

# Roxana comes out strong, but loses to Pickneyville

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
March 5 2015 6:35 AM



WOOD RIVER - Roxana's basketball team, had a spirited start in Wednesday's IHSA Class 2A East Alton-Wood River Sectional semifinal match against Pickneyville after a dramatic regional final win over Piasa Southwestern last week.

Their dream of getting to the state tournament came to an end as the Panthers, behind 27 points from Nolan Luke, eliminated the Shells 61-44 at Wood River's Memorial Gym. Pickneyville, now 25-6 on the season, advanced to Friday's final against Breese Mater

Dei with a trip to Carbondale's SIU Arena for the Carbondale Supersectional on the line. The Shells' run came to an end at 16-16.

“Once we figured out how to play to our strengths, we had a great year,” Shells coach Mark Briggs said, reflecting on how far his team had unexpectedly come. “If we had been told we'd be among the last 32 teams playing at the start of the season, I'd take it. Our kids started playing with confidence and they were battle-tested.

“No one expected us to be here, but we weren't satisfied. We wanted to keep playing and we came out hungry. We battled right to the end.”

Early on, though, it seemed the Shells' momentum from the regional final had carried forward; they came out on fire and got out to a 14-5 lead midway through the first term, forcing the Panthers to call time out to halt the momentum.

“Once we got settled in on defense, we were able to use our size inside on them,” said Panther coach Bob Waggoner. “As quick a team as they are, we were worried they would be able to spread things out on us. We had to make a few adjustments to get the right matchups we wanted.”

After the Panthers got untracked, they came alive and cut the lead to 17-11 at quarter time, then slowly chipped away at the lead until a Luke jumper and three-point shot gave them a 26-21 halftime lead. A huge run in the third period after the Shells had pulled to 28-27 with 7:20 left in the period proved to be the decisive blow.

“That was probably our best quarter of the year,” Waggoner said. “They had us on our heels early on.”

The Shells tried to keep things close, but Pickneyville's size advantage slowly turned the tide to their favor. At the finish, Roxana's fans gave their side a huge ovation for their accomplishments.

Brian Taylor had 10 points for the Panthers in addition to Luke's game-high score, with Clayton Houghland adding eight. The Shells were led by Zach Golenor's 12 points, with Trace Gentry adding 11 and Randy Skiff eight.