

Triad defeats Jersey in Roxana Regional, key Panther player injured

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ROXANA – Jersey lost quite a bit when their leading scorer, **Mackenzie Thurston**, went down with a knee injury late in the first quarter of their IHSA Class 3A Roxana Regional semifinal against Triad Tuesday night.

Thurston's absence was noticeable as the Panthers couldn't quite get over the hump as the Knights advanced to Thursday's final against Civic Memorial 37-24. Jersey was eliminated at 16-12, while Triad advanced at 13-12.

Thurston was helped to the bench and didn't return to the game, and that hurt the Panthers.

“It's a little early to tell” what kind of injury Thurston suffered, said **Panther coach Kevin Strebel** following the game. “The trainer was there; she stayed with her and worked with her. They basically iced it. Mackenzie couldn't relax enough in order to let them fully test everything on the knee.

“Hopefully tomorrow, she'll get back and see our trainer and go from there; she's a softball player and a heck of a softball player. I just hope she'll be able to be back for that. It looked like it buckled a bit; it was just one of those things. It wasn't a lot – a bump – but it was enough and she's such an explosive player that there's a lot of pressure going off one way or another.”

The injury didn't help the Panthers' cause. “She's our leading scorer,” Strebel said, “whenever we had Triad at our place a couple of weeks ago, a big part of it was that they were guarding Bethany Muenstermann and they're right there with her the whole time and that opens up gaps. No one exploits those gaps better than Mackenzie Thurston does.

“One of the things that happened in that game is that they were trying to guard one-on-one without much help and Mackenzie – and others, but Mackenzie is top notch – and you saw that a little bit on this end in the second half, we got to the rim and we didn't finish; Mackenzie finishes those. If she's in there, it's a different game, or at least a close game. I'm not saying we win it, but it's not double-digits down the whole second half.”

Kiara Chapman led the Panthers in scoring in the game with six points.

It was starting to be noticeable in the second half; Jersey trailed Triad just 17-10 at the half and the Knights extended the lead to 28-15 at three-quarter time, getting it to 35-19 at one point in the final quarter before the Panthers tried to mount a comeback but couldn't find the basket when they needed to.

Triad will be facing a huge test against CM in Thursday's final. "We're familiar with them," said **Knight coach Stephanie Potthast**. "They're a really good basketball team; we've got to try to come up with a game plan of some sort to limit them in some way, but they've got (Allie) Troeckler inside, they've got shooters outside.

"You try to take one thing away and they've done a good job of – when we've played them – of other girls stepping up. You try to take one thing away, someone else steps up; that's what makes them so good. Their pressure, their run-and-jump, gave us trouble the last time we played them, so we're going have to really focus on that tomorrow, figure out how we are going to do this."

Looking at Jersey's body of work for the season, Strebel was happy with how things went. "I just got done talking to the seniors (in the locker room) and they've been in everything. This is my third year and since coming in, they're just always there. It's going to be tough going into the gym as we start in the summer and not having those leaders there; they've just always been there.

"They have taken the program to higher levels here; now the challenge is for the players to continue that."

