

Examiner Sports Kisses & Swishes!



RAY GALLAGHER PHOTO

Putnam Valley Crowned Class B Hardwood Queens for 3rd-Straight Year #OnToStates

Putnam Valley sophomore Brianna Foody (L) and junior MVP Eva DeChent kiss the coveted gold ball after the reigning Section 1 Class B Tigers won their second Section 1 title since 2020 to go along with last year's COVID-shortened Northern Westchester/Putnam Small School regional championship. The Tigers, who saw DeChent drop a game-high 22 points, advanced to the NYSPHSAA tournament where they will face Section 9 champion Red Hook Wednesday (4:30 p.m.) at Yorktown High School... see Girls' Class B Hoops Notebook

Live & Learn!



RAY GALLAGHER PHOTO

Youthful No.3 Panas Gives All, Falls to No.1 Tappan Zee in Class A Finals

Panas freshman G Cadence Nicholas sinks a wild, off-balance bank shot in the third-seeded Panthers' 59-40 Section 1 Class A title setback to top-seeded Tappan Zee Sunday at Yorktown High where Nicholas' youthful Panthers (20-4) got a taste of what they need to work on in order to get back to the 2023 title tilt... see Class A Girls' Hoops Notebook

Sports

NWE/Putnam Class B Girls' Hoops Notebook

Putnam Valley Peaks in Prime Time, Wins 3rd Straight Title

State-Ranked No.15 Tigers to Face Section 9 Champ Red Hook in State Tourney



Members of the Putnam Valley team pose with Section 1 Class B gold ball after beating Irvington 52-46 for 3rd-straight title Saturday at Yorktown.

By Tony Pinciario & Ray Gallagher

PUTNAM VALLEY faced a daunting path toward a possible Section 1 Class B Girls' Basketball Championship. The Tigers were seeded fifth and if the seeds held true, they would have to beat No.4 Bronxville, top-seeded Hastings and then second-seeded Irvington and legendary Coach Gina Maher. The bumps along the road were a combination of craters and sinkholes the Tigers would need to navigate.

After eliminating Bronxville in the quarterfinal round, state-ranked (No.15) Putnam Valley completed its run to the title game with a 51-45 semifinal victory over No.7 Hastings. The Tigers added the

exclamation point with a 52-46 triumph over No.13 Irvington to win the Section Class B title at Yorktown High School Saturday.

Putnam Valley, now 17-7 this season, will play Section 9 champion Red Hook, Wednesday, 4:30 p.m., in a regional semifinal at Yorktown. The winner will face the Section 8-Section 11 victor in a regional final (TBA).

This is Putnam Valley's third consecutive championship. The Tigers won the Class B title in 2020, but they, along with all sectional champions that winter, were denied a chance at a state title because Covid canceled the state championships. Last year, Putnam Valley was the Northern Westchester/Putnam Small-School



First-year Put Valley Coach Don Hamlin takes time to thank Tigers fans for support after title-clinching 52-46 win over Irvington Saturday.

RAY GALLAGHER PHOTOS



Put Valley Tigers held off Irvington, 52-46, to celebrate 3rd-straight Class B title Saturday at Yorktown High.

Champion, beating Class A Walter Panas in the final.

"This entire season we had so many goals, but the main goal was to win the sectional title," senior G Amanda Orlando said. "Honestly, for the seniors, Natalie Mazza and LeAnn Keeler, and especially for me, growing up and going through the Putnam Valley girls' basketball program, I wanted to win for my last year and wanted to show we still have the talent and energy to win"

The season began with a myriad of issues, including a new coach after the district decided to pass on former Coach Kristi Dini.

"It was hard to transition to a different coach, but that didn't stop us," Orlando said. "Coach Don (Hamlin) has been the biggest help the whole season and he got us to do what we wanted to do."

Even though Putnam Valley owned a

victory over Irvington during the regular season, it did not come into the final overconfident. It's difficult enough beating a Gina Maher-coached-team once during the season, let alone twice. However, fueled by a tough defense and DeChent's instant offense (18 points in the first half), Putnam Valley led at halftime and never relinquished it.

"We didn't go cocky, but we were humble and mentally ready for Irvington because we knew it was hard to beat them and their fantastic coach," Orlando said. "Irvington and Hastings are similar, so we started out in the same defense as we did against Hastings. Then we switched up our defense after multiple possessions to confuse Irvington. We started in a 2-3 then switched to man."

"Offensively, we all know each other and we know our strengths, so we did

continued on next page



PV players went to the stands to join fans after winning third-straight Class B title Saturday at Yorktown High.



Put Valley senior Amanda Orlando plants one on coveted gold ball after Tigers copped 3rd-straight Class B title Saturday at Yorktown High.



Put Valley Coach Don Hamlin is greeted by jubilant Tigers after they clinched 3rd-straight Class B title Saturday at Yorktown High.

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everything in our power to make sure we were getting the job done offensively. We wanted this so bad and I think our energy was the best it's ever been this season."

DeChent, the tournament MVP, finished with 22 points, 13 rebounds, three blocks and eight steals. Nai Torres played fearlessly, adding 13 ultra-clutch points while Orlando grabbed seven rebounds.

Hamlin inherited a well-trained team that had all the pieces in place under former Coach Kristi Dini, but there were inherent issues, on and off the court, which Hamlin needed to manage while getting to know their personalities.

"My job was to just get them on the same page," Coach Hamlin said. "They went through what they went through before the start of the season. High school kids shouldn't have to worry about that stuff. They should know

their coach is there and it's all good at the start of the season, but I would say the last three or four weeks they finally bonded and started doing things together, and honestly, winning the gold ball was great, but seeing them bond and do things together was heartwarming.

"Eva was Eva," Coach Hamlin added. "She was on fire in that first half and I kept insisting we feed her and get her the ball. What are we waiting for? Swing the ball back to her, she's gonna knock it down. When you've got a kid hot like that, as good as she is, you have to get her the ball. Nai Torres came up with some huge shots down the stretch and played fearless tonight. She's come a long way."

DeChent, the URI-bound sniper, put the team on her back in

the first half.

"I've been shooting a lot the past couple of days to get ready," DeChent said, "so I knew that this was going to be our biggest game and challenge, tougher than any other game we had this season. We know how bad they want to beat us, so we needed to come out with as much energy as we could and do the best we could. Nai (Torres) brought up the energy when we were down, too. The feeling is amazing."

Torres was sensational in the

second half, coming of age before the eyes of Section. The hybrid guard scored 13 points, dished three dimes and grabbed four boards to secure an All-Tourney nod along with Orlando (5 points, 7 rebounds), Natalie Mazza (5 points, 6 rebounds) and Brianna Foody (5 points). Hastings had defeated Putnam Valley during the regular season, but the Tigers came into the semifinal game focused, defensively.

"We switched our defense and we prepared for every possible

situation both mentally and physically," said Orlando, who will attend Manhattanville College in September and continue playing basketball. "We wanted to shut down their top offensive player. We executed our defense so that they couldn't get the ball inside to her by playing a box-and-one. Nai (Torres) and Eva (DeChent) switched off on her. When she got the ball, we applied pressure by doubling her."

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Put Valley's Amanda Orlando (M) and Brianna Foody (R) are quick to celebrate with Angie Anzano after Tigers clinched 3rd-straight title Saturday.



Put Valley junior G Eva DeChent sinks two of her game-high 22 points en route to MVP performance in Class B title win.



Putnam Valley G Ava Harman sinks a hoop in Tigers' 52-46 Class B title-clinching win over Irvington Saturday at Yorktown.

Sports

NWE/Putnam Class A Girls' Hoops Notebook

Panas Preps for Future in Class A Title Loss to Tappan Zee

Mahopac Falls to TZ in Class A Semis

By Tony Pinciario & Ray Gallagher

WALTER PANAS may not have come home with the Section 1 Class A Girls' Basketball Championship, but the Panthers stamped themselves a sectional favorite going into the 2022-23 season after an incredible 2022 campaign that came up just short of a sectional title.

The Panthers, seeded third in the tournament, defeated second-seeded Harrison, 56-41, in a semifinal behind 13 points and 11 rebounds each from Kelsey Cregan and Julia Gallinger. Sofia Tavaréz added 12 points and Cadence Nicholas had 11 points.

"In the semis we won by playing together as a unit and all five our starters scored a good amount," Cregan said.

Panas ran into a buzzsaw in the final against top-seeded Tappan Zee. The Dutchies, 22-1 entering the game, beat the Panthers, 59-40 in the final to win their second sectional title since 2019.

State-ranked (No.2) Tappan Zee led 20-8 after the first quarter and 37-18 at the half. Youthful, state-ranked (No.21) Panas finished the season with a 20-4 record, and understands what it needs to do in order to secure a sectional title next season.

"The first quarter we were definitely very nervous and Tappan Zee came out ready to play," Cregan said. "The second half showed we could compete with them had we played like that from the start."

It was Panas' first championship-game appearance during Coach Matt Evangelista's tenure.



Panas F Julia Gallinger drops a well-placed dime in Panthers' 59-40 Class A title loss to Tappan Zee Sunday at Yorktown High.



Panas freshman G Sophia Tavaréz goes for two in Panthers' 59-40 Class A title loss to Tappan Zee Sunday at Yorktown High.

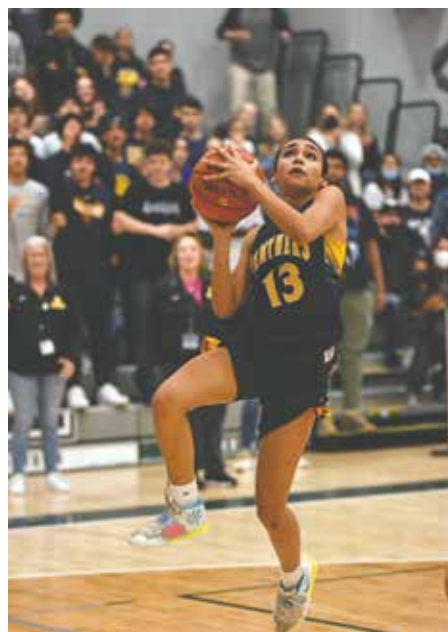
The good news for Evangelista and Panas fans is that the starting five returns next year, led by Captain Cregan, a walking double-double (12) this season.

"Playing in the final was an amazing experience and we proved so many people wrong by getting there," Cregan said. "We are definitely very excited for next season and we know what we are capable of. We are

going to continue to build for next season."

Next season is already in the works with freshman G Cadence Nicholas (16 points and six rebounds), freshman G Sophia Tavaréz (10 points, four rebounds, three assists), Cregan (eight points, six rebounds) and many others

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With her student body behind her, Panas freshman Sophia Tavaréz drops an easy bucket in Panthers' 59-40 Class A title loss to TZ Sunday.



Despite an obvious foul, Panas F Kelsey Cregan deals with being hacked in Panthers' 59-40 Class A title loss to TZ Sunday.



Panas junior Sarah Chiuli tries to penetrate Dutchmen D in Tappan Zee's 59-40 win over Panas in Section 1 Class A Girls Championship Sunday at Yorktown High.



Panas freshman Cadence Nicholas fires from downtown in Panthers' 59-40 Class A title loss to No.1 Tappan Zee Sunday at Yorktown High.

Sports

NWE/Putnam Boys' Hoops Notebook

Heartbreaking Ending Foils Haldane's Bid for Gold Ball

By Ray Gallagher

Examiner Sports Editor @Directrays

It had been five years since Haldane High had savored the sweetness of championship valor; its last title coming at the tail end of the Blue Devils most sustained run in school history – the great three-peat of 2014-16, which saw Haldane reach the NYSPHSAA Class C finals before all was said and done behind former greats like Peter Hoffmann and Edmund Fitzgerald. That was Haldane's last road trip to Glens Falls, home of the NYS Final 4.

Always among the best-coached teams in Section 1 under Joe Virgadamo – the prideful Haldane alum – the top-seeded Blue Devils (19-3) will have to wait another year to hoist the coveted gold ball.

Haldane squandered a 13-point first-quarter lead (15-2) and allowed No.2 Hamilton to recover from its dreadful start en route to a 53-51 triumph for the Raiders' second straight Section 1 Class C championship Saturday at Yorktown High School.

The Raiders (17-5) will challenge Section 9's Chester in a regional semifinal Wednesday (6:30 p.m.) at Yorktown High

School.

Hamilton's horrific start was matched only by its stunning conclusion. The two teams combined to miss five consecutive three throws in the waning seconds, including three by Haldane, which had a chance to win or tie the game with 0.3 seconds left after getting fouled behind the arc. After a pair of misses, the Blue Devils intentionally missed the third in the hopes of a game-tying put-back, which never came to fruition, thus ending a terrific 2022 campaign.

"This one is tough," Virgadamo said. "We left it out there for 32 minutes. Proud of my guys, we never quit. Our defensive intensity was on point, but Savage hit some big shots. We missed some shots in the fourth that usually fall.

"We have a lot to be proud of and I'm thankful for what we accomplished," he added. "It will take a while to get over this one, though. I'm going to miss the seniors but they kept Haldane basketball on the map. The returners are hungry and hopefully we can come back next year and win it for everyone."

Blue Devil wing Soren Holmbo (12 points) was hot in the first half and his jumper with 3:10 left in the first spotted the Blue Devils 15-2 lead. The Raiders responded with nine consecutive points, trimming the lead to 25-19 at halftime #GameOfficiallyOn.



Haldane G Tristen Reid soars for two in Blue Devils' 53-51 Section 1 Class C title loss to Hamilton and Jaylen Savage (21) Saturday at Yorktown.

Hamilton's Chris Harper's trey gave the Raiders their first lead, 28-27, with 5:29 to go in the third, and the Class C rivals traded punches from the point forward. Haldane G Tristen Reid made like Magic Johnson with a coast-to-coast finish to tie the game at 37 after three quarters. Hamilton's feisty G Chris Ward dropped a three off the top of the key just 1:51 into the fourth, which allowed Hamilton to grab the lead for good. After a slow start, Hamilton F Jaylen Savage scored 21 of his game-high 22 points bridging the second and third quarters, and was named MVP.

Robert Viggiano scored 14 points to lead the Blue Devils and the Raiders did a terrific job of limiting Haldane's junior hotshot Matteo Cervone to 13 points, two steals and



Haldane G Ryan Irwin tries to gain lane in Blue Devils' 53-51 Section 1 Class C title loss to Hamilton Saturday at Yorktown.



Haldane Coach Joe Virgadamo and Blue Devil fans disagree with ref on call in 53-51 Class C title loss to Hamilton Saturday at Yorktown.



Haldane players and fans begin to come to terms with the top-seeded Blue Devils' 53-51 Class C title loss at Yorktown Saturday.

a block.

In Haldane's 67-59 semifinal win over Leffell last Tuesday, Cervone had gone off for a career-high 37 points to snatch a victory that was closer than expected. Hamilton would not allow an encore performance from Cervone and made it tough on the All-Section swingman.

Blue Devil F Matthew Nachamkin was everywhere, scoring 10 points, hoarding nine rebounds, swatting two blocks and dishing three assists while Ryan Irwin scored 11 points and facilitated the offense with six assists.



Haldane F Matteo Cervone is whacked by Hamilton's Jaylen Savage in Blue Devils' 53-51 Class C title defeat Saturday at Yorktown.

MATTHEW TURRI PHOTOS



Haldane Coach Joe Virgadamo draws up a play for Blue Devils in 53-51 Class C title loss to Hamilton.



Haldane senior Robert Viggiano gets an easy two points in Blue Devils' 53-51 Class C title loss to Hamilton Saturday at Yorktown.



Haldane senior wing Soren Holmbo rises for trey in Blue Devils' 53-51 Class C title loss to Hamilton Saturday at Yorktown.

Sports

Girls Class B Hoops continued...

continued from page 3



Put Valley senior G Amanda Orlando goes baseline in Tigers' 52-46 Class B title win over Irvington Saturday.



Put Valley G Nai Torres fearlessly penetrates lane for two points in Tigers' 52-46 Class B title win over Irvington.



Nai Torres, Nanatie Mazza and Ava Harman get with Brianna Foody after Foody's clutch late bucket.



PV senior F Nat Mazza drops a bucket in Tigers' 52-46 Class B title win over Irvington Saturday at Yorktown.

RAY GALLAGHER PHOTOS

Girls Class A Hoops continued...

continued from page 3

returning.

Panas entered the finals after knocking off state-ranked (No.19) Harrison, 56-41, in the semis. The second-seeded Huskies had no answers for Cregan and junior F Julia Gallinger, who went to town in the paint. Nicholas came through with 11 points, five rebounds and four steals. Panther Sarah Chiuli added seven points.

MAHOPAC opened its season with a loss to Tappan Zee and the Dutchies ended the Indians outstanding season in the Class A Final 4. Tappan Zee defeated fourth-seeded Mahopac, 77-39, in a Section 1 Class A Girls' Basketball Championship semifinal.

State-ranked (No.24) Mahopac concluded its season with an 18-5 record.

Mahopac was 4-4 after eight games before going on a 14-game winning streak, highlighted by its defense and balanced scoring. Senior Melanie DeMeo chalked up the first eight games to an adjustment period.

"We lost two important starters from last year so we just needed to work through that," said DeMeo, who will attend the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth next fall and play basketball.

DeMeo pointed to one major lineup alteration that initiated the run.

"Things really started to click when Jess Sterbens was put into the starting lineup," DeMeo said. "We were getting

outrebounded in a lot of games so Jess really helped with our rebounding problems. We knew early on that we were better than our record. So it came down to us making shots consistently and rebounding. Our defensive effort was always there. As a team we took a lot of pride in our defense."

During its run, Mahopac's defensive intensity was limiting teams to below 40 points. While the defense was suffocating opponents, the offense was consistently placing three-to-four players in double digits. What made this impressive was Mahopac would have a different leading scorer almost every game.

"As for our offense, we have very good shooters so that's why any game we could have a different leading scorer," DeMeo said.

Tappan Zee proved to be Mahopac's kryptonite. DeMeo felt the team did not have its best shooting days either game and it came back to haunt the Indians.

"Tappan Zee is a very good team that has a lot of players that can score," DeMeo said. "Once we got down big against a team like TZ it's hard to climb back."

DeMeo and her fellow senior teammates move on after two excellent seasons, highlighted by the 2021 Northern Westchester/Putnam Large-School title.

"We would have liked to go further, but it was a good year," DeMeo said. "The seniors, we've been playing together since third grade CYO, so it's sad for it to end."



Panas freshman Katie Hoffmann takes run at rack in Panthers' 59-40 Class A title loss to Tappan Zee Sunday at Yorktown High.



Mahopac senior G Melanie DeMeo goes up for a rare easy bucket in Indians' Class A semifinal loss to champion TZ.

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Sports

Host Yorktown Shines Bright as Gold Ball Venue for Section 1



By Ray Gallagher
Examiner Sports
Editor @Directrays

Local Communities Treated Beyond Expectations

Host Yorktown High School, like it often has, outdid itself in last weekend's Section 1 basketball championships where portions of Dutchess, Rockland, Putnam and Westchester counties were exposed to the Cornhuskers' grandeur.

Not only were its newly-renovated lavish digs on the mark, but Yorktown shone a light brighter than ever on one of the section's premier venues, which have gone next-level with its bright, expansive hardwood, state-of-the-art bleachers and massive video screen.

"We wanted to produce a college-like feel in our gymnasium to match what we already have on Charlie Murphy Field," Yorktown Athletic Director Rob Barrett said of the Cornhusker complex. "We're very proud of the final product and we're thrilled to welcome our local communities. Thanks to Superintendent Dr. Hattar, Principal DeGennaro, Director of Facilities Dennis Verboys, Diego Arroyo, Mike Grundig, the entire parking lot crew that handled thousands of cars, the custodial staff who made every game look like the first, my event staff, our AT, and of course, Yorktown's finest."

It's hard to imagine a complex that could match the majesty of the Westchester County Center, where scores of gold balls have been hoisted and lifelong memories cherished since the 1930s. But with the Mecca still breaking down as a COVID vaccine station, Yorktown did its best to mimic the experience for the many student athletes and scores of fans that made their way to Husker Nation. The only thing missing was Yorktown's mythical #Crop, the best fan base in Section 1.

"Yorktown stepped up for all of

us," Briarcliff Athletic Director Chris Drosopoulos said. "They did an amazing job. Please thank them for all of us."

Consider it done, Drosops, but we can't stop there. From the Section 1 team and security staff, to the Y-Town custodians, its athletic director, the Yorktown Central School District administration and staff, there's plenty to be proud of. Everyone was greeted with a smile. Everyone felt welcome. Nothing was left to chance, and Yorktown showed up like few school districts in Section 1 ever could.

**Direct
Rays**

"I am beyond proud to work for such a great district," Yorktown basketball Coach Mark Pavella said.

The action was furious over the weekend where eight championship games were contested between late Saturday morning through early Sunday evening, climaxing with the Poughkeepsie boys' 43-41 Class A title win over Lourdes, one of many wild finishes. This Pioneer Coach Cody Moffett continues to produce greatness wherever he goes, and Poughkeepsie has a man with a plan to change lives.

"It was just a sensational job by the entire staff here at Yorktown, stepping up and hosting eight games over two long days," legendary Section 1 sports guru Kevin Devaney said. "We owe Rob Barrett and his crew for it all."

Locally, the action began with a feisty top-seeded Class C Haldane Blue Devils club that also mimics their head coach, Joe Virgadamo, a spirited mentor who bleeds blue and came up short of snagging the sixth sectional title since 1999, and first since 2016, when Haldane lost a heartbreaker.

"Man, does this one hurt," Coach V admitted. "It's the toughest loss of my career, hands down."

Don't fret, my man, you have done more for that community than most, and you'll have many more cracks at it, given your style and approach to hoops. Your kids buy



RAY GALLAGHER / MATTHEW TURRI PHOTOS

Yorktown High's brilliant gymnasium and basketball experience was memorable for players.

Section 1 and Yorktown High pulled out all the stops, including stylish DJ Dizzy Dog DiFiore (R), who went through pre-game hype music with Panas Coach Matt Evangelista.

in every year, and that's a credit to you and your staff.

The Putnam Valley girls delighted folks in the Valley for a third straight year, taking home the Section 1 Class B title for the second time in three years, to go along with last year's COVID-abbreviated regional championship. Everyone expected a monster game from URI-bound junior G Eva DeChent and she delivered in every way, shape and form, but it was unheralded Nai Torres, just a sophomore, who played a fearless second half to get the Tigers over the hump.

"Nai Torres has improved with every game," first-year PV Coach Don Hamlin said. "She's so coachable. I can say anything to her and she says 'yes, coach,' even when she doesn't want to. Her heart is as big as this room, and I love it when she's driving like that."

Listen, Put Valley went through some stuff a couple of weeks before the season when they declined to accept former Coach Kristi Dini back for the 2021-22 campaign. I don't care what anyone thinks, Dini caught

a bad break, and it truly sucks to be in the middle of it, knowing all parties like I do. Decade-long friendships might be fractured by things I think to myself sometimes, so we'll leave it at that and conclude by saying Hamlin's cool, calm and collected approach was just what the doctor ordered if, indeed, it had to go down like it did.

"I didn't take this team to a championship, they took me," Hamlin said. "They had the pieces in place and were well-coached, and I was fortunate enough before the season to get the phone call to coach them, and I was like, 'Okay, let's do this,' and we did."

Something tells me there's another Final 4 in store for this unit in the days ahead. Book your rooms, folks!

The Walter Panas girls' team, while they came up short in their title tilt loss to state-ranked (No. 2) Tappan Zee, were about as much fun to watch as any local team this season. Full of youth, exploding with vim and vigor, well-coached under Matt Evangelista and damn good at ballin', I'd bet we see them in the hunt for the gold ball next season.

TZ was as good as any Class A girls' team I've seen in my 30-plus years on the circuit, and the Panthers saw what the next level looks like. I suspect they'll do what's needed to get there.

Peace, y'all!

Yorktown Cheer Team Makes History, Takes 3rd in NYSPHSAA Tourney



COURTESY OF TWITTER/NYSPHSAA

Members of the Yorktown cheerleading team pose with their third place plaque after performing a near flawless routine at Saturday's NYSPHSAA Division 1/Large School cheer competition at the Rochester Institute of Technology.



A vintage look at Yorktown High's revamped gymnasium during Haldane -- Hamilton game.

Sports

Westlake's Playoff Run Ends With a Loss to the Bulldogs

By Andy Jacobs

A dream season for the Westlake girls' basketball team ended with a nightmare.

Just one win away from reaching the Section 1, Class B championship game, the Wildcats arrived at Irvington High School last Thursday afternoon and quickly discovered that their path to the final was about to vanish.

The host Bulldogs limited Westlake to just four baskets in the first half and went on to a 55-24 rout in a semifinal game that was all but over once they scored the first 10 points of the third quarter. Katie LeBuhn and Anders Knapp scored 16 points apiece as second-seeded Irvington cruised past sixth-seeded Westlake into Saturday's championship game against the Tigers of Putnam Valley.

"Obviously we were excited getting this far," said Wildcats head coach Sean Mayer, whose team finished 17-6 this season. "But that wasn't our goal just to get here. We wanted to win. The girls are a competitive group and they wanted to win. It just wasn't their day."

That started becoming apparent mere seconds after the opening jump when leading scorer Allie Castellone couldn't finish on a layup try, and the Wildcats then had to wait over five minutes for their first basket of the game, a short pop from left of the lane by Sami Oswald. By then Irvington had jumped out to an 8-1 lead.

"I thought we had a couple of early layups that if they went in would've really settled our nerves," said Mayer. "But when you're in a big game like this, it's really important to try to make some shots early. And we just didn't."

A high-arching 19-foot jumper from the left corner with 18 seconds remaining by Julie Lyden, who led Westlake with 11 points in her varsity farewell, brought the Wildcats within 12-5 at the end of the first quarter. Six seconds into the second, sophomore Catherine Nebel, just inserted into the



Westlake point guard ToniAnn Mastracchio drives to the basket as Irvington's Anders Knapp and Alyson Raimondo defend in Thursday afternoon's Class B semifinal game.

game, connected on a shot from the right elbow, cutting the Bulldogs' lead to just five points.

But Nebel's basket was followed by three straight baskets from the Bulldogs, whose rebounding domination on the offensive glass led to two of them. Irvington wound up finishing the first half with an 11-2 run, scoring the last five points after a Lyden bucket in the lane with 3:47 to go in the second quarter.

"Rebounding hurt us," said Mayer. "We gave them a lot of second chances, third chances, fourth chances. Irvington has some really good shooters and you can't give them that many looks. And then the other thing they did really well is when we missed shots, they really fast-broke a lot. So when you're not making shots and then you're giving up layups, that's not a good recipe for winning."

The third quarter began with Irvington building on its big run that ended the first half, extending it to 21-2 by scoring the first 10 points. Lyden eventually put an end to it when she converted a conventional 3-point play, scoring on a short turnaround jumper from the right baseline while getting fouled with 4:31 remaining in the period.

Just 15 seconds later, junior point guard ToniAnn Mastracchio coasted in for a layup after making a steal. A free throw by Castellone was followed by another basket from Mastracchio, who dribbled through the top of the Bulldogs' zone and scored on a scoop shot in the lane. The Wildcats were on an 8-0 burst and had sliced the Irvington lead to 33-17 with just over three minutes to go in the quarter.

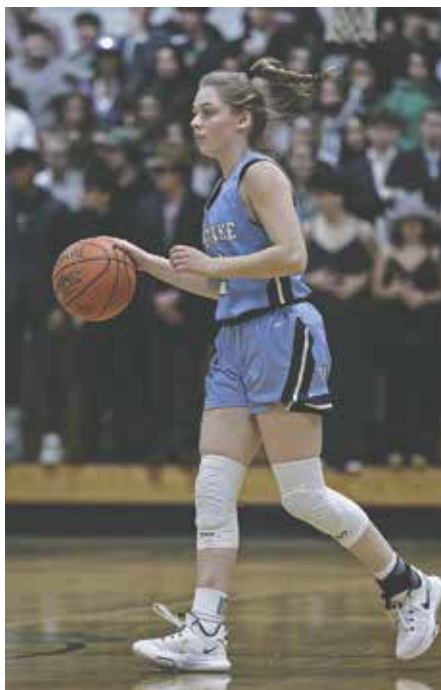
But consecutive fast-break layups 15 seconds apart by the Bulldogs' Knapp soon stretched the Irvington cushion up to



Westlake's Allie Castellone tries to score inside during the first quarter of Thursday's playoff game at Irvington.

22 points before Castellone connected on a step-back 3-pointer from the right corner for her only basket of the day. An easy layup by LeBuhn with nine seconds left in the third quarter gave the Bulldogs a 42-20 lead, but Lyden then answered with a 3-pointer from the top of the key just before the buzzer.

Unfortunately for the Wildcats, they would never get any closer in the fourth quarter. Irvington scored the first 11 points of the period and limited Westlake to a single point over the final eight minutes, a free throw by Francesca DeMartino with just 1:38 left on the clock. Just before DeMartino stepped to the line, Lyden was summoned to the bench by her coach so she could hear cheers from the Wildcat fans one final time.



The Wildcats' Catherine Nebel brings the ball across midcourt in the fourth quarter of the Class B semifinal against Irvington.



Westlake senior Julie Lyden fires a jump shot from the left corner in the first half of the Wildcats' season-ending playoff loss to the Bulldogs.

"Julie, she's been in the program five years and, you know, she means a lot to us," said Mayer. "She played well tonight, but it's a great experience for the other girls. We obviously have a core group coming back and it's nice to be in this environment. I wish we would've played a little better, but those things happen."

The Wildcats had clinched their league championship by defeating Briarcliff three weeks earlier and they earned a pair of playoff victories before facing the Bulldogs riding a six-game winning streak.

"Like I told the girls," said Mayer, "we're not gonna let this game define the season that we had. It was a great season and I'm very proud of them."



Erin Nebel of Westlake prepares to shoot the ball during last week's playoff game at Irvington High School.



Junior guard Sami Oswald dribbles the ball up the court with Irvington's Anders Knapp applying defensive pressure in last Wednesday's sectional semifinal.

ANDY JACOBS PHOTOS

Sports

Foxes Fall in the Class AA Semifinals to Unbeaten North Rockland

By Andy Jacobs

Trailing by 10 points with less than three minutes remaining against undefeated North Rockland last Wednesday evening, the Fox Lane basketball team seemed all but finished.

But then a pair of old-fashioned 3-point plays, first by Justin Allen and then by Matt Toscano, miraculously brought the Foxes back to life. They soon had possession of the ball, trailing by three, as the scoreboard clock ticked down the final 20 seconds.

One after another, the jump shots came in rapid succession from beyond the 3-point arc. First there was Allen rising off the dribble from the right elbow with 13 seconds left. Next was Michael Lombardi's turn from the top of the key with six seconds to go. Finally, the ball wound up in Charlie Shevick's hands just before the final buzzer for a quick-release pop out of the left corner.

Unfortunately for the Foxes, none of the three high-pressure rushed shots dropped through the basket and the host Red Raiders managed to hang on for a 47-44 victory in a Section 1, Class AA semifinal game. Despite 23 points from Allen, 16 of them in the second half, Fox Lane's quest to reach the sectional final came to a disappointing end.

"We gave ourselves a chance to tie it at the end and potentially win the game, so there's nothing else we could've done," said Fox head coach Mike Tomassi afterwards, his voice all but gone after spending the evening trying to shout over the exuberant fans who packed the gym. "I'm proud of these guys. We were down, we fought. And we just kept fighting, fighting, fighting."

Facing the second-seeded and undefeated Red Raiders, Fox Lane, riding its own 10-game winning streak, got 3-point baskets

from Aidan Giannelli and Shevick in the first quarter and then grabbed a 10-8 lead after the first eight minutes on a late layup by Niko Dent. The third-seeded Foxes' lead grew to four points when Dent converted on a pair of free throws 40 seconds into the second quarter.

But North Rockland proceeded to go on a 12-0 spurt over the next four minutes and never trailed again the rest of the evening. A 3-pointer by Eze Frazier with 6:10 left in the half erased the Foxes' 12-11 edge and put the Red Raiders in front for good. Dent finally ended the Raider run and Fox Lane's four-and-a-half-minute scoring drought with a basket in the paint, but the reeling Foxes found themselves trailing 29-18 at halftime.

Even worse for the Foxes, who finished the season 17-6, Allen was whistled for his third foul with just 6.4 seconds remaining in the first half. He had picked up his first on an offensive foul in the game's first minute, then was forced to the bench when he picked up his second with 3:49 left in the opening quarter.

"We had a tough start there with some early foul trouble," said Tomassi. "But we persevered, we did some nice things, we kept battling. We knew it was gonna be a game of ups and downs."

Allen emerged from the locker room after halftime to pour in nine points in the third quarter, but the Foxes still couldn't chip away at the North Rockland lead. The Raiders opened up their biggest lead, 12 points, when Malachai Presswood drained a 3-pointer from the left corner two and a half minutes into the third quarter.

A layup by sophomore Elijah Barclay, who led North Rockland with 17 points, with 25 seconds to go in the period left Fox Lane trailing 39-30 with just one quarter left to play. Two minutes into the final period, Frazier drove the left baseline for a layup and the Raider lead was back up to double digits.

But 30 seconds later, a technical foul was called on North Rockland and Allen made both free throws. With 5:17 remaining, Toscano connected on a trey from the left



The Foxes' Justin Allen shoots the ball in the third quarter of Wednesday's semifinal playoff game at North Rockland.



Fox Lane junior forward Niko Dent is fouled by North Rockland's Marco Evans in the first half of last week's Class AA semifinal playoff game.

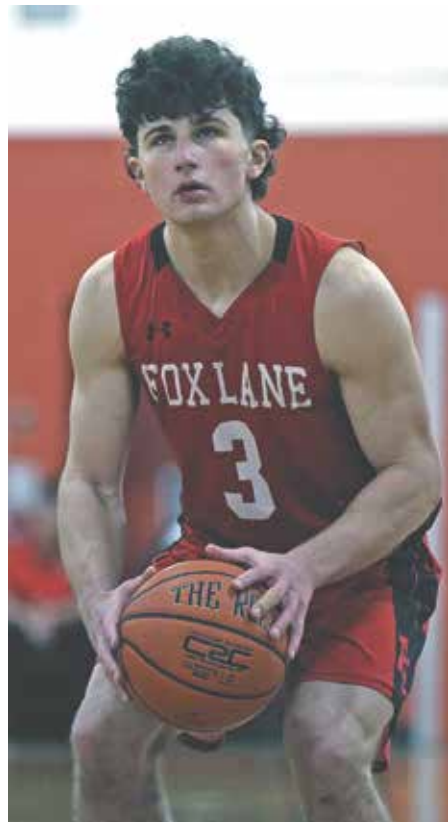
corner, cutting the Foxes' deficit to 41-35. Barclay then answered with back-to-back layups, the second one coming with exactly three minutes to go and giving the Raiders a 10-point lead.

The improbable Fox comeback began with an Allen bucket with 2:36 on the clock. Just six seconds later, after a timeout, an Allen steal under the basket led to his conventional 3-point play as he was hit putting in a reverse layup. North Rockland, just 3 of 10 from the line in the fourth quarter, then came up empty on the front end of a couple of 1-and-1 opportunities, providing more fuel for the Foxes' come-from-behind bid.

With 1:18 remaining, Toscano sent up a scoop shot that caromed in as he was fouled. His free throw brought Fox Lane within two points. In the final minute, the Red Raiders got a free throw each from Joshwa Rodriguez and Marco Evans, while the Foxes' Giannelli also made one, setting the stage for the frenetic final sequence when the Foxes nearly sent the contest to overtime.

"You know, they could've run away with it," said Tomassi about the Raiders. "But I

loved how we played hard. We made some tough shots and we got stops when we needed to and made it a game. You're on the road, playing the number-two seed in a game that should be at a neutral site, in the County Center. But it is what it is and I'm proud of the way we fought and gave ourselves a chance."



Senior guard Aidan Giannelli concentrates on a free throw during the final moments of the fourth-quarter in Fox Lane's Class AA semifinal game.



Dylan Watson of Fox Lane gets set to pass the ball while down on the floor in the second half of the Foxes' 47-44 loss to undefeated North Rockland last Wednesday evening.



Fox Lane guard Matt Toscano pushes the ball up the court in the season-ending semifinal playoff loss at North Rockland last Wednesday night.



The Foxes' Charlie Shevick sends a jump shot over the outstretched hand of North Rockland's Connor Wein.

ANDY JACOBS PHOTOS

Sports

Briarcliff's Quest for a Sectional Title is Stopped by the Broncos

By Andy Jacobs

With a pair of one-point victories in their previous two sectional playoff games, including a remarkable fourth-quarter comeback in the semifinals, the Briarcliff Bears appeared to have destiny on their side.

But on Saturday evening at Yorktown High School, destiny was denied.

Top-seeded Bronxville jumped out to an early 9-1 lead and never looked back, convincingly defeating the second-seeded Bears 66-49 in the Section 1, Class B championship game before a standing-room-only crowd that filled nearly every inch of the gym. Tournament MVP Chris Kelty finished with a game-high 17 points as the Broncos put an end to their four-decades-long hoop title drought.

"You've got to tip your cap to Bronxville," said Bears head coach Nick Friedman, shortly after sadly watching the Broncos celebrate with the Gold Ball. "They played absolutely great. They kicked our butts and they deserved to win. They shot the ball really well and that can happen. I just didn't think our defense was championship level tonight. We're definitely capable of defending better than that."

Just eight seconds into the contest, Bronco guard Sean McGrath provided a hint of things to come when he dropped in an 18-foot pullup jumper from right of the key. Before the game was even three minutes old, McGrath connected on three long jumpers and Bronxville had an eight-point lead. With the feisty guard erupting for 12 of his 15 points in the first quarter, the Broncos built an 18-8 advantage.

The Bears turned the ball over six times in the opening quarter, four of them coming in the first two minutes, and their deficit grew to 12 points when the Broncos' Conor



The Bears' Ben Siegel takes the ball to the basket in between Bronxville's Conor O'Neil (left) and Finn Ruhanen during the first quarter of Saturday's title game.

O'Neil scored the first bucket of the second period. But then two free throws by Elliot Jones started an 8-0 Briarcliff run that was capped off by five quick points from Jayden Larregue.

A 3-pointer by Saad Hussain with 3:14 remaining in the quarter brought the Bears to within 24-19, but they never scored again the rest of the half and retreated to the locker room trailing by seven.

Asked later about his team's cold shooting and early turnovers, Friedman said, "That's part of it, but it's always defense for us. If we're playing like we're supposed to on defense, then those errors don't happen on offense because we're playing fast and free and loose. I just really think our defense was the reason the game got away from us."

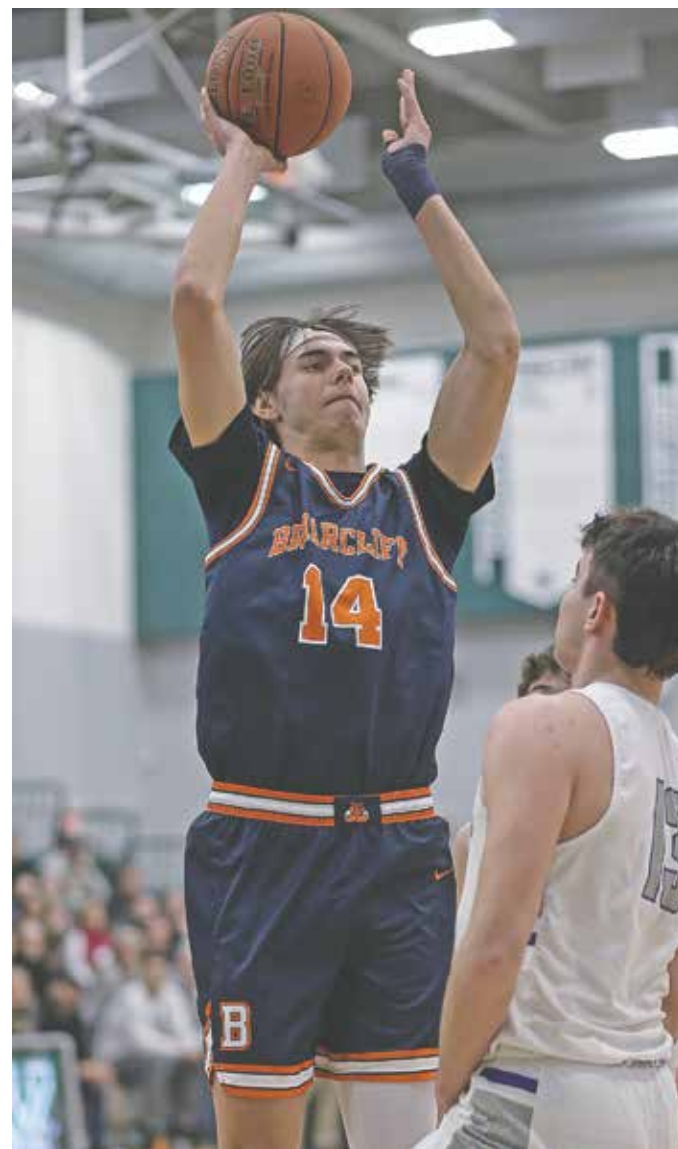
Bronxville opened up a 28-19 lead early in the second half before Ben Siegel, who along with Luke McCann led the Bears with 13 points, made a steal and then weaved his way through traffic for a lefty scoop in the lane. Briarcliff then got as close as 35-31 with just under three minutes left in the third quarter after a 3-point shot by Rai-shan Hall from the left wing.

But the Broncos answered with a 7-0 spurt, fueled by a layup from O'Neil and then two more by Kelty, who had 15 of his points after intermission. With five seconds to go in the third quarter, Siegel cut to the basket, received a pass from Hall, and scored to send Briarcliff to the fourth trailing 42-33.

Just 30 seconds into the final quarter,

Larregue fired up a trey from left of the key that bounced in, reducing the Bears' deficit to just six points. Kelty then drove the left baseline for a basket, but the Bears closed to within six again when Larregue made two free throws with 7:09 remaining in the game.

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Briarcliff senior forward Luke McCann rises for a short jump shot in Saturday's Class B championship game.



Elliot Jones of Briarcliff sends a scoop shot toward the basket with Bronxville's Chris Kelty defending the paint in the first half of the sectional final.



Jason Rosenbaum of Briarcliff drives toward the basket past Bronxville's Finn Ruhanen in the second half of Saturday's Class B championship game.



Briarcliff's Rai-shan Hall shoots a 3-pointer from the left corner in the fourth quarter of Saturday's title game vs. second-seeded Bronxville.

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That’s as close as the Bears would get, though, as Bronxville, which had lost at Briarcliff by four points back in mid-January, exploded for 22 points over the final seven minutes. A short baseline jumper by McCann with 5:05 on the clock narrowed the Bronco lead to 51-40, but 16 seconds later McGrath drained a long pullup jumper from well beyond the arc left of the key.

Despite late 3-pointers from Evan Van Camp, Larregue and Jones, the Bears were unable to get any closer than 10 points and Bronxville, which got eight fourth-quarter points from Finn Ruhanen and seven more from Kelty, was soon celebrating its first sectional title since 1982.

“When the kid, McGrath, hit a 3 from half-court to go up 14 with a couple minutes, looking back it kind of felt like that might’ve been the kill shot,” said Friedman, who was nonetheless impressed by the ambiance created in Yorktown’s newly refurbished gym.

“The atmosphere was great,” he said. “We couldn’t hear each other. Yorktown did a really great job hosting. I don’t know, the County Center is special, but this was an awesome environment.”

That awesome environment was something it seemed the Bears were going to miss out on when they found themselves trailing third-seeded Hastings 41-25 late in the third quarter of last Wednesday’s semifinal game. But a spectacular block by Larregue of Yellow Jacket star Josh Thigpen’s layup attempt with 1:40 left in the period set in motion a stirring revival by the host Bears.

“When he made that play, it definitely gave us life, our fans life, and was one of the turning points,” said Friedman, whose team still trailed 43-30 at the start of the fourth quarter before going on a 15-2 run and tying the game when McCann rattled in a 3-pointer from the left wing with just over two minutes remaining.

A free throw by Siegel with 3.6 seconds



Briarcliff senior Jayden Larregue sets his sights on the rim with Sean McGrath of Bronxville trying to stop him in the Broncos’ 66-49 title win at Yorktown High School.

on the clock broke a 50-50 tie and provided the winning margin that sent the Bears, who finished their season 16-7, into the Class B championship game, a feat that once seemed



Briarcliff head coach Nick Friedman directs his Bears during the second half of the sectional final vs. the Bronxville Broncos.

unlikely to their coach. “We started 5 and 5 and really had a gauntlet of a schedule,” said Friedman. “But the second half of the year, we played great. So I’m really proud of our group and the way they responded. At 5 and 5, you don’t think you’re gonna be in a sectional final game battling for a Gold Ball. So in that regard, the kids have a lot to be proud of.”



Briarcliff’s Luke McCann shoots a free throw in Saturday’s Class B championship game against Bronxville.



Michael Lombardi of Fox Lane watches the ball get knocked away on his drive to the basket in the first half of the Foxes’ semifinal game vs. North Rockland.

focus on
SECTION ONE
PLAYOFFS
FINAL FOUR WEEK



Westlake senior Julie Lyden is greeted by coach Sean Mayer as she heads to the bench in the final moments of the Wildcats’ semifinal loss at Irvington.



The Briarcliff student section watches the Bears battle for the Class B title at Yorktown High School on Saturday evening.



Westlake junior Allie Castellone drives past Irvington’s Katie LeBuhn in last Thursday’s Class B semifinal game won by the host Bulldogs.



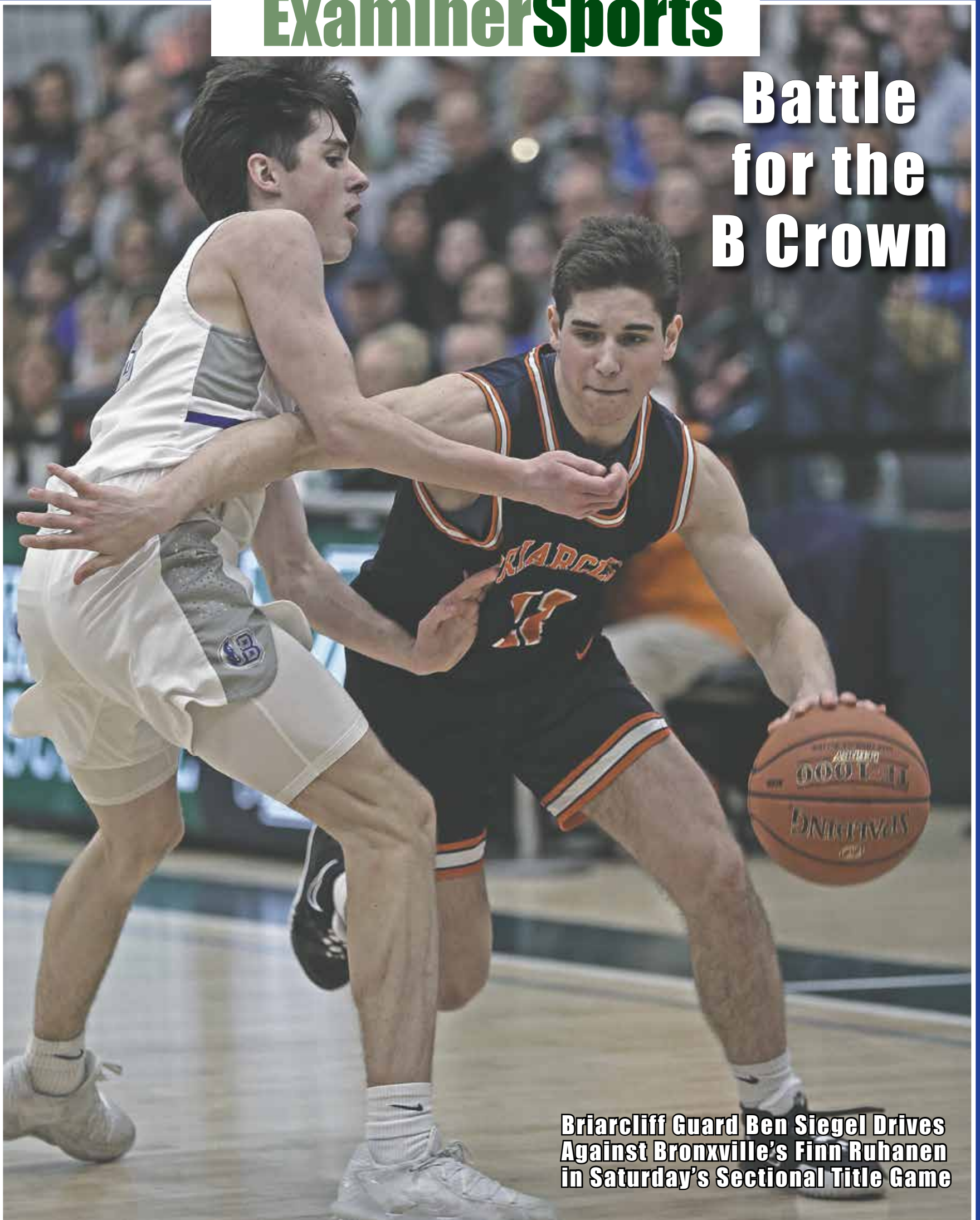
Fox Lane’s Justin Allen elevates for a jump shot in the second half of Wednesday night’s Class AA semifinal game at North Rockland.



Members of the Westlake girls’ basketball team line up during player introductions at last week’s Class B semifinal game vs. host Irvington.

ExaminerSports

Battle for the B Crown



**Briarcliff Guard Ben Siegel Drives
Against Bronxville's Finn Ruhanen
in Saturday's Sectional Title Game**