

Sports

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Three-peat a deep feat

Top-to-bottom talent carries Lady Tigers to another county crown

By JASON STROMBERG

Whitney Ahern and J.J. Diah may not be the best players on the Northport girls' basketball team or the go-to players down the stretch.

But what makes them so valuable to coach Rich Castellano and his staff during the last three seasons is that they epitomize what the Lady Tigers are all about: teamwork.

That was no different in No. 2 Northport's commanding 63-46 win over No. 4 Longwood in the Suffolk Class AA final on Friday, March 3 at St. Joseph's College—the Lady Tigers' third straight county title.

Ahern and Diah, who both play the forward positions as seniors, were monumental on the boards and on defense against Longwood senior guard/forward La'tasia Lee (18 points) and senior guard Danielle Jenkins (nine points). The two helped Northport rebound Longwood 47-32, with Ahern leading the way with a team-best 11 rebounds.

Northport improved to 21-3 overall after its Suffolk Overall championship win over Wyandanch (see story, page 30), and takes on Massapequa in a rematch of last year's Long Island Class AA championship game this Friday, March 10 at Longwood High School at 8 p.m.

"We're not a huge team," said co-captain Ahern, who stands side-by-side underneath the basket with the 5-11 Diah. "It's really important for us to box out. We work on that in practice and it shows in the game. Everyone gets rebounds."

Those rebounds translated into early buckets for the Lady Tigers, as they led 17-8 at the end of one.

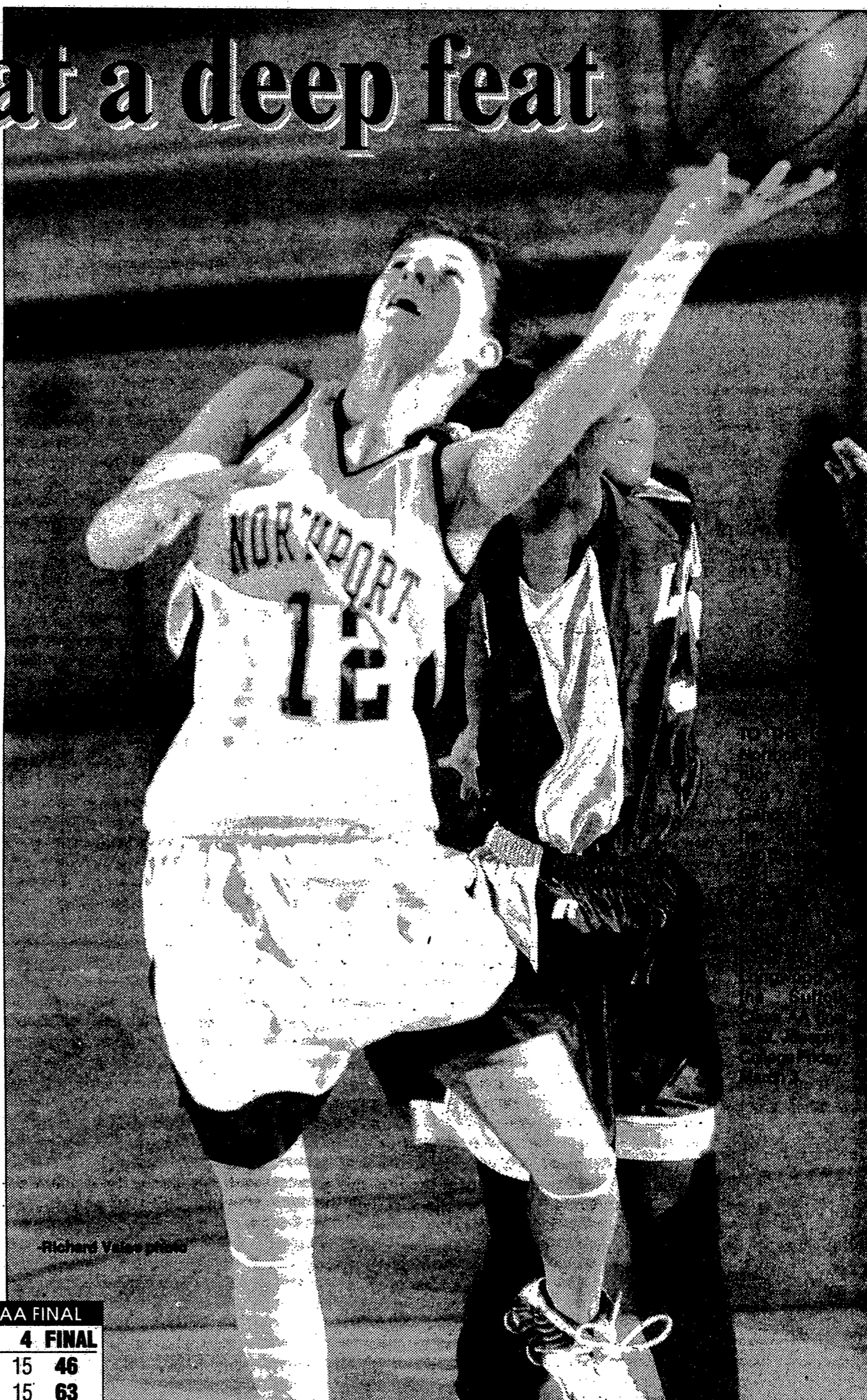
"It's all about the team and it's always about that," said Castellano, who didn't see Ahern score a single point in the game. "We don't care about stats. This team plays like a family."

After Lee put back a Jenkins missed free throw to give Longwood an 8-6 lead with three minutes left in the first quarter, the Lady Tigers closed out the first quarter with an 11-0 run, which was capped by senior guard Corrine Gandolfi and junior forward Francesca Volpe's combined 4-for-4 shooting from the strike.

As a team, Northport shot 7-for-8 in the first quarter, after which it led 17-8. The Lady Tigers finished 24-for-29 (83 percent) for the game.

"We had a pep talk before the game," said Northport junior guard Kiera Schiavetta, who had 16 points, six rebounds and four steals. "We wanted to go out strong and never let up."

Schiavetta and Lady Tigers senior co-captain guard Kelly Dunne made sure there wasn't a let-up in the second quarter. Dunne, who had 10 points and three steals, added to Northport's margin by sinking a



Richard Valeriani

GIRLS' HOOPS: SUFFOLK CLASS AA FINAL					
	1	2	3	4	FINAL
No. 4 Longwood	8	9	14	15	46
No. 2 NORTHPORT	17	20	11	15	63

three-pointer from the right wing to make it 20-8 with 7:03 left.

"We talked about how this is it," Dunne said. "We made sure we came out really strong. We told our team we knew they would be confident. I know how this team goes and when we do, we roll."

Gandolfi's three-pointer from the left wing gave

Northport a 23-12 lead with 5:43 left in the second quarter. Her dish to Schiavetta 32 seconds later resulted in an easy layup to make it 25-12.

Gandolfi's trey was the start of another big run for Northport. When freshman forward Samantha Breidenbach knocked down one of two free throws

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