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SECTION 7AAA BOYS BASKETBALL

WRESTLING

'It's a kind of magic'

After slow start, Schneider ignites the Lumberjacks

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To say the Cloquet boys basketball team had a slow start to its Section 7AAA playoff basketball game against Grand Rapids Tuesday night rank as one of the understatements of the year.

Midway through the first half, the 'Jacks trailed the Thunderhawks by 12 points, and it looked like their season would come to an end. Then something magical happened and the Lumberjacks rescued the game to beat Grand Rapids 59-57.

The magic sparked when sophomore Adam Schneider helped lead his team on a 27-8 run prior to halftime. Trailing 20-8, the Lumberjacks flipped the switch behind 18 first-half points by Schneider and took a 35-28 lead into the locker room at intermission.

In a sequence key to the win, Schneider made a steal, hit a 3-pointer, and made a couple of free throws all within a two-minute span.

"He's just a talented kid," said Cloquet coach Steve Battaglia. "He got hot, and we got him the ball. Most of what he does isn't stuff you can coach. He lives in the gym; that's why he's such a good scorer."

While Schneider was handling the scoring duties in the first half for Cloquet, the Thunderhawks were running their offense around John Sutherland — their big man in the middle — who had 15 points at the break but scored only four points in the second half.



Cloquet forward Nick Flynn (5) passes the ball to fellow senior Alex Leuzzo (12) to get around Grand Rapids big man John Sutherland (23) during Tuesday's playoff game. Cloquet won and will play in the semifinals Friday in the Cloquet Middle School gym. *Photos by Amber Nichols / Pine Knot Sports*

"Sutherland is the best offensive player in our section and we couldn't contain him early despite committing four guys to him when he had the ball," said Battaglia of the 6-foot, 7-inch forward. "We were about a possession or two from scrapping our game plan and going with something gimmicky."

The second half started in ragtag style with neither team able to score early. Eventually the game settled down in the second stanza and slowly the Thunderhawks pecked away at the 'Jacks lead. Adding to Cloquet's problems were foul issues on senior Markus Pokornowski, who ran into trouble late in the first half, then picked up quick back-to-back fouls in the second half and ended up fouling out of the game.

Grand Rapids picked up their defensive pressure in the second half and started to create problems for the 'Jacks.

Cloquet senior guard Riley Leslie (11) makes his move past a Grand Rapids defender during Tuesday's playoff game.



They eventually got Cloquet to start turning the ball over, resulting in some quick baskets and cutting the score to just four points with over a minute remaining. The Lumberjacks had chances at the foul line to salt the game away, but they managed to make only one of two free throws on three consecutive trips to the charity stripe. Those miscues allowed the Thunderhawks to keep it interesting.

"They cranked up the pressure with some trapping and full-court stuff late and we made a couple of poor decisions and let them hang around," Battaglia said. "We only shoot in the upper 50s from the free throw line as a team, so it's been a season-long struggle. We've had some really good nights from the line, but it was fairly typical of how we shoot free throws."

Eventually the Thunderhawks had no choice but to foul and Cloquet hit just enough free throws to close the door. Cloquet led 59-54 after Alec Turnbull made one of two free throws and then a last-second three-point shot by Stacy Washington for Grand Rapids went in,

Harms-Synkiew falls at state

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Tyler Harms-Synkiew was seeded third in the sectional tournament at 138 pounds and earned his way to the state tournament with a second-place finish.

At the state tournament last week in the Twin Cities, the Cloquet junior's hopes of a deep run in the tournament were dashed when Harms-Synkiew suffered a first-round defeat by eventual fifth-place finisher Trevon Johnson of Dawson-Boyd-Lac Qui Parle-Monte-video United. Harms-Synkiew lost his second match, and that ended his season.

According to head coach Al Denman, Harms-Synkiew is one of the most dedicated student athletes you will ever come across. He is a three-sport athlete, seldom misses an opportunity to train, and has a 3.882 grade point average.

His leadership skills and tremendous work ethic earned him a spot as one of the four team captains, a position he has held for two years now.

Making it to the state tournament is a huge undertaking for any wrestler. It takes years of practice, training and competition just to have a shot at making it.

"It takes more of the same and a bit of luck to place in the top six at state," Denman said. "I am very confident that Tyler has what it takes to make it to the podium at state next year, and Tyler is a fine example of all that is right with a student athlete at Cloquet High School."



ending the game at 59-57.

The game was tight throughout and the Lumberjacks showed resilience and mental fortitude by playing tough and fighting through till the final buzzer.

"We've got tough multisport kids and they seem to play well in bigger games," explained Battaglia. "Our seniors did a great job leading in terms of our defensive effort and our collective focus."

All the Lumberjacks who were on the floor near the end of the game provided highlight reel plays on offense or defense. Both Alex Leuzzo and Turnbull provided key moments with steals and rebounds, Nick Flynn managed to get to the free throw line as did Riley Leslie. All of those moments were in the last two minutes, or final minute, of the game. And, of course, Schneider was the go-to guy most of the night for Cloquet.

Schneider led the 'Jacks with 24 points and both Leuzzo and Flynn finished with 11 points, Leslie added eight points, Turnbull chipped in with three points and Pokornowski added a pair of points for Cloquet.

For Grand Rapids it was Sutherland with 19 points, and Stacy Washington

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