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# Towanda rallies to defeat Hughesville

By RYAN LEMAY Staff Writer

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Towanda's Porschia Bennett goes up for a contested layup attempt on Friday night.

Review Photo/RYAN LEMAY

TOWANDA — Down 18-2 after the first quarter, the Towanda girls basketball team's season was in jeopardy on Friday night.

The Lady Black Knights slowly inched back into the game and completed its comeback in the fourth quarter to defeat Hughesville 36-32 in the District IV Class AAA quarterfinals.

Towanda and Hughesville traded baskets to open the game, then the Lady Spartans went on a 16-0 run to close the quarter.

Sara Stump nailed two corner threes for the Lady Spartans and Bre Boback hit one from deep as well.

“We were shell shocked initially and I didn't call a timeout as early as I probably should have,” Towanda head coach Rob Gentile said. “I told them that we are going to have to defend to get back in this thing.”

The Lady Black Knights upped the intensity of their half court press and three-quarter court press and forced Hughesville into making several costly mistakes on offense.

Towanda outscored Hughesville 10-1 in the second quarter and cut the deficit to 19-12 at halftime.

“We knew if we wanted to win that game we had to keep competing and adjust to their defense because they knew most of our plays,” Towanda's Paige Manchester said.

Gentile also alluded to how well prepared Hughesville was and talked about how it made running plays tougher.

At one point in the third quarter Towanda trailed 24-14.

Porschia Bennett knew she had to step up and the senior scored seven, cutting Hughesville's lead to 28-22 heading into the final eight minutes.

"Porschia is a competitor and one of the toughest kids I know," Gentile said. "She doesn't want her season to end and I think that's what it came down to. Your best players have to step up and make plays when needed and I thought they did tonight when it mattered."

At the 4:24 mark of the fourth quarter, Bennett scored a layup to give the Lady Black Knights their first lead of the game since leading 2-0.

Lucy Meyers put the Lady Spartans back up 30-29 with just over two minutes remaining.

With 28 seconds remaining in the game, Towanda's Bella Hurley found herself at the free throw line up 31-30.

Hurley drained the first free throw but a lane violation wiped out the second attempt.

“I honestly just thought it was all mindset, blocking everything out, and focusing on my free throws the whole time, Hurley said. “It is definitely a lot of pressure but I can handle it well when I have my teammates supporting me.”

Hughesville turned the ball over on the ensuing possession and then Hurley was sent to the line again.

This time around, Hurley nailed both free throws and put Towanda up 34-30 with 21 seconds remaining.

“She is a tough kid and a lot of people probably don’t know this but Bella is probably our best free throw shooter percentage wise,” Gentile said. “She has a really solid shooting stroke and we have 100% (confidence) she will make shots and that’s why we put the ball in her hands late in the game.”

The Lady Spartans made it 34-32 with six seconds remaining but Hughesville coach Ryan Callahan called a timeout when his team had none left.

Manchester converted both of her technical foul free throws to ice the game.

Bennett recorded 15 points, five rebounds, and four steals. Manchester had 13 points, 10 rebounds, and two assists.

Ava Snyder scored a team-high 15 points for the Lady Spartans.

Towanda advances to play at Line Mountain in the semifinals. The time and date of the game is yet to be announced.

“I have watched a few games on film and (Line Mountain is) are quite similar to us,” Gentile said. “They have a pretty good guard and you don’t go 20-2 and not be a really solid team so we are looking forward to the opportunity.”

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