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Girls hoops

Pioneer downs East in Class A final

by **PATRICK J. NAGY**
Reporter

Williamsville East knew that Pioneer had a ton of weapons on offense. Stopping them was the challenge.

The Lady Flames put forth a great effort against Pioneer but it wasn't enough, losing, 62-38, in the Section VI Class A title game on Saturday at Erie Community College's Burt Flickinger Athletic Center.

East played a box-and-one defense on 6-foot-2 Joelle Connelly, who two days earlier set the Western New York career scoring record for girls basketball, and the Hofstra University bound senior was held to 17 points (four baskets, 8 of 8 free throws).

While Connelly was held down, others for Pioneer stepped up their game, including Erin Asquith, who scored eight of her 11 points in the fourth quarter. Six other Pioneer players scored at least five points.

"They just have too much firepower," said East coach Chris Durr. "They have three post players who score and four or five guards that can handle the ball, shoot the three, hustle and work hard."

"It's an awesome group of kids," added Pioneer coach Max Payne. "The mix is really nice. We've got eight seniors but a lot of young kids that contribute. They all get along. They work towards a common goal. It's funny how good things can happen when they're all on the same page."

Pioneer led right from the start. Connelly won the opening tip and after two quick passes, Alyxis Mitrowski drained a three from the top of the key.

Durr said his team missed at least six layups in the first half because Pioneer's defense forced them into taking rushed shots.

Pioneer went up, 15-6, after the first quarter and, 23-13, at halftime.



Williamsville East's Anna Stolzenburg, right, and Pioneer's Latisha Hartman battle for a loose ball during the Lady Flames' 62-38 loss to Pioneer in the Section VI Class A final on Saturday at Erie Community College's Burt Flickinger Athletic Center.

Photo by Joe Eberle
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"I told them at halftime, 'you're in this game,'" said Durr. "If we want to win, we have to limit as many mistakes as possible, make our layups, and take advantage of our opportunities."

East kept it an 11-point game early in the third quarter but Pioneer went on a 6-0 run to go ahead, 33-16. The Lady Flames got the score back down to 36-23 but Pioneer's Suzie Farner scored a basket, was fouled on the play and hit the free throw to extend the advantage to 39-23. Pioneer led, 43-28, at the end of the third quarter.

Pioneer outscored East, 19-10, in the fourth quarter.

Bridget Steele led East with eight points, all in the third quarter, and three assists. Taylor Klun and Aleece Burgio each

scored six points. Burgio also grabbed five rebounds. Neha Bakhai, Jordan Kowalski and Courtney Hawkins each scored four. Sarah Dopofi banked in a three. Jessica Kowalski scored two points. Anna Stolzenburg added one point.

East shot 13 of 46 from the floor, 6 of 12 from the free throw line and committed 17 turnovers.

Connelly added 15 rebounds and five blocks for Pioneer.

"This is something that Joelle really wanted more so than her record," said Payne. "She really wanted to get to the state tournament. She's a real unselfish player."

"I would rather get as far as we can in the state tournament than score my points,"

said Connelly.

To face Pioneer, East held off Grand Island, 41-38, on Thursday at ECC to win the A-1 title for the second time in four straight appearances. Since Durr has coached East, they've appeared in a section final 10 of the 13 years and won six section titles.

"To win a sectional championship without a designated star, it's a tribute to how hard the kids have worked," said Durr. "I'm proud of them."

East jumped out to a 15-9 first quarter lead and 24-15 halftime advantage.

Durr didn't want his team to get too overconfident because Grand Island played well in the second half of games and the trend continued. The Lady Vikings went on a 9-2 run in the first three minutes of the second half to cut the deficit to, 26-24, and outscored East, 13-8, in the third quarter to trail, 32-28.

"All of their baskets came on the fastbreak and our inability to get back and play good transition defense," said Durr.

In the fourth quarter, Grand Island never took the lead but always stayed close.

"Every time we pushed the score to five or seven, Grand Island made a couple of baskets to cut it to three or two," said Durr.

Durr said his team went 0 of 7 in the final 30 seconds from the free throw line and got key rebounds down the stretch from Klun, Stolzenburg and Burgio.

"That was big," said Durr. "I only wished we could have done a better job at the free throw line."

East finished 14 of 28 from the foul line. Grand Island missed its first two free throws and went 14 of 14 the rest of the game.

Bakhai and Stolzenburg each scored 11. Five of Bakhai's 11 came in the first

(Please turn to page 17)

Sweet Home hockey advances to state final four

by **PATRICK J. NAGY**
Reporter

Five years ago, the Sweet Home Federation hockey team went 0-23-1. Five years later, they could be playing for a Division II New York State Championship.

Ryan Gutt scored from Ryan Marko at 3:01 of overtime to move Sweet Home past Section IX's John S. Burke Catholic, 3-2, in a Division II state quarterfinal game held on Saturday at the Ice Time Sports Complex in Newburgh, N.Y.

It's the first postseason win at the state level for the Sweet Home hockey program. Last year, Sweet Home lost, 2-1, in the Division II state quarterfinals to eventual state champion, Monroe-Woodbury.

The Panthers (15-9-4) will play Section X's Thousand Islands in the state semifinals at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday at Utica Memorial Auditorium. The winner plays either Section II's Queensbury or

Section V's Webster-Schroeder for the state title at 3:15 p.m. on Sunday in Utica.

"I didn't see this coming and neither did they," said Sweet Home coach Dave Gerspach. "Coming into the season, the only goal I had for them was to play our best hockey at the end of the year. We had never talked about being a state or Fed champion this year and we already have the Fed championship and are now two wins away from a state championship."

The heart attack Panthers didn't make it easy on themselves. Sweet Home trailed 1-0 for most of the game until Marko scored a short-handed goal at 6:50 of the third period. Marko somehow spun off three Eagles players and shot the puck under the pads of goalie Mike Beck. It was the first of only two penalties Sweet Home took all season.

Their other penalty resulted in the Eagles' game-tying goal with 1:56 remaining. Tommy Farr shot

the puck off the boards and Tommy Mahoney put the puck into the open side of the net.

Gerspach felt his team was in control in the third prior to the goal. Gutt put Sweet Home ahead, 2-1, when he scored his first of the game at 4:43 on the power play from Marko and Dominic Puntillo. Then Mahoney scored and forced overtime.

In overtime, Marko took the draw and shot the puck at the net. The puck laid between Panther forward Chris Covel's feet and Gutt stuffed it into the top corner of the net.

Sweet Home outshot John S. Burke Catholic, 37-24. Sweet Home didn't score in the second period but dominated the shots on goal, 10-3. Jimmy Cardinale hit two goal posts on the same power play.

Declan Ludington scored on a scramble in front of the Panther net at 5:53 of the first period from Farr and Jason Healey.

"We were playing really well in

the first two periods," said Gerspach. "Other than being down 1-0, I wouldn't have changed anything with the way we were playing."

Sweet Home has been playing great as a team but Marko is a big reason why. Already the school's all-time leading scorer with 163 points, Marko needs five more assists to reach 100, one more point than what 2007 graduate Alex Esposito, the school's second all-time leading scorer, had

for career points.

"He's been doing the little things that we need him to do like winning faceoffs and killing penalties," said Gerspach.

Gerspach said Thousands Islands is a physical team.

"They work really hard and have a good goalie," said Gerspach. "He's 6-foot-5. On his knees, his shoulders are still covering the top of the net."

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Cohen, Stella to wrestle at state meet

Williamsville East's Max Cohen and Sweet Home's Nic Stella will be competing at the New York State Championships this weekend at Rochester's Blue Cross Arena.

Cohen won a section title at 130 pounds and will meet John Cataldo of Section VIII's MacArthur in the first round.

Stella earned a wild card entry at 135 and will face Shane Strumwasser of Section VIII's Massapequa.

Stella beat Strumwasser in the finals of the Eastern States Wrestling Classic in January.