

RECORD SPORTS

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Northport Drops Ball Against Longwood

By Jayson Blockside

For the Northport girls basketball team, last Friday's loss to Longwood was déjà vu all over again. After knocking off Smithtown in the first round of the playoffs, Northport lost to its old nemesis in a rematch of last year's second round playoff game.

Top seeded Longwood came into the playoffs with a 12-0 League I record. Northport, having finished the season strong at 9-3, was second in League II behind Connetquot. Though Longwood was favored, Northport felt ready for battle, especially after its first round playoff victory against Smithtown, said head coach Rick Castellano.

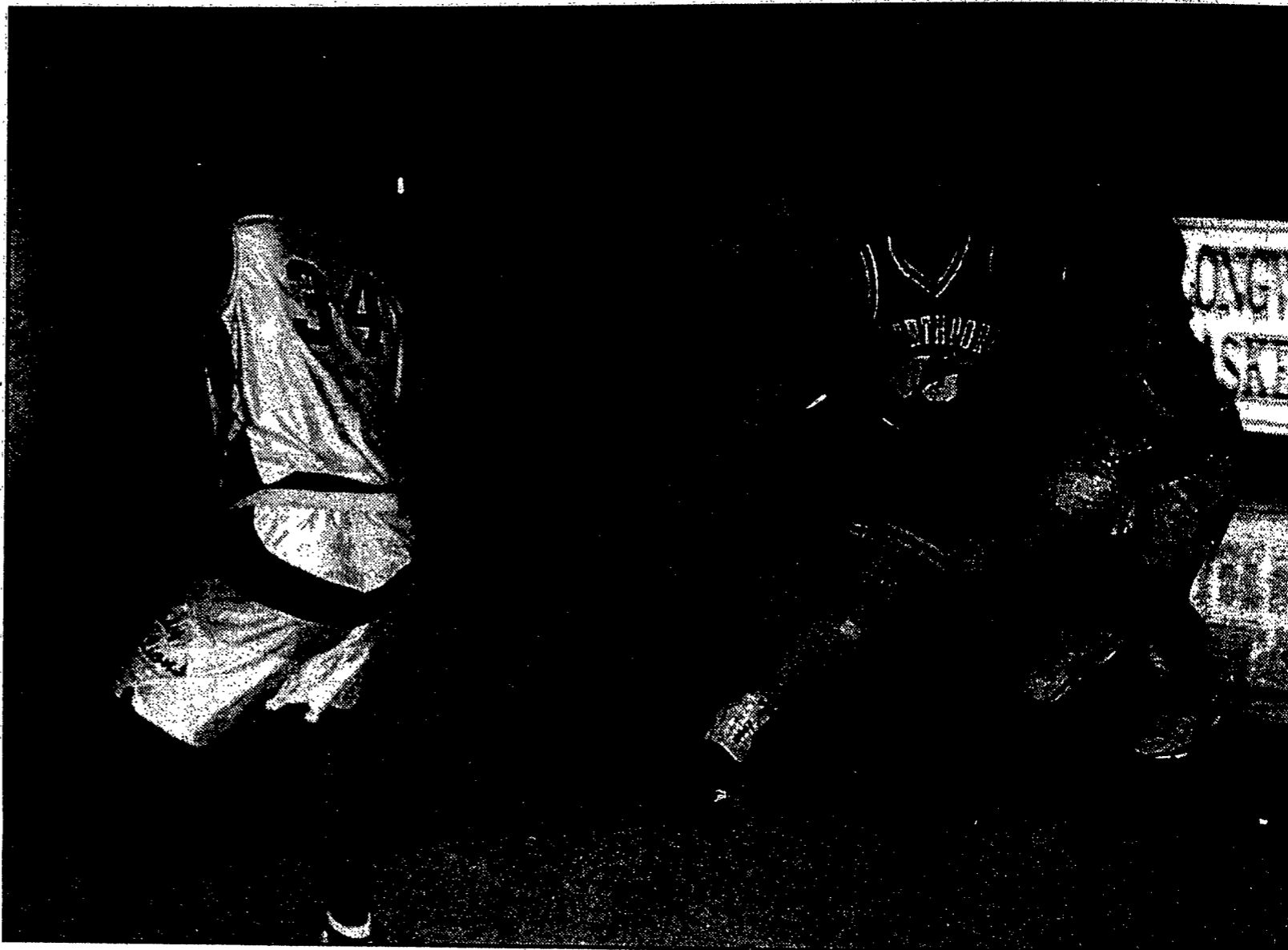
Northport reached the second round of the playoffs after beating Smithtown 59-51 last week. Although the Lady Tigers had blown a 14-point lead late in the third quarter, they were able to fight back to win the game.

Against Longwood, however, Northport never had the lead and were unable to catch up. Castellano gave credit to Longwood's aggressive play.

"I had scouted Longwood before. There weren't any surprises except that they played with more intensity than I saw before," he said. "They did to us what we did to Smithtown."

Just as Northport jumped ahead of Smithtown, Longwood did the same to the Tigers. Northport's Liz Ommundsen, Kerri Angst, Jackie Lukas and Stephanie Russo put the early points on the board in the first quarter to lock the score at 9-9 with 1:30 left. But in the final minute, Longwood scored 8 unanswered points between Danielle DeGiorgio, Keola Lee, Teelah Grimes and Melissa Dancholski.

Longwood's offense was potent, with Jeanne Baxter leading the way in the second quarter, nailing two 3-point shots. Though Northport was outscored 13-8, they showed signs of rallying midway through the quarter. Russo ended the scoring drought with a lay-up which was followed by a 3-point shot from Lukas. Erika Pepe grabbed her own rebound and put the ball in the



In the fourth quarter, senior Jenn Carbajal (6 points) drives to the basket, scoring 2 of her 6 points in the final minutes of the second round playoff game against Longwood.

basket to bring Northport within six.

In the final three minutes of the half, Longwood scored 8 unanswered points, while taking advantage of the Tigers' poor shooting. "We missed some easy stuff inside,"

said Castellano. "It is part of the game, you win that way and you lose that way." Longwood led at half time 30-17.

Castellano knew at the break that his team had to change the tempo of the game. "We were basically trying to slow them down and make them work for a basket. We put three forwards in to see if that could help us grab more rebounds," he said.

Although they played better under the boards, Castellano said that his team was unable to convert. "Their defense stopped us. We usually score more than 17 points in the half," he said.

In the third quarter, Angst scored first followed by Lukas who nailed her second 3-pointer. Afterwards, Longwood scored 11 unanswered points. Six of those points came from Baxter, who nailed her third and fourth 3-point shots of the game. Northport's hopes for a victory were pretty much dashed trailing 46-24 going into the fourth quarter.

While Northport outscored Longwood 17-9 in the last period, it wasn't enough to win. Seniors Jenn Carbajal and Russo scored 6 points each, while Angst hit a 3-pointer followed by a lay-up from Ommundsen. As the minutes ticked away, the Northport bench stood up with elbows locked praying for a miracle. One would not come as Northport lost 55-41.

The same story was told last year when Northport lost to Longwood in the second round of the playoffs after which Longwood went on to lose against Bellport in the semifinals. This year, Longwood defeated Bellport and will face Sachem in the finals.

"It is tough for the nine seniors when they play their last game," said Castellano, who had to console a tearful team. He was proud of his team's spirit this season and said that they never lost a game for lack of effort.

"I am blessed with girls who want to work hard and want to succeed," he said. He believes that the seniors were good role models for the younger kids and hopes that those lessons will rub off.

"I have a nice group of kids coming back so I'm looking forward to that," he said.



Northport players lock elbows and pray for a miracle that wouldn't happen as the final minutes tick away in a losing effort against Longwood last Friday.
Record Photos/Jayson Blockside