

Press Clippings 3/17/2018

NOTE: There were no U-46 related news stories in the March 17, 2018 newspapers.

SPORTS SECTION

---Daily Herald--- 3/17/18

Royal battle but come up short

BY JOHN RADTKE



Larkin's Jalen Shaw goes up for a first-quarter shot during the Royals' 64-53 loss to Belleville West in a Class 4A semifinal game Friday in Peoria. Larkin will play Evanston for third Saturday. PhotoNews Media/Clark Brooks

PEORIA -- Larkin wasn't intimidated, nor did the Royals ever give up.

Belleville West was just plain better on this night.

The Maroons, ranked No. 2 in Illinois and No. 24 in the nation by USA Today, used a 9-0 run at the start of the game and an 8-0 spurt to begin the second half to catapult them to a 64-53 win over Larkin in Friday's Class 4A state semifinals at Carver Arena.

In between those runs, though, Larkin played toe-to-toe with a 31-2 team that still hasn't lost to an Illinois school this season and will go for its first state championship against defending champ Whitney Young on Saturday.

"I can't say enough about our guys," said Larkin coach Deryn Carter, whose team is in the state final tournament for the first time in program history.

"They fought and fought and fought. They represented the city and the program well."

The Royals (24-9), who will play Evanston at 5:30 p.m. Saturday for third place, came closer to beating Belleville than any team in Illinois except Champaign Central, which lost to the Maroons 62-61 on Dec. 30. Their closest game in the postseason has been 17.

"They're a great team," said Carter. "The 9-0 start to the game and then the start to the second half put us up against the 8-ball."

The 9-0 start came courtesy of three 3-pointers in the game's first 2 minutes, two of them from 6-foot-7 junior EJ Liddell, the Gatorade Player of the Year who has at least 13 major Division I offers and who scored a game-high 24-points to go along with a state tournament record 7 blocked shots.

"They made shots," Carter said of the Maroons, who finished the game 22 of 43, including 6 of 11 from 3-point range. "It wasn't nerves or anything, it was just them making shots."

But Larkin took that punch and battled back to trail just 17-13 after one quarter. The Royals stayed within shouting distance and were down just 26-23 after 2 free throws from senior Anthony Lynch with 4:03 left in the half.

But Belleville went on a 7-0 run from there to open a 10-point lead before junior Pierre Black hit a 3-pointer with 1:34 to go to draw Larkin within 7 at 33-26. The Royals, though, let Belleville's Malachi Smith loose for a basket with 1:16 left and trailed 35-26 at halftime.

Liddell and the Maroons owned the first 3 minutes of the third quarter. Belleville's shot blocking machine swatted away 5 Larkin attempts that turned into Maroon points on the other end and before the under-5 media timeout Belleville had opened up a 41-26 lead. The Maroons stretched that to 43-26 before Larkin would finally score on a Lynch drive through the lane with 3:33 left in the third.

"We turned it over a lot during that 3-minute stretch," said Carter, whose team had 15 turnovers for the game compared to Belleville's 10. "I wish I could put my finger on what it was. But even with that we got (the deficit) down and we competed at the end."

The Royals' biggest deficit was actually 18, 49-31, with 1:35 left in the third quarter. But senior Jalen Shaw, who finished with 11 points and 10 rebounds before fouling out midway through the fourth quarter, scored on a putback at the buzzer to give the Royals some life.

And during the final eight minutes Larkin showed its resolve by not letting the Maroons blow them out. In fact, using a variety of 3-pointers from Black (15 points on five 3s), pullup jumpers from Lynch and another putback from Shaw the Royals cut Belleville's lead to 54-45 with 4:52 to play. But then Belleville went on a 6-2 spurt to make it a 60-47 game with 4:08 to play.

Larkin again took that punch and fought back. Black, who was 5 of 9 from 3-point range, hit back-to-back 3-pointers to draw the Royals within 7 at 60-53 with 1:34 to play but they didn't score again while Belleville closed out the game with a basket and 2 free throws to come away with the win.

"We didn't play our best game but we battled," said Belleville West coach Ed Muniz. "Give Larkin credit. Lately teams have been folding against us but they kept fighting. We were up 18 and they cut it to (7). (Lynch and Black) are really good players and (Black) is unconscious. We did just enough to win."

Keith Randolph, Jr. added 18 points and 12 rebounds for the Maroons, who were held to their second lowest point total of the season.

"We didn't get knocked out," Carter said. "We went 12 rounds with them and I'm very proud of our guys."

"It shows a lot about our team," said Lynch, who led Larkin with 16 points while adding 7 rebounds and 4 assists. "We could have given up but we gave it our all until the end."

"Luckily we have another chance tomorrow. It's going to be one of the hardest games to play but we're here for a reason and we want to go out fighting."

---Daily Herald--- 3/17/18

Despite big early deficit, Larkin doesn't give up

BY JERRY FITZPATRICK

PEORIA -- Belleville West follows a pattern.

Dazzle the opponent with a first-half barrage, get up big and watch the other team fold like a road map.

Except Larkin didn't follow the pattern in Friday's 64-53 Class 4A semifinal loss.

Larkin (24-9) fell behind 9-0 and trailed by 18 with 1:30 left in the first half, but the Royals climbed back into it against the mighty Maroons, a 31-2 team blew out its previous five playoff opponents by a 26-point average.

Senior Jalen Shaw started the second half by using his 6-foot-10 frame to grab one of his 10 rebounds and score a putback basket for the Royals.

Then junior sniper Pierre Black splashed a 3-pointer.

Senior guard Anthony Lynch started finding ways to score without having his shot blocked by Maroons junior phenom EJ Liddell. Lynch would go on to finish with a team-best 16 points on 8-of-16 shooting.

Black sank another 3-pointer. Then another. And then another on his way to a 15-point night on 5-of-9 shooting from beyond the arc.

Suddenly, Larkin was within 60-53 with 1:34 left, and the full-throated Larkin Blue Crew cheering section was chanting "It's not over. It's not over," with the volume only eight fan busses worth of teenagers can.

The Royals, in turn, fed off the energy they were getting from the crowd.

"It was great to see that we have people behind us and it's not only our team and our coaches that's behind us," said senior guard Kindrel Morris, who had 5 points and 5 assists. "It's the whole city behind us."

However, that was as close as the Royals came to completing the comeback. They will face Evanston (26-6) for third place on Saturday at 5:30 p.m.

In the end, Belleville West and Liddell were just better. Liddell is a special player. For instance: the previous record for blocked shots in a Class 4A finals game was 4. He matched that in the first three minutes of the second half alone when he swatted 4

attempts, including one by Shaw, to ignite an 8-0 run. That surge mattered a great deal later considering Larkin's fourth-quarter push.

"Give Larkin credit," Belleville West coach Joe Muniz said. "We got up on them. Lately, teams have been folding when we get up 18. They battled and found a way to get it down to (seven), but we just made the clutch plays to prevail and extend the game."

Though Liddell (24 points) and 6-5 forward Keith Randolph (18 points) were too much to overcome, Larkin coach Deryn Carter appreciated how hard his players tried.

"I can't say enough about our guys," Carter said. "They fought, they fought, they fought. They represented the city well. They represented our program well. Only one team is really going to come out of here super happy tomorrow and we just happen to be not one of them.

"But it doesn't diminish what we've done over the year, for sure."