

Durbin Scores 31, Zupan Adds 23 In Eagles' 64-58 Thriller OT Win Over East St. Louis

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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BETHALTO – The Civic Memorial girl’s basketball team gets to continue their postseason run after an intense 64-58 overtime win over the East St. Louis Flyerettes. After the game, the Eagles were presented with the Regional Champions plaque and will move on to the Sectional Semifinals on Tuesday.

This game, which was supposed to be on Thursday, was canceled due to the snow giving the Eagles an unexpected day off. It just gave CM head coach Mike Arbuthnot more time to watch film. He said that the day off didn’t have an effect on his players and that they had a “real good shoot-around” the morning of the game.

The Eagles played ESL back on Feb. 7 and in that game, CM found themselves down 23-7 after the first quarter and 30-22 at the half. They overcame the deficit and earned a 57-55 win in a nailbiter.

Fast forward two weeks to the Regional Championship, and CM found themselves down 29-21 at the halfway point. Both teams came out to blistering hot starts, but again CM would have to overcome another 8-point deficit.

“It was just the tale of two halves. We came out in the first half a little flat,” Arbuthnot said after the game. Unlike the previous game against Jerseyville where the Eagles ran out to a 23-7 lead after the first quarter.

The Eagles knew they had done it once, so they believed they could do it again. But this time it was different. The Flyerettes kept with them. The Eagles didn't have a lead until halfway through the fourth quarter after two made free throws from senior guard Kelbie Zupan to make it a 42-40 ballgame. Before you could even blink though the Flyerettes stormed back down the court and drained a three-pointer to regain the lead.

It then turned into a back and forth battle with both sides going blow for blow. "It was two good teams going possession to possession and it was just a good old-fashioned high school basketball game where our players were making plays," Arbuthnot added.

The score was 54-52 with the Flyerettes leading in the final seconds. The Eagles had possession with less than 10 seconds to go. The ball was inbounded to Zupan who drove all the way to the basket and scored a layup to tie the game and force overtime.

Had she missed the bucket, her high school basketball career would have been over, but she delivered probably the biggest shot of her life. "I was just going up saying, I hope I don't miss this layup, but once I made it, it felt good," Zupan said referring to that moment.

So, with the game tied at 54 heading into overtime, it could have gone either way. The Eagles won the opening tipoff and scored first, but in the end, the game was decided by free throws with the Flyerettes missing too many of theirs in OT. The Eagles could not be stopped, and they picked up an epic victory.

Zupan finished the night scoring 23 points, 10 of which came from the free-throw line. But all eyes were on junior guard Olivia Durbin. She absolutely blew up leading her team with 31 points and doing so most likely with a broken nose. Durbin said after the game that all the pain was "100 percent worth it."

Junior guard Aubree Wallace may not have scored any points, but she played just about every minute of the game and had yet another great defensive performance to help slow down the Flyerettes. Senior Emily Williams and junior Hannah Meiser added four points each to the scoresheet.

For East St. Louis, junior Shakara McCline led the way with 21 points. Senior Mikayla Lee scored 12 and junior Janiyah Brown added 11.

If things couldn't get any better for CM, it just so happens that win was coach Arbuthnot's 400th victory in his coaching career.

“He deserves everything that goes to him, he’s a great coach and 400 is nothing for him,” Zupan said about Arbuthnot. She certainly believes that her coach has many more wins in him, however maybe none more dramatic than this one.

The Eagles are lucky enough to host this year’s regional and sectional games, and it has definitely worked out to their advantage.

“We’re happy as heck that we are able to do it because we’ve had such a great following for basketball in this community and the support of this community is great. I’m just glad the girls got to do it in front of their home crowd,” Arbuthnot finished with.

CM has a chance to play in the Sectional Championship in their own gym, but first, they have to make it through the semis. The Eagles will take on Mount Vernon on Tuesday, Feb. 22 at 7:30 p.m. in the Sectional Semifinals.