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PREPS
BOYS' BASKETBALL STATE TOURNAMENT

CLASS 2A FINAL ANNANDALE 60, MINNEAPOLIS NORTH 49



The Annandale Cardinals had plenty to yell about after beating Minneapolis North 60-49 for the Class 2A championship on Saturday.

Annandale wins first title

The Cardinals led by seven points at halftime and kept the top-seeded Polars from rallying.

BY HEATHER RULE
Special to the Star Tribune

Annandale thrives on second-half comebacks. In Saturday's Class 2A championship, the Cardinals were up by seven at the break.

"Ingoing. Oh boy, we've got to find a way to make sure they understand the second half is not the one that gets away from us," Annandale coach Skip Dolan said. "Because the other ones, we've dominated."

The longtime coach didn't have to worry. His Cardinals kept top-seeded Minneapolis North at bay at Williams Arena, ending with a 60-49 upset victory and Annandale's first state title in program history.

"That winning feeling was completely unbelievable" for senior Hawkin Miller, who led the No. 3-seeded Cardinals (19-1) with 18 points.

"We've all dreamed about this, along with every other kid in the country, probably," Miller said.

The Polars (22-7) fell just short of a state title for the second time in four years, also finishing second in 2009. Seniors De'Mello Anderson and Will Wilson each scored 14 points, but it wasn't enough.

"If you look at the stats, you can't win if you don't put the ball in the basket," Polars coach Larry McKenzie said. "They shot the ball a lot better than we did."

The one thing that we did not do today, and [it] is important to our style of play, is we just didn't control tempo."

Minneapolis North shot 42% from the field, but was only 3-6e-39 from long range, with two three-pointers coming in the closing minutes.



Polars guard Will Wilson blocked a shot by Annandale's Robert Olson in the second half Saturday. For the third-seeded Cardinals shot the ball better than Minneapolis North and won by 11 points.

CLASS 1A FINAL HAYFIELD 51, BELGRADE-BROOKTON-EROSA 49

Comeback makes repeat a reality

Hayfield rally begins with three, ends with clinching free throws.

BY PATRICK JOHNSON
Special to the Star Tribune

Defending state champion Hayfield came out of the locker room down eight points to start the second half. That's when junior guard Isaac Marti took over.

Marti scored the Vikings' first 11 points of the second half on the way to a game-high 27 points, and top-seeded Hayfield (27-2) snatched all six of its free throws in crunch time in a 31-49 victory over second-seeded Belgrade-Brookton-Erosa (28-5) in the Class 1A boys' basketball state championship Saturday at Williams Arena.

"He's been our guy all year," Hayfield senior forward Easton Fritcher said of Marti. "When it came down to the end we wanted him to get his shots because he's the best player on this team. He hits his big shots when it matters and that's what he did today."

With Hayfield down 29-21 at the half, Marti sank three consecutive three-pointers in the first three minutes of the second half to make it a one-point game.

"I knew it was probably time to start making some big shots and I did," said Marti, who had 10 points in the first half. "I got on back with 32 seconds remaining and Belgrade-Brookton-Erosa had the ball with a chance to tie it. However, Fritcher stole the ball, was fouled and hit both halves of free-throw-and-our top Hayfield senior guard Robert Foster was fouled and hit the remaining free throws. And the celebration was on."

"I'm the greatest free-throw shooter," said Fritcher, who shot 46 percent from the line this year. "I know I can make them. It doesn't show on the stat line, but I knew I needed to step up. I just took a deep breath and I sank them."

For Belgrade-Brookton-Erosa, brothers Ashton and Luke Diagnmann combined for 25 of the Jaguars' 49 points in the game. Ashton, a senior, had 20 points and six rebounds. Luke, a sophomore, had 15 points and five rebounds.

The Diagnmann brothers scored 21 of Belgrade-Brookton-Erosa's first 25 points in the Jaguars' 25-21 half-time lead. In its fourth state tournament appearance, Belgrade-Brookton-Erosa, which won Class 1A titles in 2002 and 2004, led the entire first half and by as many as 11 points.

North did so in 2016 and 2017. Fritcher added 11 points, eight rebounds and three assists in his final game for Hayfield.

"Whatever happened it was our last game," Fritcher said. "Winning is definitely better than losing it. It's definitely a sigh of relief. It feels good to win it all again."

In the closing moments Hayfield made its free throws when it mattered most.

It was a three-point game

only we'd be briefly, when the Polars had a 9-2 size to make a 9-14 lead.

Dolan called a timeout with 7:02 left in the first half, the Cardinals went back to getting layups off cuts and down to the baskets. They led 30-23 at the half and were never in trouble again, pulling away for a 60-49 victory and Annandale's first-ever state title.

The coach brought four of his five senior starters to a postgame interview session. He talked of the great optimism with that collection—all three open athletes, 2-2 to start the season with some leeway football injuries, and then a 29-0 finish.

As Annandale was winding down its media session, North coach Larry McKenzie and most of his players were arriving outside the small interview room.

Dolan followed his players to the door. A couple of Cardinals offered brief congratulations to the Polars, the traditional "good game," but then Dolan stopped.

"This did not come off as a rival coach trying to win a sportsmanship medal, but rather sincere congratulations to North players that had been through much, kept fighting to the end on Saturday and were a 'class act' on the floor and off."

"I wish you the best," Dolan said. "I'm going to be following you where you go after high school, and I'm sure there will be great things."

Dolan then shook hands with McKenzie and headed toward the long hallway to the locker room, was standing there and we also shook hands. Then, before I could mention it, Dolan said:

"Did you hear what happened with that team last night? I can't stand what's going on. I don't know how we're going to get a handle on this."

North had defeated Morris Area/Chaska-Alberta and its outstanding center, Jackson Lago, in Friday night's semifinal. Late in the night, there was a social media message sent directly to North's Facebook containing serious racial slurs.

It came from a non-playing student in one of those high schools involved in the sports cooperative.

McKenzie talked in the interview room about his team's issues in this loss—an inability to make long shots, layups allowed on drives and drives, and Annandale handling the Polars' trademark pressure—and then was asked about the racist message sent directly to his player.

"We don't have United States of America," McKenzie said.

"There's a lot of divide. And I'll tell you as somebody who's 40-plus years old, the more things change, the more they stay the same."

"And I think it's getting worse. This is not just a (Minnesota State) High School League responsibility, but it's all of our responsibility as a community. That cannot be acceptable behavior."

"I'm a believer that there is no greater tool in terms of fighting racism and the divide than athletics. Athletics bring people together, right? And it's not the athletes, but it's those folks out there that allow young people—"

"Where did he learn that at? I think that was the first time he did that. Where did he learn that type of behavior?"

McKenzie also said this of his team, representing a North community that remains shocked by the murder of Dushane Hill. It's a North sophomore and athlete, on Feb. 9.

"I'm proud of these young men in terms of what they've gone through. Being a teenager at 17 and 18 years old, and losing a close-mate and a teammate, that's not common in a community. Missing almost a year and a half of school because of COVID and then teachers decide to walk out and not having school for 10 more days ..."

This senior group, in 2020, COVID hit and they don't get to finish that season. They've gone through more adversity than any other group of kids could probably face in their lifetimes."

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