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STORY

Hustling Kings get shot down

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Saint Paul goes on a late rally to defeat Port Lions in the fifth/sixth place game at the Region 1A tournament

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Article published on Monday, March 12th, 2007

By DEREK CLARKSTON
Mirror Writer

PORT LIONS — Before the Port Lions Kings took the floor for the last time this season, head coach Dana Strong emphasized to his basketball team to relax and have fun in front of their home crowd.

They did just that for the better part of their game against Saint Paul.

The Kings displayed what Port Lions basketball is all about. — hustle, hustle and more hustle.

They displayed the heart of a champion going up against the quicker Sea Patriots.

But, when it was all said and done, a 13-2 Saint Paul run at the end of the game ended Port Lions season in an 83-72 physically and draining fifth/sixth-place game at the Region 1A boys basketball tournament Sunday in Port Lions.

“They played hard and they gave it all they had,” Strong said. “In reality we had the tempo we wanted. We just had a couple of people that got into foul trouble. I thought we were going to pull away in the fourth. I’m still not sure how we lost it.”

It might have been because the Sea Patriots just wanted it more.

Saint Paul, in the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, has been away from home for the past 18 days. They traveled to Anchorage to play four games nearly three weeks ago, because they thought the region tournament was supposed to be last week. Those were the first games of their season, in which they earned a split.

Saint Paul head coach Michael Baldwin reminded his team of the struggles it took to get here at halftime and they responded with greatness.

“We were talking a lot about where we came from,” he said. “At halftime I gave them a speech and I told them the score was 0-0. It’s a new game and you got to step up and the boys did that. The intensity was there.”

Saint Paul sophomore Neon Kruffoff heard the message the loudest. The 5-foot-8 guard scored 22 of his game-high 39 points during the fourth quarter.

“Neon steeped up big time. He hasn’t been doing his thing,” Baldwin said. “When we get all three guards running we are pretty unstoppable.”

With the score knotted at 71-71 after Greg Lukin threaded the needle to Randy Boskofsky for a lay in with 2:01 left, Kruffoff and Co. took over.

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Saint Paul's Shane Baldwin started the game-ending run with a pretty drive inside to give Saint Paul the lead for good at 73-71; just 20 seconds after Boskofsky tied the game.

Kruffoff then scored two consecutive baskets, his second with 54 seconds left to give the Sea Patriots a 77-71 advantage.

"They were beating us up and down the floor at that point," Strong said. "I guess we tired. I'm not sure. Maybe I should have subbed in some players a little bit earlier. I told some of the boys I was going to let them go as long as they could go."

Lukin and Jeremy Kewan both came up big for the Kings.

Lukin lead the team with 25 points and made several magical drives inside, while Kewan, a 5-foot-6 freshman guard, energized the team and the crowd with his all-round hustle. He finished with 20 points, which included four 3-pointers – two of them of the banked variety.

Charlea Kewan, Jeremy's sister and one of four girls on the team, added 14 points from her post position.

For the first 30 minutes of the game, both teams never lead by a margin of more than six points as each team fired up shot after shot. With each team hitting big shot after big shot.

"It was exciting, both teams played their hardest," Strong said. "It must have been a fun game to watch for the fans, but not much for a coach."

It was Bush basketball at its finest.

There were 144 shots attempted – 71 from Port Lions and 73 from Saint Paul – and 63 of them went through the nets.

In all there were eight ties and 12 lead changes throughout the game.

"This is Bush basketball," Strong said. "This is what it is. It's hard to get them to settle down and treat each possession like it is important. They just go out there and start winging it."

Port Lions closed out the season with a 12-3 record going 1-2 during the tournament. They lost to Koliganek Saturday and beat island rival Ouzinkie Sunday morning.

Saint Paul wraps up the season at 4-3, going 2-1 during the tournament.

SEA PATRIOTS 83, KINGS 72

Saint Paul 11 24 17 29 - 83

Port Lions 15 20 16 21 - 72

Saint Paul (83) – Melovidov 2, Chapman 4, Krukoff 39, Baldwin 18, Rukovishnikoff 4, Fratis 2. FG – 36-73 (.493). FT – 5-12.

Port Lions (72) – J. Kewan 20, Strong, Nelson 2, Robo, C. Kewan 14, Bostofsky 8, Lukin 25, D.J. Kewan 3. FG - 27-71 (.380). FT – 12-22.

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