

After two losses, Tanager girls move on to district play

By Parker Knox
Sportswriter

If Vermillion's girls could maintain for four quarters the kind of start they had against Harrisburg last Friday, their record might be far better than it is right now.

The Tanagers got points from five different players in the first period alone and surged to an eight-point lead over the tall, athletic Tiger women.

But Harrisburg applied a pressure defense that the Tanagers had trouble handling. A good many of Vermillion's 23 turnovers came during a second-quarter stretch during which the Tigers went from a 15-7 deficit to a 21-17 lead via a 14-2 run.

Couple the miscues with a warm shooting night for Harrisburg, including seven three-point bombs, and you have a problem. Though they trailed by 29-22 at halftime, the Tanagers saw the game gradually get away from them in the second half, and the Tigers went home victors by a 60-38 count.

"Every possession is so important to us," Coach Nick Mayer said in assessing the damage created by the Harrisburg press. Besides that, "Harrisburg shot well, and we didn't," Mayer added. The Tanagers couldn't get a single three-point try to fall.

A majority of Harrisburg's offensive damage was done by senior guard Kristin Ackermann, whose team-high 15 points all came from behind the three-point circle. Katie Goldammer added 10 points. To the Tanagers' credit they did hold the Tigers' major inside force, 6'2" junior Lindsey Johnson, to eight points. Calista Winter also had eight as 10 different Tigers scored.

Sierra Allen led the Tanagers with 13 points and eight rebounds. Kelly Amundson contributed seven

and Hannah Nehlich-Aroba six for Vermillion.

The Tanagers' regular season ended Tuesday with a 4-14 record in a 56-46 loss at Wagner where the Red Raiders improved to 17-2.

The Tanagers came ready to play and led after a quarter, 14-10, but Wagner's numerous weapons began to take control in the second period, and the home team had a 20-9 advantage in that quarter. Yet VHS was still within seven, 42-35, after three periods.

Amundson's return to the team after missing numerous games due to injury continued to pay dividends. She led the Tanagers with 13 points. Allen had nine points and four rebounds. Wagner had three women in double figures, led by Devon Brecke with 23.

Mayer said last week his girls have been focusing on "making some noise" in the district tournament. The time for that is now at hand.

As the fourth seed in District 8A, the Tanagers will play the top seed on the latter's home court Tuesday night at about 7:45 after the Nos. 2 and 3 seeds play each other in a 6 p.m. semifinal at the same location.

The race for the No. 1 seed is tight, but Elk Point-Jefferson has a narrow power-points lead over Beresford even though their records are the same at 14-5. Each has one game left Friday night with EP-J taking on Flandreau Indian School and Beresford playing Sioux Falls Christian. Dakota Valley also had five losses at the beginning of this week with three games remaining.

The two teams that win Tuesday's semifinals will clash Thursday in a 7 p.m. district title game at the home court of the higher remaining seed.

Tanager boys defeat Harrisburg in cliffhanger

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If ever a team deserved to leave the court with a feel-good victory they had snatched from the jaws of defeat, it was the Tanager boys varsity.

The basketball gods had not looked down kindly upon Coach Jay Drake's ballclub very often this winter as a string of frustrating losses to good teams continued to accumulate. Even against Harrisburg last Friday night, it appeared throughout a stomach-churning fourth quarter that somehow, some way it was going to happen to Vermillion yet again.

But because they played their hearts out for every last second of this 32-minute game and quite frankly refused to lose, the Tanagers made enough things happen so that, when Harrisburg's final-second desperation shot from the sideline at half-court just missed wide left, the game belonged to the good guys, 44-43.

Not only was it Vermillion's fifth win of the season but also their second one-point cliffhanger over Harrisburg, which had been the top team in neighboring District 7A.

"We are really proud of our guys," Drake said. "It's nice to see us play for 32 minutes." His club improved the job they did on the Tigers back in the season opener, outbounding the taller Tigers this time, 28-27.

The Tanagers did not lead in this game at any point in the last 11 minutes until senior guard Jason Rasmussen, with that proverbial ice water cursing through his veins, swished the tying and go-ahead free throws with 2.6 seconds left.

Those heroics climaxed a final four minutes of scoreboard time that took well over 15 minutes of real time to transpire. Even the very last 12 seconds had more twists and turns than any writer of fiction could create.

But let's start at the beginning. For a change the Tanagers did not create for themselves a first- or second-quarter hole from which they would have to climb. In rolling to a 15-8 lead, Vermillion got six valuable points from Aaron Steele, a trey and two free shots from Cole Andre, two Kylan Freidel free throws and a perfect feed from Freidel to Rasmussen for a layup.

To start the second period Freidel scored first, then freshman Austin Krier drove the baseline for a layup to restore a seven-point lead. The margin stayed between three and five points for VHS until Andre's jumper made it 25-19 nearing halftime. At the buzzer Andre let fly one of his patented three-point jumpshot attempts, and the ball dipped low into the net, spun around a couple of times but popped out.

The Tanagers heard Harrisburg footsteps to start the third quarter as the Tigers scored four straight buckets to take a 27-25. Three of them were from speedster guard Eric Hensch, who unfortunately for Tiger opponents is only a sophomore. Hensch up to this point had 16 of Harrisburg's 27 points, time and again flashing

through the Tanager defense for layups or leading breakways on his team's transition offense.

It took 4 minutes, 45 seconds of the second half for Vermillion to score, but the first basket was another three-pointer from Andre. Later in the quarter Andre and Freidel teamed up for a picture-perfect in-bounds play and layup as Andre flipped the ball in from the baseline and Freidel zipped past the Tiger defense for an easy two. A Hensch basket gave Harrisburg a 31-30 lead with one quarter left.

Despite being outscored 12-5 in the period, the Tanagers had kept their balance and were within one.

Andre's third three-pointer of the game tied the score at 33-33. For the next four minutes the Tanagers continued to get good looks at the basket but couldn't get their shots to fall. The exception was Kylan "Fearless" Freidel.

The senior forward was a demon all night long, blocking shots of taller Tiger players as he defended 6'6" Patrick Draisey and 6'3" Jordan Budde, crashing to the floor, diving for loose balls, and snaring 10 rebounds as well as three assists. His coach tabbed it as Freidel's best game of the year.

"Fearless" got the Tanagers to 35 with a drive up the lane. With 4:26 left he sacrificed himself with another hard drive to a score, and though he was fouled roughly, he picked himself up and sank the subsequent free throw.

Hensch's 19th and 20th points and the third basket of the final quarter for Draisey seemed to put Harrisburg on a victory track with another three-point lead. But Freidel yet again saved the Tanagers with a floater over the outstretched arms of the Tigers' tall timber with 2:15 remaining.

Draisey made a free throw, but importantly also missed one, at the 2:02 mark. Forty seconds later the Tanagers, down 42-40, made a defensive stop and took a time-out. They turned the ball over nine seconds later. The Tigers kept the ball until taking a time-out of their own with 47 seconds left.

Hensch's free throw made it 43-40 with 0:42 to go, but he couldn't make his second try, leaving it a one-possession game. It came down then to the final frantic 15 seconds, a small span of time in a senior's basketball career, but 15 seconds which Rasmussen may never forget.

Vermillion needed a three-pointer and who better than Andre to take that shot. He got open on the left side, and his shot arched deep into the net but came back out. But out of nowhere came Rasmussen, flying through the air across the lane to flip the rebounding ball back up onto the backboard before one of the tall Tigers could get it. As Rasmussen's body went sprawling onto the tile out of bounds, the ball amazingly caromed neatly off the glass and through the net. The deficit was again only one point.

The clock showed 0:12 as Harrisburg tried to in-bound the ball from beneath the Tanager basket. The Vermillion

defense choked off all open men, and when the in-bounding Tiger had to throw the ball somewhere or lose possession, a gaggle of players from both teams ended up on the floor with the basketball. The jump-ball was called, and, lo and behold, the possession arrow was pointing in the Tanagers' favor. They had the ball back with nine seconds left!

After two Tanager time-outs, they put the ball into play, and Freidel was fouled with :05.6 remaining. But it was not yet a bonus free-throw situation, so Vermillion in-bounded the ball yet again. This time the Tiger defenders did their job, covering all possibilities. A desperation pass into the far left corner couldn't be handled cleanly by Rasmussen, and with only 4.5 seconds showing, it seemed all hope had been lost.

All that remained for Harrisburg to do was to get the ball into play cleanly and expect to be fouled immediately, but Rasmussen created a miracle. He burst past the Tiger to whom the ball was intended, stole the ball and was fouled in the process, setting the stage for his game-tying and game-winning free throws.

In a game where every point mattered, no matter when it was scored, the Tanagers made all 11 of their free throws—five by Freidel, four by Andre and two by Steele. Harrisburg took the same number of free shots but could make only five.

Freidel finished with 17 points, Andre 13, Steele six, Rasmussen six, and Krier two. Tyler Hux didn't score, but he did have three rebounds and two assists, and one play of his epitomized the Tanager effort. Hux tried to save a bounding ball from going out of bounds and crashed face first into the bottom row of the bleachers but refused to leave the game.

Hensch had 20 and Draisey 13 to lead Harrisburg. The Tigers missed all seven of their three-point attempts while shooting 42 percent (19 of 45). Vermillion made only three of its 21 long-distance tries, all of them by Andre, but that's nine more points than Harrisburg got from behind the arc. The Tanagers shot 15 of 49 overall for 31 percent.

On Tuesday night, the Tanagers, who have played six games against top-10 Class "A" teams, played one of them, Wagner, dead even in the second half, but a 22-15 halftime margin held up in a 63-50 Red Raider win, their 14th in 17 games.

Freidel led VHS with 19 points. Steele added nine points and Andre eight points and seven assists. Krier scored seven, Hux four and Rasmussen three.

Wagner shot at a 48 percent clip (26 of 54) while the Tanagers had a respectable 43 percent night (19 of 44). The Red Raiders had 20 rebounds off the Vermillion boards among their 29 total rebounds. Freidel and Rasmussen had six boards each and Andre five among Vermillion's total of 21.

The Tanagers' last home game of the season will be a rescheduled date against Pine Ridge Monday. Only a varsity game will be played, tipping off at 5 p.m.

VHS gymnastics team competes at state tournament Friday Tanager JV girls continue to roll on court

By Parker Knox
Sportswriter

Vermillion earned the right to take its entire team to the state gymnastics tournament by placing third in the regional meet at Mitchell Friday.

The Tanagers will be part of the Class "A" team competition in a session starting at 9:30 a.m. Friday in Aberdeen. Then on Saturday at the same time, Elly Melby and Amber Walker will compete in the Class "A" all-around competition and Jade Fostvedt on the balance beam.

Last year at the state meet Vermillion accumulated 111 points. Coach Mark Upward said he thinks his club could improve their point total by as many as 10 points this time around even though the roster is composed of the same girls as a year ago.

VHS had 121.875 points in the regional last week, trailing perennial state champ Madison with 139.15 and runner-up Wagner with 126.925. West Central placed fourth with 112 points. The top three teams automati-

cally qualify for the team competition at state.

Melby and Walker qualified for the state all-around by placing among the top 12. Melby was sixth with a season-high score of 33.05, and Walker was ninth at 30.975.

In individual events Melby was fourth in the vault at 9.075, sixth in the floor exercise at 8.45, sixth on the beam at 7.75 and ninth on the bars at 7.775. Meanwhile, Walker was fifth on the floor at 8.55, ninth in the vault at 8.575 and 12th on the bars at 7.30.

Fostvedt earned the right to compete on the beam by placing eighth in that event with a 7.65 score.

Madison claimed the top five athletes in the all-around standings, led by champion Lexi Finck with a 35.875 tally.

Rory Tucker was the Tanagers' heartbreak athlete of the day, placing 13th on the beam, missing 12th place by .05. Twelfth would have meant she advanced to the state in that event.

The salvation to Tucker's disappointment is that she and teammates all get to join Melby, Walker and Fostvedt at state to compete in the team competition. Besides juniors Melby and Walker and freshmen Fostvedt and Tucker, other members of the Tanager squad in Aberdeen will be sophomores Cassie Donahoe and Christine Epping; freshmen Alexis Reich, Morgan Hower and Grace Olson, and seventh graders Jamie Moos and Teddi Settles. Helping Upward coach the VHS team is second-year assistant Kelly Enebo.

By Parker Knox
Sportswriter

Vermillion's junior varsity girls continued to roll last week, picking up three more victories, including two over teams to whom they had lost earlier in the season.

One of those revenge games was against West Central, and this time it was no contest as the Tanagers led 19-6 at the half and won by 38-19. Valerie Robinson had a 13-point, three-assist and five-steal game. Beth Szymanski scored eight and Morgan Erickson six. Lizzie Bye and Kelly Amundson led the rebounding with four apiece.

The Tanagers ran away

from Dakota Valley, 37-22. Balanced scoring was led by Claire Jones' eight, Bye's six and Sami Girard's six. Bye had five rebounds, Robinson three assists and Erickson four steals.

Vermillion outscored Har-

risburg, the other team to whom they lost early in the year, 43-32. Jones had 11 points, Robinson 10 and Erickson eight. Amundson had five rebounds, Robinson three assists and Erickson four steals.

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