

Alton Loses OT Heartbreaker To Waubonsie Valley In Super-Sectional

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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BLOOMINGTON – It took a long time for Alton to get over last season’s sectional semifinal loss to O’Fallon.

But the Lady Redbirds cleared that hurdle a year later and then won their first-ever sectional title two nights after that.

But their postseason run was cut short just one game away from the state tournament, and the way that it went down is most certainly going to take a while to get over.

Alton lost 55-53 in overtime to Aurora Waubonsie Valley Monday night in the IHSA Class 4A Bloomington Super-Sectional played at Illinois Wesleyan University's Shirk Center.

"I don't know," Alton head coach Deserea Howard said on how long it will take to get over the loss.

"It's not as devastating as last year, just simply because we fought. We fought, and we fought hard. Obviously, if you run that game back two or three times, you might get the same result, you might not."

But the result was what it was and with it, Alton's season comes to a close with a 32-3 record.

The Redbirds lost a one-possession overtime game, and they did so for the majority without their leading scorer.

After a quick 3-0 deficit, Alton rattled off 12 straight points thanks to baskets from Jarius Powers and Talia Norman and a couple of three-pointers from Alyssa Lewis. The Redbirds led 12-10 after the first quarter.

But at the time, nobody cared what the score was.

They wanted to know if Kiyoko Proctor was alright.

With 41 seconds left in the opening frame, Proctor took a hard knock to the floor and stayed down a while holding her knee. She never returned to the game.

But Alton continued to battle, even after giving up the lead.

Allison Pruitt opened the second quarter with a three, but Waubonsie scored the next seven points thanks to back-to-back longshots to take an 18-15 lead.

But Powers went back to work in the post with two more baskets before Kaylea Lacey's emphatic three-point play regained the Alton lead at 22-21.

The Warriors took the lead back at 26-24 after another triple, but Lewis hit two straight threes to give the Redbirds a 30-28 lead at halftime.

After learning the severity of Proctor's knee injury in the locker room, the Redbirds had to try and rally the troops.

"We tried to readjust," Howard said. "We tried to put our defense out front and lead with it, and we did. I think that's what kept us in the game."

The Warriors opened the second half with another three to take a 31-30 lead and by the end of the third quarter, they had flipped the script and led 42-38.

But there was still no quit in Alton.

Powers and Lacey opened up the fourth strong and helped Alton to a 6-2 run, tying the game back up at 44. The game would again be tied at 46, and then again at 49.

Powers put a basket up and in to lead 48-46 with 59 seconds left. Pruitt made one free throw to increase the lead to 49-46, but Waubonsie went the other way and drilled a three with seven seconds remaining to end up forcing overtime.

It was the Warriors' second straight overtime game, coming off of Thursday's 63-61 win over Lisle Benet Academy, last year's state runner-up.

Waubonsie scored the first four points in overtime, including a three that would prove to be the dagger to go ahead 53-49. Alton got within a basket twice at 53-51 and 55-53.

After the Warriors fumbled the ball, Alton was able to get the last shot of the game off. The ball moved up to Lewis who put up a Hail Mary three-pointer for the win, but it came up just short as the buzzer sounded.

"She fought hard, she played long," Howard said of Lewis, the team's only senior.

"She had to step into Kiyoko's role tonight, she couldn't just be the shooting guard, she also had to be the thinker and the ball handler. She was the maturity on the court tonight and I think she handled it to the best of her abilities."

Lewis finished the game with 12 points. Alton was led by Powers with 23 points. Talia Norman and Lacey each scored six, Pruitt had four, and Justice Haynes had two.

Pruitt, a freshman, and Haynes, a sophomore, both stepped up big time in trying to replace Proctor's point guard role. Freshman Madeline Ducey and sophomore Jakayla Steen were also called upon off the bench.

“Girls went from four to five role minutes to it’s on you. You’re calling the plays, you’re making the decisions, you’re pushing the pace,” Howard said.

“I thought they executed to the best of their ability,” she continued. “You could see the nerves on them. They tried to push through it, they tried to play through it. Nobody just quit and that’s all I ever ask from buzzer to buzzer.”

Waubonsie moves on to the state semifinals where it will meet Nazareth Academy (31-3), 48-32 winners over Homewood-Flossmoor (23-8) in its super-sectional.

The other semifinal is between Wilmette Loyola Academy (36-0) and Palatine Fremd (29-6).

Alton finished the season ranked second in Class 4A according to the Associated Press’ final state poll. The Redbirds were second for most of the season, never able to dethrone No. 1 ranked Loyola Academy.

“I tried to find words to just remind them how special the season has been and with the adversity we went through tonight, and to still be just one possession away, you’ve got to be proud of that fight,” Howard said.

“We gave it everything we had tonight. Two people down, you never think it’s going to happen, but you have to prepare for it, and we tried as hard as we could.”

Besides Proctor, Alton was without Aryanna Anthony who suffered a concussion in last Tuesday’s game against O’Fallon.

“We’re fighting injured, we’re fighting wounded. I’m just glad that we fought,” Howard said.

“It wasn’t our time,” she continued. “We thought it was. We really, really wanted it to be. We did everything we could to make it.”

“It’s not the end of the world,” Howard said. “It feels like it, but we’ve learned that it’s not.”