

Sweet Home upsets North, faces Falls on Thursday

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

The Sweet Home and Williamsville North boys basketball teams have had their share of wars over the years and their Section VI Class AA quarterfinal game last Friday at North added another chapter.

Jamel Werts' inside layup off a pass from teammate Donald Watkins with six seconds remaining in regulation moved the sixth-seeded Panthers past the third-seeded Spartans, 48-47, and a spot in the AA semifinals.

"I didn't want to go home," said Werts, who finished with 17 points. "I told my teammates in the timeout this is not going to be my final game."

"It's fitting he made the play because he kept reiterated how we're not going home," said Sweet Home coach Paul Schintzius. "It felt like it hung on the rim for eight seconds and it went in."

Sweet Home (13-9) faces second-seed Niagara Falls (21-1) at 6 p.m. on Thursday at Buffalo State Sports Arena in a rematch of last year's AA final won by Sweet Home.

"We lost nine seniors from last year's team and not a starter was back so people kind of rode us off," said Schintzius. "They've worked extremely hard. We've always made it a saying that this is our time of the year and these kids were not to be denied."

"Everybody was counting us out and nobody believed but the coaches and this roster," added Werts.



Sweet Home's Donald Watkins, right, battles with Clarence's Greg Stevens for a loose ball in the teams' Section VI Class AA prequarterfinal last Wednesday at Sweet Home. The Panthers, seeded sixth, won, 78-62, and went on to defeat third-seed Williamsville North, 48-47, in the quarterfinals last Friday at North.

Photo by Joe Eberle

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North (18-4) led by as many as 10 in the second half but Sweet Home, wearing new black third jerseys, kept chipping away at the deficit, scoring the first four points of the fourth quarter to only trail, 38-37. A Werts three-pointer with 2:02 remaining tied the game at 44-44. Werts scored 15 of his 17 points in the second half.

The Spartans built the lead back to three, 47-44, after one free throw by Steve Barth and two from Josh Barrett but Sweet Home's Ali Ramadan scored on a layup with 46.5 seconds remaining.

North turned over the ball on their next offensive possession and Sweet Home called a timeout

with 22 seconds left to set up Werts' final shot.

"It was the first time all year that we gave up a fourth quarter lead," said North coach Chuck Swierski. "I think nerves got to us. This is the first really close game we played all year. The games we won I think the closest it got was five and when we lost, it wasn't close."

North had one final chance but Barrett, who had knocked down a three at the start of the third quarter, missed on his final attempt.

"They had all of the momentum going into halftime," said Schintzius. "They hit a big three to start the third quarter. We were almost out of gas. Our body language

was horrible. I thought we were in trouble but we have got some kids who have been in wars before. We dug deep. We just wanted to nip one possession at a time. We went to a zone and I think it really affected the game. They struggled with it by not getting as easy shots. Keon Williams (four points) played huge for us and gave us a big lift."

"They packed into a 2-3 zone and clogged up the middle," said Swierski. "We didn't really have a lane and when we needed to knock down a jump shot, we didn't seem to find one."

"We also had a couple of defensive breakdowns and gave up wide open shots," he added. "They made plays at the end and we didn't."

Watkins gave Sweet Home a big lift early, scoring all 11 of his points in the first half. Ramadan, usually one of the team's leading scorers, had eight.

Barrett finished with 17 points, six steals, four rebounds and two assists. He scored nine of his points in the first half as the Spartans took a 27-23 lead at halftime and knocked down a three at the beginning of the third quarter. He went 8 for 9 from the foul line.

"He set the tone for us from the first game he played," said Swierski. "He was a great advantage for us all year."

Alex Barth scored 12 points to go with six rebounds and three steals. Gaines had seven points, seven rebounds and two assists. Alex Ullrich chipped in six points and nine rebounds.

Sweet Home and North each

won home prequarterfinal games on Wednesday. The Panthers downed 11th-seed Clarence, 78-62. North romped over 14th-seed Niagara-Wheatfield, 71-50.

Sweet Home beat Clarence twice last year while in ECIC I and played well versus them this year, using a full court pressure to cause turnovers and open a 22-13 first quarter lead, 42-21, advantage by halftime and, 59-34, cushion after three quarters. Sweet Home was up by as many as 25.

"We jumped them early," said Schintzius. "If we dig ourselves a hole, it's always been a struggle."

Watkins and Marcus Johnson combined for 19 points in the first quarter. Each finished with 20.

Werts added 10. Ramadan scored nine.

Greg Stevens scored 10 of his 16 points in the fourth quarter to lead Clarence.

Eleven North kids scored against Niagara-Wheatfield, led by a career-high 27 from Barrett. He went 7 of 8 from the free throw line.

Alex Barth and Steve Barth scored 12 and 10, respectively.

The Spartans went up, 16-7, after the first quarter, 30-21, at halftime, and 49-34, after three quarters.

North graduates six seniors - Barrett, Ullrich, starting point guard John Piaggione, Matt Antalek, Joe Greenwald and Jack Jagodzinski.

"I couldn't ask for anything more out of my seniors," said Swierski.

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Williamsville East turns ball over against McKinley

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

Turnovers have plagued the Williamsville East boys basketball team all year and it continued against McKinley in the Section VI Class A-1 quarterfinals last Friday at McKinley.

East, seeded sixth, committed a season-high 30 turnovers against third-seed McKinley in a 63-49 loss.

Flames coach Dennis Belote said his team committed at least

15 turnovers in the second quarter. McKinley outscored East, 21-6, in the second quarter, to take a 32-22 lead into halftime. East led, 16-11, after the first quarter.

"We blew it in the second quarter," said Belote. "We had a lot of trouble getting the ball up the court. McKinley was putting a lot of pressure on us."

It didn't help that junior point guard Kevin Castine was fighting the flu and could only play 12 minutes in the entire game.

McKinley led, 45-36, after the third quarter and by as many as 14 in the fourth quarter when East cut it down to six with 1:30 remaining.

That's when a game-changing play occurred. East junior Peter Heim drove the baseline and hit a jumper to cut the deficit to four but was called for a charge. McKinley scored on the ensuing possession and went up by eight.

McKinley made 4 of 6 free throws in the final minute to secure the victory.

Brian Wallden led East (12-10) with 16 points and 15 rebounds. Mark Rutecki added 10 points, including a nice dunk over a McKinley player in the fourth quarter, five rebounds and three

blocks. Roy Brown added four points, two steals, two rebounds and a block.

It was the third straight year McKinley has eliminated East in the playoffs.

To advance to the A-1 quarterfinals, East held off 11th-seed South Park, 72-67, in overtime last Wednesday at East.

The Flames led South Park after the first three quarters (15-12, first quarter; 26-20 halftime; 46-40, third quarter) but South Park's Roman Brown nailed a floater from just inside the three-point line with four tenths of a second to tie the game at 59-59.

There were three lead changes in overtime. East went up three twice courtesy of a basket by

Heim and two free throws by Castine. Wallden and Castine combined for 3 of 4 free throws. Wallden finished OT 5 of 6 from the line and 7 of 10 in the game. Heim scored five.

Wallden finished with 38 points, 20 rebounds and five blocks. Mike Silvestri scored 10. Heim (seven points), Aaron Tichenor and Rutecki (six points each) and Castine (five points, six assists) also contributed.

Wallden finished the season with 502 points, becoming only the fourth player in school history to score over 500 points in a season. Wallden finished fourth all-time in scoring with 1,169 points.

(Please turn to page 19)



Brian Wallden takes a shot for one of his 38 points in Williamsville East's 72-67 overtime win over South Park last Wednesday in the Section VI Class A-1 quarterfinals at East. The Flames' season ended with a 63-49 loss in the quarterfinals on Friday against McKinley.



THE ULTIMATE CHEER — The Williamsville North varsity cheerleading team is traveling to Orlando, Fla. from March 20 to 23 to compete in the COA 2008 Ultimate National Championship at the Gaylord Palms Convention Center. Members of the team, pictured lying down, is coach Amanda Johnson; kneeling, from far left - Krista Pulaski, Kayla Gallagher, Kellie Kubala, Lauren Jackson, Rachel Fenigstein, Kelly Schifferle, Kelsey

Johnson, Brittany Russel, Stephanie Carpenter, Katie Elkin, Kaitlyn Gallagher; standing, first row - Jill Schifferle, Samantha Smith, Jillian Caprow, Alyssa Curran, Sara Honsberger, Amanda Carrow, Allison Soucise, Brittany McDuffie; standing, second row - Jessica Kuzdzal, Ashley Lewis, Gianna Berrafato, Bridg Purcell, Jennifer Beachum and Emily Honsberger.