

Penalty shot sends Blake to state hockey tourney

Red Knights tagged with 'devastating' overtime loss

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Whether it's the Squirt level, the high school ranks or the NHL, the most exciting play in hockey is the penalty shot.

Fans were mesmerized Feb. 26 at Mariucci 3M Arena when a penalty shot was awarded to The Blake School's Gavin Best after he was taken down just south of the goal mouth by a Benilde-St. Margaret's defenseman, who had lost his stick. The moment couldn't have been any bigger with the scored tied 3-3 in the championship game of Section 6AA prep hockey.

The referee's call was both quick and decisive, and after a short timeout, Best hovered over the puck at center ice awaiting his confrontation with Red Knights goaltender Carson Limesand.

"My legs were shaking," Best said after the game. "I just kind of took it all in."

As he began skating toward the goal, with his mind racing, Best's thought was "get it on net."

Limesand, who had al-



(PHOTO BY MARK TROCKMAN - TROCKSTOCK.COM)

Sometimes hockey resembles rodeo, especially when a section title is at stake. Above, Blake's sophomore forward Nate Heitoff (15) bulldogs Benilde-St. Margaret's captain Blake Mesenburg to the ice in breaking up a rush.

ready made 32 saves in the game, braced for the biggest save opportunity of his career.

"I made a move going in, and it worked," Best said. "It is a move I have used before ... a pretty simple move."

When the goal judge turned on the light, the celebration was on. Blake players rushed the ice to hug their hero. The Blake School had won the game 4-3 at 5:59 of overtime.

The Bears (22-6-0) will be making their first trip to the State Class AA Tournament since their move from Class A to AA in 2017.

While the win was glorious for Blake, it was a bitter loss for Benilde-St. Margaret's, which had beaten the Bears 2-1 Jan. 21 in a regular-season contest.

Veteran Red Knights coach Ken Pauly was asked if he had ever seen a

section boys hockey final decided by a penalty shot. "Never," he replied.

While he didn't want to criticize a judgment call, Pauly said, "I don't think anyone would have complained if he [the official] had called holding and put them on a power play."

Blake head coach Rob McClanahan had a different view from his bench.

"It was pretty flagrant," he said. "Best was in clean

and got hauled down."

"This is devastating for our kids," Pauly said after consoling his Red Knights in the locker room. "We have nine seniors this year - I told them I love them. It's a bitter pill to end the season like this. I thought it was a great hockey game, and Blake's the real deal. I'm sure we'll reflect on this more when the snow melts."

Blake's celebration was somewhat subdued, fol-

lowing the initial reaction to Best's goal, because there is more work to be done in order to reach the ultimate goal - a state Class AA championship.

"Benilde-St. Margaret's is a great team," Best said. "They are the team we envisioned playing in the finals."

How did it feel to score the biggest goal of his career in the biggest game of the season?

"It is a moment I'll remember the rest of my life," Best concluded.

Blake 4, BSM 3

Scoring Summary

First Period: Blake - William Matzke (Anderson Blum, Connor Mahony).

Second Period: BSM - Blake Mesenburg (Nate Schweitzer, Brady Yakesh), BSM - Charlie Bischel (Grant Ellings, Schweitzer), Blake - Joe Miller (Will Svenddal, Thomas Nelson), BSM - Asher Connolly (Jackson Bisson, Yakesh).

Third Period: Blake - Svenddal (Miller, Ben Dexheimer).

Overtime: Blake - Gavin Best (Penalty Shot).

Saves/Shots: Aksel Reid (Blake) 14-17, Carson Limesand (BSM) 32-36.

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(PHOTO BY MARK TROCKMAN - TROCKSTOCK.COM)

Members of The Blake School's boys hockey team are living the dream, with the Section 6AA championship trophy in hand, after defeating Benilde-St. Margaret's 4-3 in overtime Feb. 26 at Mariucci 3M Arena on the University of Minnesota campus.



(SUN PHOTO BY JOHN SHERMAN)

Captain Gavin Best of The Blake School boys hockey team describes his penalty-shot goal against Benilde-St. Margaret's outside the Bears' locker Room at Mariucci 3M Arena.