

Troeckler's 25 points, Eaton's 16 points helps Eagles reach 3A super-sectional over Highland

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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WATERLOO – The last two years running, Civic Memorial had gotten to an IHSA Class 3A girls sectional final.

In 2015, the Eagles fell to Massac County of Metropolis. In 2016, the Eagles fell to Highland.

Thursday night, the Eagles took on their Mississippi Valley Conference rival Bulldogs for the fourth time this season. And they weren't about to go away at all.

CM stormed out to a 14-3 lead at quarter time, not giving up a Bulldog basket until the final 30 seconds of the period, then expanded the lead to as much as 22-3 before Highland began to mount a comeback.

The Bulldogs kept coming and made it close down the stretch, but the Eagles – led by Allie Troeckler and Kaylee Eaton, who both hit several key free throws when it was needed most – prevailed 61-52 in Thursday's IHSA Class 3A Waterloo Sectional final.

CM advanced to Monday's supersectional at Illinois-Springfield against Rochester, 69-39 winners over Mattoon in the Decatur MacArthur Sectional final, set for 7 p.m., with the winner moving into next week's IHSA Class 3A state tournament at Redbird Arena in Normal. The Eagles improved to 31-2 on the year, while the Bulldogs were eliminated at 29-4.

While Troeckler led the way for CM with 25 points, Eagle coach Jonathan Denney gave praise to her supporting cast. “Allie Troeckler, I don't think she was going to let us lose this game today,” Denney said, “but the supporting cast was great too. It's a great feeling – we're going to enjoy this tonight – but we're going to move on and focus on what's ahead; our goal is to get to state and win it and we've still got to win a supersectional.

“It's going to be a good weekend of practice and preparation, and we're going to try to give the same effort Monday night.”

The Eagles' defensive effort helped short-circuit the start the Bulldogs had in both halves, Denney felt. “Defensively, we were as good as we've been all season through the first two quarters,” Denney said. “They were pretty desperate and we were a little careless with the ball in the second half, but the way we played defense and the way we shot the ball early gave us that cushion.”

And once CM got to the 22-3 lead, Denney told his team to be ready for what was coming from Highland. “I told them when it was 22-3, I said 'a run is coming, probably two, maybe three,’” Denney said. “ 'You've got to be able to withstand the run, mix in a couple of baskets, get some defensive stops and don't let them get second chances.'

“I thought Troeckler did a great job on the floor tonight not giving second chances.”

“When you start the two halves like we started,” said Highland coach Mike Arbuthnot, “you can't expect to win the ball game. We just came out and didn't get the job done; we missed some easy (shots), missed some layups – we were on three points forever. You

just can't have the starts that we had in the first half and second half and expect to win the ball game.

“We showed great fight; our kids had a lot of heart, but they (CM) deserved to win the ball game. They turned us over close to 20-25 times and they've got a great player in Troeckler. I wish them the best of luck; they were the better team tonight.”

Highland couldn't get much going in the first half before coming back to cut the CM lead to 26-17 at the long break. “We were pretty stagnant offensively, especially in that first half,” Arbuthnot said. “We had some good looks; we had the ball in the right peoples' hands, they just didn't knock down shots.

“We had opportunities; they came out and it was kind of trading punches in the first 4-5 minutes and then Troeckler broke loose a couple of times and it was one of those things where it escalated.”

The atmosphere of the game was one worthy of the meaning “March Madness”; both schools' cheer squads were loud and into the game all night. “I can't thank Eagle Nation enough,” Denney said. “The student section, the crowd – this is what these girls and this coaching staff has worked hard for, to get that kind of support, and we didn't let them down.”

“It was a good atmosphere and a fun opportunity for the kids to play in,” Arbuthnot said of the packed house.”

Eaton had 16 points for CM, with Alaria Tyus scoring nine, Kourtland Tyus five, Tori Pfeifer four and Hannah Schmidt two. Madison Wellen led Highland with 25 points, with Rece Portell adding 13, Alex LaPorta 11 and Ellie Brown three.

