

# RECORD SPORTS

January 2, 1997

## Girls' Basketball: Lady Tigers Take It To The Shootout Finals

### Beat Longwood in semi-finals; fall to Sachem

By George Wallace

The Northport Lady Tigers basketball team, host to the Suffolk Shootout, placed second in their holiday tournament this past week, taking it to the finals before losing to the Flaming Arrows of Sachem High School.

The Lady Tigers, who were dominant at times in the eight-team field, overcame a stubborn Longwood team in the semifinals to earn a berth in the championship game against Sachem — only to fall by a double digit margin against a swarming Sachem team that was led by "all-everything" Nicolé Kazmarski.

But let's put aside the tournament championship game for a moment, which is essentially a preseason "bragging rights" ritual between some of the top girls' basketball teams in Suffolk County. When you consider the way things have been going for the talented Lady Tigers so far in this young season, it is a fair enough assessment to say that there nearly always seems to be someone to step up and get the job done for the Lady Tigers basketball team.

Consider, for example, the way that the Northport girls' team benefited from a two-minute, seven-point run at the end of the third quarter of play from freshmen Jackie Lukas and Jenn Carbajal to break out of a 26-26 deadlock against Longwood in the semifinals. It was not the only clutch set of minutes in the game, nor were Carbajal and Lukas the only ones to participate in them. But all the elements of drama and resilience were there in those couple of moments: Lukas' shot from the top of the key, a gorgeous bounce pass from Carbajal to Lukas for an easy layup, and a net-drenching three pointer as the buzzer was about to sound on the quarter.

Also playing some key moments in the game, as in previous outings for the Lady Tigers, was sophomore Brianne Watkins.

Northport has had plenty of opportunity to learn about the talents and abilities across their lineup, and for those who have been watching, there is plenty to be excited about — despite this early season loss to Sachem. The three players mentioned — and other players as well — have stepped up in previous games this season.



She's only a freshman and she's only 5 ft. 4 in., but Jackie Lukas stood tall in the lane against a Longwood player in this particular moment of the semifinal game of the Suffolk Shootout.

They did so again against Longwood, with the team operating under what to other teams might have been spirit-busting conditions: the absence, for example, of starting point guard and captain Lenore Bray (family travel) and backup center Liz Ommundsen (illness); the reduced court effectiveness for starting center Kerry Beach (somewhat hampered by a taped finger); and the fact that the quality of spirited play which guard Katie Angst brings to the game was lost in the second half (she fouled out).

In fact, the semifinal game against Longwood went down to the wire as Northport's stubborn opponents refused to cave in time and again. With only a couple of minutes remaining, Longwood stormed back from a five-point deficit, utilizing tenacious defense and a full court press. And with the Lady Tigers on top by a slim 39-38 margin, Longwood's defense was in there, breaking up attempts to bring the ball up court or even inbounds it. Eventually, they succeeded in getting the ball back with :26 remaining when Northport couldn't get its third inbounds within the five seconds allowed.

Let's say that again — with less than

30 seconds on the clock, Northport was only up by 1, and their persistent opponents had the ball. Fortunately for the Lady Tigers, the tide changed at that moment — and in their direction. To be precise, a Longwood player took THEIR inbounds pass, dribbled it a couple of times, and then fired a pass right into the hands of Northport's Kerry Beach. Beach looked down at the ball with some amazement, dribbled up court, and took what was to be one of Longwood's last second desperation efforts to foul the Lady Tigers and get back into the game.

It was of no avail, however. When Longwood finally did work the fouls to a one-and-one situation, pure-shooting Lauren Amen got the call to march to the foul line. Twice, in fact — the second time after a critical defensive rebound from forward Sarah Frost — and she sank three of four free shots to seal the 42-38 victory in the last few seconds of play.

While Northport was unable to muster its forces to overcome the skills of Sachem this time around, there is no reason to doubt that the team will be highly competitive as the season progresses. Last year, by way of illustration, the two teams in the finals were Sachem and Longwood — and the Lady Tigers had to settle for seats in the stands to watch the tournament finale.

And when you consider that last year's all-county guard Lenore Bray did a pretty effective job of containing Kazmarski in last year's Shootout, there's reason to believe that a healthy Northport squad can put itself in a position to challenge for post-season honors at the end of the season — and maybe even get a shot at Sachem again.

