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SPORTS

**PREPS**  
BOYS' BASKETBALL STATE TOURNAMENT

CLASS 2A SEMIFINALS ANNANDALE 62, CALEDONIA 55

**'Core four' leads North into final**

Polars' senior group is looking for its first state championship

By HEATHER RULE  
Special to the Star Tribune

From Day 1 at Minneapolis North, De'Melo Anderson, Jacob Butler, Rio Sanders and Willie Wilson dubbed themselves the "core four."

"This is their senior year. They have everything that they have not done," North coach Larry McKenzie said. "That's why we have a state championship."

The "core four" and the rest of the top-seeded Polars got a game away from that last check mark after a 71-63 victory over No. 3 seed Morris Area/Chokio-Alberta in Friday's first boys' basketball Class 2A semifinal game at Williams Arena.

The Polars (27-6) trailed 8-4, but that was a blip on the radar as they went on a 19-0 run to grab the lead for good. Though the Tigers kept it a close game, getting within a point at 49-48, the Polars always put some distance between them. Making 10 of 21 free throws helped.

"When we make our mistakes, we know what exactly it was right away," Butler said. "So when adversity comes, we don't ever break down, because we've seen games like this before."

Anderson also celebrated 1,000 career points during the game. He led the Polars with 19 points.

Tigers 6-8 senior center Jackson Loge had 37 points, Herbomand and right-blocked shots.

The Tigers (28-4) came within a game of reaching the final for the first time since 1994. "We were right there," said coach Mark Trapperson. "The fact that we got back into it in the second half was a credit to these kids."

ANNANDALE'S CARSON GAGNON DROVE TO THE BASKET IN THE CAROLINA VICTORY OVER CALEDONIA IN A CLASS 2A SEMIFINAL GAME.

DARL J. HENNINGSEN - SportsTiger

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**Annandale rallies as Gagnon scores 30**

By HEATHER RULE  
Special to the Star Tribune

"That really got me going," said Gagnon, who scored 30 points.

Annandale 6-6 senior forward Robert Olson got going, too, with a pair of two-handed dunks.

After Gagnon's fifth three-pointer of the second half, the rest of red Annandale fans held up signs with letters and numbers: "CARSON 1000," for his career milestone in points. He finished 16-for-14 from the No. 3-seeded Cardinals put on a show in a 62-55 victory over No. 2 seed Caledonia in the boys' basketball Class 2A semifinals at Williams Arena.

Annandale trailed by 10 before cutting the deficit to 26-20 at the half, and Cardinals senior Carson Gagnon then propelled his team's 26-6 second-half run. He set the tone when he drained a three-pointer only 12 seconds into the second half.

"We had a really nice first half," Gagnon said. "Second half we had a hard time scoring the basketball."

Caledonia shot 37% for the game, 33% in the second half.

Annandale (10-2) will face top-seeded Minneapolis North on Saturday while riding a 25-game winning streak.

MINNEAPOLIS NORTH'S RIO SANDERS DROVE FOR A LAYUP IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE POLAR VICTORY OVER MORRIS AREA/CHOKIO-ALBERTA ON FRIDAY AT WILLIAMS ARENA. SANDERS FINISHED WITH 11 POINTS.

DARL J. HENNINGSEN - SportsTiger

CLASS 1A SEMIFINALS HAYFIELD 72, CHERRY 61

Hayfield's Justin Fritcher reached for a loose ball with Cherry's Isaiah Asuma, right, in pursuit.

CHEERY, A. MYERS - SportsTiger

**Hayfield still standing despite 36 points from Tigers' Asuma**

By MATTHEW DAVIS  
Special to the Star Tribune

Cherry gave defending state champion Hayfield everything it could handle before Hayfield's Vikings took care of business Friday, winning 72-61 and returning to the Class 1A title game.

"They were so scrappy," Hayfield coach Chris Pack said of Cherry. "We had to be strong with the ball inside. We finished really well."

Hayfield (12-2) found its second gear in a tight game with an 8-0 run right before halftime to take a 32-30 lead.

Junior guard Ethan Pack, the coach's son, led the Vikings with 19 points and helped his team finally pull away.

Asuma went up for the Vikings in the second half as the lead grew to double digits, and the Tigers (27-0) couldn't get closer than seven points.

"We're very proud of our guys," Cherry coach Jordan Christensen said. "We were always too small [and] always too young. These guys just scraped all year."

Cherry's Isaac Asuma, a sophomore, exploded for 36 points. Asuma was 6-for-10 from three-point range and connected on 14 of 20 on shots overall.

"We knew he was going to get his points," Chris Pack said. "Our goal was to keep him between 15 and 25, so it didn't work. He shot really well from the outside. Some of those, it didn't matter what we did."

Hayfield will play Belgrade-Brocton-Elrosa for the championship. Vikings junior guard Isaac Matti said they won't celebrate Friday's win long.

"We're not satisfied with this one," Matti said. "We're onto the next game. We didn't come here just to get this far."

CLASS 1A SEMIFINALS BELGRADE-BROCTON-ELROSA 55, NEW LIFE ACADEMY 53

Eyes were on the rebound and New Life's Erick Reader after Reader missed a dunk attempt.

CHEERY, A. MYERS - SportsTiger

**New Life Academy's bid ends with Jaguars' defensive stand**

By MATTHEW DAVIS  
Special to the Star Tribune

Belgrade-Brocton-Elrosa junior guard Kadon Pieper explained why he and his Jaguars teammates shut down New Life Academy's final chance with ease in a 55-53 victory in the Class 1A semifinals Friday.

"We lost two buzzer-beaters during the regular season," Pieper said.

Belgrade-Brocton-Elrosa forced a turnover as time expired and the Eagles never got a shot off after the Jaguars (28-4) broke a 25-all tie by making two free throws with 11.7 seconds remaining. It concluded a wild final minute of play.

"It feels like a blur to me," Jaguars coach Chris Anderson said.

Luke Diemann-drew-a-foul with 12.7 seconds remaining, and made both free throws to give the Jaguars a two-point lead. Diemann finished with 13 points, as did Pieper.

The Jaguars led 53-50 before New Life's Colton Hendricks tied it up with a three-point play with 16.1 left.

Senior guard Kollin Kaemling led New Life Academy (27-4) with 23 points, boosted by 4-for-8 shooting from three-point range. Junior guard Maxwell Briggs added 12 points.

"I was going in confident," Kaemling said. "I don't doubt the game before, and then, I got real used to the rim."

New Life Academy coach Robbie Whitney said he was "super grateful" for his team to experience a game like this in the state tournament.

"Those are the games that you remember forever, in an arena like this with a crowd like this coming down to a co-possession game," he said.