

Shells Hold Off Piasa Birds' Fourth-Quarter Comeback

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter
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ROXANA - Just six days after the Roxana Hoopsgiving boys basketball tournament, Piasa Southwestern was back in the Larry Milazzo Gymnasium in Roxana to take on the Shells Friday night.

Both the Shells and Piasa Birds came in with a winning record of 3-2 to start the young season. Roxana would lead wire-to-wire Friday night en route to a 53-48 win.

Before the action on the court, there was a pregame ceremony featuring family members of Harry “The Horse” Gallatin, and Roxana Assistant Principal Adam Miller unveiled the newly christened Harry Gallatin Court inside the Larry Milazzo Gym.



Gallatin is widely considered the greatest Shell to grace the hardwood in Roxana, as he went on to play nine seasons in the NBA with the New York Knicks and one season with the Detroit Pistons between 1948 and 1958.

The game tipped off, but it seemed the visitors were a bit late to realize. The Piasa Birds only got one shot off in the first quarter, and trailed 11-2 after the opening stanza.

Both ways, coaches expressed frustration with what they saw were calls going against their teams. Southwestern coach Jason Darr was given a warning by an official in the first half, and one of his assistants was given a technical foul for slamming a clipboard.

“If the game’s not called the way it’s called, we win by 20 or 30 points,” said Roxana head coach Mark Briggs following the game. “Some of the fouls are not smart on our end, and we have to do a better job there... When the game is called differently, kids have to adjust, and we didn’t do that.”

The Shells took a 25-13 lead into the halftime break, keeping a firm hold on the lead they built in the first quarter. Sophomore guard Trenton Holloway scored seven in the quarter, on his way to 14 points on the night, tied for the Roxana team lead with forward Sean Maberry.

Much of the second and third quarters were dictated by fouls and free throw shooting, as referees grew more strict, calling fouls to keep the game from becoming overly physical. Both teams entered the double-bonus in the quarter, and much of the scoring opportunity came at the charity stripe.

Neither side could really gain an advantage from all of the free throws, and the Shells retained a 12-point lead heading into the fourth quarter.

Southwestern's perimeter game finally came to the fore in the final frame and brought the visitors right back into the game in the closing stages. Three straight three-pointers fell for the Piasa Birds, and they closed the gap late to give themselves a chance in the late stages.

The slow start would be their undoing, as they simply couldn't close the gap enough despite a valiant fourth-quarter effort, outscoring the Shells 20-13 over the last eight minutes. The final horn blared, and Roxana's players and fans celebrated inside the Larry Milazzo Gymnasium as the hosts hung on for a 58-43 victory.

"We came out pretty slow," said senior Southwestern guard Rocky Darr, who scored 12 points including a fourth-quarter three-ball. "We had quite a few turnovers, probably shouldn't have. We started to play better and battle in the second half, but we just couldn't get there."

Southwestern falls to 3-3, and they have no time to dwell on Friday night's defeat. The Piasa Birds are back in action at home Saturday afternoon, hosting Calhoun.

Roxana will have a little more time to get some practice in, something head coach Mark Briggs noted has been a struggle with so many tournament games early on and many of his players wore out from an extended football season.

"Our kids are very tired, we're battling right now and have some tired legs," said Briggs postgame. "We had a good effort tonight. We had a bunch of guys step up and make big plays, and as the season gets a little bit older, we'll get a little bit better."

