at 9 p.m. Friday in the ECIC-MMA Challenge.

"It will be a real good challenge," said Sweet Home coach Paul Schintzius. "I hope we answer the bell."

Sweet Home opened league play last week with two convincing home wins, 76-34 over West Seneca West on Dec. 5 and 66-50 versus Clarence last Thursday.

Sweet Home jumped on West Seneca West early, taking a 25-10 first quarter lead, 20 points coming from Ali Ramadan (12) and Terrell Rankin (eight). Ramadan led

Sweet Home in the game with 14 points and eight rebounds. Rankin had 12.

The Panthers outscored West 25-10 in the second quarter.

"The nice thing about this game is that we got everyone significant playing time and 12 of 14 scored," said Schintzius.

Eric Schnirel added 11 points.

Sweet Home worked through Clarence's 2-2-1 press back to a 2-3 zone to lead 28-17 at halftime. They were ahead 43-32 after the third.

"I don't know if we necessary played well but I credit Clarence for that," said Schintzius. "Their defense was effective at times."

Rankin led with 25 points. Glenroy Carr ended a two-game offensive funk with 15 points and nine rebounds. Schnirel added 11, including eight fourth quarter free throws.

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