

# Sports

The Observer

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Page 32

## Northport girls' basketball playoff preview

# No such thing as a free first round

### Castellano: We'd rather be playing because we don't want to lose edge

By JASON STROMBERG

As it prepared to make a run for a second straight Long Island championship, the Northport girls' basketball team had to wait around a little longer than everyone else. Thanks to a perfect regular-season record, the Lady Tigers earned a bye in the first round, much to the delight of head coach Rich Castellano, right?

Wrong, said the 25th-year head coach. "East Islip could have been the No. 16 seed at 6-6 if they had beaten West Islip [in the regular-season finale February 12]. Then we wouldn't have gotten a bye," Castellano said. "We didn't want a bye because we don't want to lose the edge."

With 15 teams having made the tournament, Northport (12-0 League II, 19-0 overall) got to rest its players while the rest of the teams duked it out in the first round February 15. The Lady Tigers open the postseason in the quarterfinal round Friday, February 18 against Longwood at Northport High School, 6 p.m. Last year Northport defeated Longwood, 83-68, in the Class AA semi-

final at Smithtown High School. La'tasia Lee had 29 points in the game, but Northport had seven players score at least eight points.

In the meantime, Northport senior forward Ali Fourney got a chance to rest the partially torn ligament in her left knee, which has been bothering her since she returned to action January 18 against Walt Whitman. Even when Fourney came out of the game noticeably limping on her left knee against Sachem North in the regular-season finale, Castellano was a little wary of putting her back in the game. That is when Fourney's motivation began to show, according to Castellano. "She talked me into going in," Castellano said of the 6-0 forward, who has com-

(Continued on page 29)



**SUFFOLK CLASS AA QUARTERFINALS: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18**  
No. 9 Longwood @ No. 1 Northport, 6 p.m.

**IF NECESSARY:**

**SUFFOLK CLASS AA SEMIFINALS: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23**  
No. 5 Commack/No. 4 Sachem North winner vs. No. 1 Northport, @ Longwood H.S., 8 p.m.

**SUFFOLK CLASS AA CHAMPIONSHIP GAME: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25**  
Pat-Med, Whitman, Smithtown or North Babylon vs. No. 1 Northport, @ St. Joseph's College, 8 p.m.



**REIGNING CHAMPS:**  
The rebounding of Ali Fourney, the defense of Kelly Dunne, the court sense of Kiera Schiavetta and Corrine Gandolfi, and the bench play of Almog Cohen (clockwise, from top right) should help the Lady Tigers repeat as Suffolk Class AA champions. Their title defense begins with a quarterfinal game against Longwood February 18 at 6 p.m.  
- Richard Valeo file photos  
- Rob Cuni photo (Fourney)

