

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Big first half lifts Holdingford over Osakis

By Jared Rubado
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The Osakis girls basketball team saw its season come to an end at the hands of Holdingford on Feb. 27 in the Section 6AA playoff opener.

The 12th-seeded Silverstreaks (11-16) drew a tough first-round match-up with the fifth-seeded Huskers (22-5). A 42-19 first half was enough of a lead to cruise to a 67-49 first-round victory for Holdingford.

“A tough season-ending loss for the team tonight,” head coach Pat Kalpin said. “Holdingford has a solid basketball team that plays aggressive on both ends of the court. Our girls played really hard all night and fought hard. We didn’t have a great shooting night, especially in the first half.”



Johanson

In the second half, the Silverstreaks didn’t go down without a fight. They cut the deficit to 11 after a 16-4 run.

“The girls played great defense and played well offensively. Unfortunately, we were down too much to mount a big comeback,” Kalpin said. “It was fun to see the girls play the way they did the second half and compete. It’s always tough to see a season end. This team showed great growth and improvement throughout this season. As a coaching staff, we couldn’t be more proud of their accomplishments and the improvement they made.”

The Silverstreaks captured a Prairie Conference title this winter with a 7-1 league record.

Kalpin watched four Osakis seniors play their last high school game, and he is grateful for what Alexa Lien, Maddie Johanson, Haylee Jern and Abby Randall contributed to the program.

“The toughest part of the season is saying goodbye to our four seniors,” Kalpin said. “They are simply a great group of girls who demonstrated positive leadership all season long.”

OSAKIS 19 30 - 49
HOLDINGFORD 42 25 - 67

OSAKIS- Alexa Lien 8 points, 2 assists, 1 deflection; Mara VanNyhuis 6 points, 3 rebounds, 3 assists; Alexis Johanson 25 points, 5 rebounds, 2 assists, 5 steals; Hayleigh Niehoff 3 points, 2 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals; Grace Oeltjen 3 rebounds, 1 assist; Maddie Johanson 7 points, 6 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals; Haylee Jern 2 rebounds, 1 assist; Abby Randall 2 rebounds, 1 assist

DYLAN

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He finished fourth at the state tournament as a junior before culminating things by being ranked No. 2 in the final 220-pound polls, earning that runner-up finish at state and posting a final record of 44-5 this winter.

“I’ve been in the Army. I’ve lost soldiers and soldiers get wounded,” Minnewaska wrestling coach Chip Rankin said. “It’s a special thing about a person who is willing to take that obstacle in their life and not let that define them. He let that motivate him, and that just shows me that Dylan is a very resilient young man. You want to make Dylan do something, tell him he can’t.”

Unresponsive for days

Dylan has passions in his life that drive him. Sports such as football, wrestling and baseball are a part of that, and so too is hunting.

Dylan was out in the early-morning hours on Sept. 3, 2017 as he and a couple of buddies started the process of setting up for a waterfowl hunt near Brooten.

The Suburban they were driving and the trailer they were pulling were loaded down with gear, and one of the portable goose blinds didn’t fit. The group decided to place the blind on the roof of the vehicle and make their way to their destination.

“Me being a teenager said I’ll hold it on because it didn’t fit in the Suburban,” Dylan said.

The vehicle was moving slowly down the road when the wind caught the goose blind and threw it off the roof. Dylan, who was on the back bumper holding it with his friends also holding on through open windows, was thrown off with the blind before his head hit the ground.

Dylan suffered a skull fracture and brain bleeding, as well as a severe concussion. He was rushed from the scene by helicopter to St. Cloud before getting transferred to the Minneapolis Children’s Hospital.

“He was unresponsive for several days,” his mother, Teresa Jergenson, said. “We didn’t know if he would be able to come out of it at all.”

Dylan does not remember the accident or the first handful of days he spent in the hospital before he was discharged on Sept. 11. His recovery from the traumatic brain injury included speech, occupational and physical therapy. He eased his way back into school at Minnewaska by attending half days to keep his brain from being overstimulated.

“It was coming back slowly but surely,” Dylan said.

The conversation eventually turned back to sports and whether or not Dylan should ever play them again. Those who suffer a concussion are more susceptible to future head injuries, and the trauma doctors who worked with Dylan recommended he not take part in contact sports.

“We had both trauma and neurology doctor teams,” Teresa said. “Neurology came back and said he should be OK to move forward. So we had the whole dilemma of if we should allow him or not, but we figured he’s an active boy. If he isn’t able to, he could take a spin for the worse with the mental pieces involved. It was hard to determine what direction to follow.”

Cleared for contact

Dylan missed the football and wrestling seasons his sophomore year as he recovered, but he spent a lot of time watching and talking with his teammates from the side of the mat that winter.

“I think he actually learned a lot when he got to see what was going on, versus constantly doing,” Rankin said. “I think that helped him. He got to study wrestling, but he had the itch to get out there. He



Eric Morken / Echo Press

Minnewaska senior Dylan Jergenson looks for his shot in the 220-pound state title match against Dominik Vacura of Badger-Greenbush-Middle River on Saturday night at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul.

was just almost beside himself to get out there and wrestle.”

On March 3 of his sophomore year, Dylan was cleared by doctors to resume his sports career. That spring, he stepped into a batter’s box in baseball for the first time since the injury.

“It was nerve wracking,” Teresa said. “To have the ball coming in and then diving into the bases too. You start really kind of shaking and praying that everything goes OK.”

Through his final two years of high school, everything did go well. Dylan returned to football as a lineman the fall of his junior year and used a special helmet that provided more safeguarding for his head. In wrestling, he uses LDR headgear that has additional padding for protection.

Some concern was inherently there for the family every time Dylan competed, but the biggest scare came during this year’s West Central Conference Tournament in early February.

Dylan wrestled his match that day but wasn’t himself. He complained of being nauseous, light headed and wanting to sleep. The athletic trainer working the tournament told the family they needed to take him to the hospital.

“At that point, it went to, ‘What did I do? Why did I let him wrestle?’” Teresa said. “None of us saw him hit his head, but we were concerned. He held onto me for weight bearing going out to the car. It turned out that it was just viral and he was fine in a couple days.”

A shocked crowd at the X

Teresa could not help thinking about Dylan’s accident that day in February, just like her mind couldn’t help but think back when he was getting ready to wrestle his semifinal match at the state tournament on Saturday.

Brayden Weber is a junior wrestler at 220-pounds from Becker. He also competed in the semifinals on Saturday and collapsed as he was leaving the mat after shaking hands with his opponent. Dr. Mark Berg, who serves as the tournament doctor, led a response to Weber’s side and started chest-to-chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Weber did not have a pulse when Berg and two other certified athletic trainers worked to revive him. They were successful in doing so, and Weber gave a thumbs up to the crowd as he was taken off on a stretcher. He was released from the hospital on Monday afternoon.

“You have all the rumors going around (in the stands). It was stressful,” Teresa said. “Then you question, should we stop (Dylan)? It’s in his head now. Sometimes when you wrestle too cautiously, that’s when unfortunate things happen. We’re crying in the stands and when the wrestler gave the thumbs up, it just brings back many emotions.”

Dylan was also dealing with the fact that the strap on his specialized headgear broke right

before that match against Daniel Erlandson of Breckenridge.

Rankin questioned whether or not they should let Dylan wrestle, but Dylan wanted teammate Tyson Meyer’s headgear. Meyer is the back-to-back state champion at 170 pounds, and Dylan joked that Meyer’s headgear was the winning headgear.

It worked, as Dylan went out and won a 3-0 decision against Erlandson.

A fitting finish

Dylan says he does not think about his injury now when he wrestles. There was a time for that, but that passed the more that time went on.

“I was scared right away, and now the only thing I think about is telling people to stop and think,” Dylan said. “We could have made two trips that day. We might have been five minutes late for hunting, but it would have saved a lot of pain and everyone’s time.”

The injury did have an impact on the way Dylan wrestled as coaches got him to change his style a bit. Instead of leading with his head, he became much more adept at leading with his hands and being more calculated with when to take a shot and when to wrestle defensively.

“If you watch Dylan his freshman year, he was successful, but not near the level he’s had the last two years,” Rankin said. “He needed to fix some things. He’s a good wrestler who had to work at it. The amount of growth he’s made over his six years, even the last three, that’s a real testament to him with that setback of a year.”

Fear. Stress. Excitement. Pride. Teresa felt a little bit of everything as she watched her son wrestle his way through the state tournament and wrap up his career with a second straight podium finish.

“He lost to Vacura every time he wrestled him, but Vacura is good,” Teresa said. “Every time we wrestle, it’s not always about winning and losing. We just tell him, ‘Have fun.’ You want them to win, but just having fun is what’s most important. I think he was just trying to take it in. To show you can overcome challenges in your life, work hard and keep going and knowing he knows how much the community has supported him over the years.”

Dylan is looking into colleges but does not know for sure right now if he’s going to wrestle or play any sports at the next level.

Minutes after wrapping up a standout career that included more than 100 wins at Minnewaska, a decision like that could wait. He hugged Rankin and chatted with the teammates who were in St. Paul with him, guys he grew up with who helped turn the Lakers into a Class A power.

He was grateful he had a chance to be a part of that group.

“I’m just happy I’m able to say that I can do everything I love,” Dylan said. “Hunt, fish, sports. I’m back to normal, and it’s fun.”

SPORTS SCHEDULE

MARCH 6	
BLIZZARD HOCKEY Alexandria vs. Coulee Region, 7:10 p.m.	in Section 6A playoffs at the University of Minnesota-Morris, 1 p.m.
BOYS BASKETBALL Alexandria at Bemidji in Section 8AAA semifinals, 7 p.m.	Winner of Parkers Prairie/WHN vs. winner of Hancock/Battle Lake in Section 6A playoffs at the University of Minnesota-Morris, 2:45 p.m.
GIRLS BASKETBALL Section 6A championship, University of Minnesota-Morris, 7 p.m.	Section 6AA playoffs at St. John’s University, 5:45 p.m.
MARCH 7	
BLIZZARD HOCKEY Alexandria vs. Coulee Region, 7:10 p.m.	Winner of Osakis/LPGE vs. winner of Pine City/Milaca in Section 6AA playoffs at St. Cloud State University, 5:45 p.m.
MARCH 9	
BOYS BASKETBALL Section 6A South finals at Concordia College in Moorhead, 7:45 p.m.	

HOOPS

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The section opened up just a bit on Tuesday night as Sauk Rapids-Rice (11-16) pulled off a minor upset in the four and five-seed match-up with Sartell-St. Stephen (16-10) in a 67-65 win. The Storm will face top-seeded St. Cloud Apollo (19-8) in the other half of the bracket during Friday’s semifinals. Section 8AAA has been a section with no clear-cut favorite in recent history, and that looks to be the case again this winter.

That makes for what

KNIGHTS

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The Knights stormed back with a dynamic offensive duo of their own. Hailey Bennett and Lexi Bright not only scored 12 of the first 16 points, but they also found open shooters on the floor. Kaylyn Ulrich sank a long two-pointer to give WCA its first lead of the game midway through the first half.

The Owls adjusted quickly to the Knight’s offensive game plan by putting more pressure on Bennett and Bright. It was WCA’s balanced scoring that gave them an advantage early.

“Lexi and I try to make all the shots we can, but sometimes we can’t,” Bennett said. “I thought we did great as a team to find the open players.”

After 14 minutes of one-possession basketball, WCA started to pull away late in the half. The Knights went to the locker room leading 34-24 following a 10-3 run.

“One of our strengths is our numbers,” Schoenbauer said. “Once we started subbing, and got our depth to roll through, it started paying off for us. We had a great effort from everybody tonight. The best part about it, from a coaching standpoint, is the girls who didn’t get in. They played on the scout team and beat us up all week. They got us ready, and that was huge.”

WCA kept rolling to start the second half. At one point, the Knights led by as many as 14 points. However, Hancock wouldn’t go down without a fight

The Owls cut the lead to 49-40 with under five minutes left. Despite several trips to the free-throw line, they struggled to make the most of their opportunities.

Rylee Hanson made it a 50-43 game with a jump shot at the free-throw line, but a three-point play by Bright on the other end was the dagger.

The Knights were one of the teams that lost to the Owls during the 11-game win streak. After the 51-48 loss on Feb. 13, WCA learned from its mistakes to pick up the win when it mattered most.

“I think when we lost to Hancock last time, we got in our heads,” Ben-

SECTION 6A CHAMPIONSHIP

WHAT: West Central Area (22-7) vs. Henning (27-2)
WHERE: University of Minnesota-Morris
WHEN: Friday, March 6, at 7 p.m.

nett said. “This time, we came ready to play.”

Last season, the Underwood Rockets bounced the Knights in the second round of the section tournament. One year later, the Knights are not only looking to avenge last year’s early exit, but their fans are too.

“We can feel the energy from the fans,” Bennett said. “They were so loud and pushed us to keep going. It’s great, and it was a lot of fun.”

The Knights will head back to Morris on Friday for the section championship game against the Henning Hornets (27-2), the top seed in the North. WCA dropped the only regular-season meeting with the Hornets on Jan. 2, by a score of 72-49 on the road. Henning advanced with a 38-28 win over Underwood (20-7) on Wednesday night.

“(Henning) is a very strong team,” Schoenbauer said. “They have some size and strength so they will get looks inside the paint. Ellie Dague is going to do what she does because she’s an amazing player for them. They have some shooters, so they’re a solid team. It’ll be another battle.”

Schoenbauer took a different approach to this season than he has in the past. He feels like the mentality of his team is one of the reasons they are playing for a section title.

“Before this season, there were years where I shot myself in the foot,” Schoenbauer said. “You’re always sup-posed to dream big in everything. If you don’t, then you’re bound for mediocrity. I always told myself that we could get to where our expectations were. This year, I told the girls that we are going to take it one game at a time. We are going to get better each game, and they’ve done that. It’s exciting to be on the ride. I don’t know when it’s going to end. When it does, I know they’ll give it everything they’ve got.”