

BEAR BASKET

**Briarcliff Soph Alana Lombardi
Gets Inside for an Easy Bucket
in a Victory Over Pleasantville
on the Road Friday Afternoon**



Grippi and Santos Lead Fox Lane to Wrestling Title

By Tony Pinciario

A year ago, Johnny Santos experienced something he never wanted to do so again.

The Fox Lane senior was the runner-up in the 2017 Section 1 Division I (large school) Wrestling Championship 195-pound final. Santos did not like how he felt when he walked off the mat that day, and it has stuck with him.

Santos made sure this year he would author an exuberant and happy conclusion to his final Section 1 Wrestling Championships.

Santos secured a takedown with 30 seconds remaining in the match, sending him to a 5-4 victory over Jhordyn Innocent of East Ramapo in the Division I 195-pound final on Sunday afternoon at Clarkstown South High School.

Along with winning his first sectional title, Santos, and his fellow sectional champions, qualified for the New York State Division I Wrestling Championships, Friday-Saturday, Feb. 23-24, at the Times-Union Center in Albany.

Wrestlers who are in position to receive a wild card will be notified on Wednesday.

Joining Santos in Albany will be Fox Lane teammate Matt Grippi. The North Carolina State-bound senior won his third consecutive sectional title, taking the 152-pound title. He was also voted the Champion of Champions. Grippi registered his Fox Lane-record 240th varsity win in the final.

The duo was instrumental in leading Fox Lane to the team title. The Foxes placed seven wrestlers in the top six, finishing with 145 points, outdistancing runner-up New Rochelle (113.5 points) and Arlington (113).

Since New York State adopted the two-division format – large school and small school, Fox Lane has won a Section 1-leading six team titles. This one, though, is the first for coach Anthony Rodrigues and his son, Steven, his assistant. Rodrigues was the assistant to Section 1 and New York State Hall-of-Fame coach Joe Amuso Sr. for the initial five.

"I feel relieved, happy and ready for states," said Santos, who is now 45-5 on the season. "I knew what it felt like to lose last year, so I was not going to let it happen again this year."

Santos went into the final with an advantage over Innocent. Since he had already experienced a sectional final, he was calm and composed. He also said he learned a lesson from last year's title match.

"I wanted to be smarter and wrestle smarter," Santos said. "I also wanted to pick my shots and stay focused throughout the match."

Santos was focused when he executed his decisive move. Innocent was leading 4-3 and was in deep on a shot attempt, but Santos negated it and went out of bounds. Off the whistle, Santos, upon hearing assistant coach Steven Rodrigues yell out instructions, hit a high single-leg and took Innocent to the mat for two points and a 5-4 lead.

Santos said winning the sectional title was great, but taking the team title was sweeter.

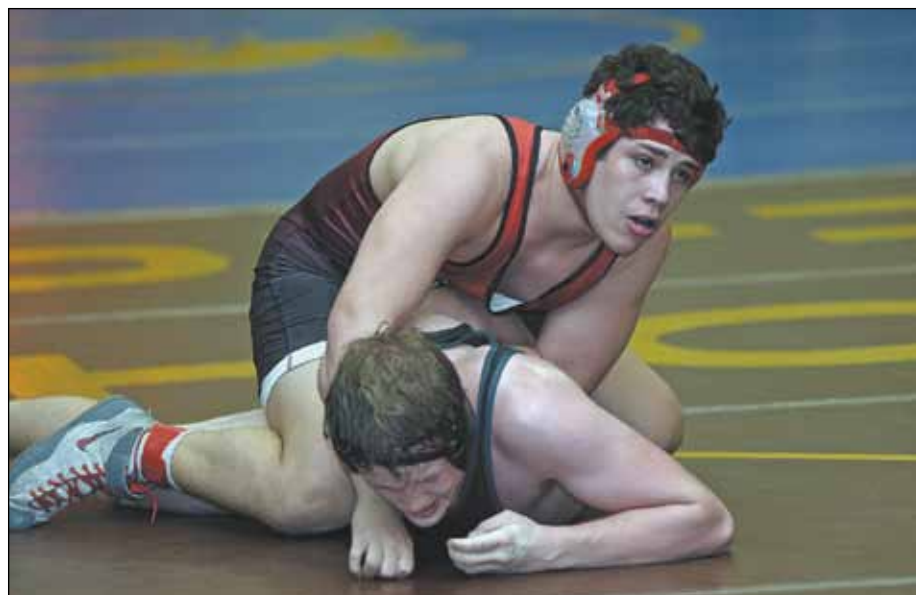
Teammate Amos Rivera was the 120-pound runner-up. Rivera bested teammate and workout partner Matias Rivera 3-1 in a semifinal. Matias Rivera finished fourth, as did Jake Hoffman (99 pounds). Quincey Downes (152) and Mitchell Antin (113) also placed sixth. Antin registered the upset of the tournament, pinning top-seeded C.J. McMonegal of North Rockland in the quarterfinals.

Horace Greeley will have two representatives in Albany as juniors and good friends Aaron Wolk (160) and Matthew Schreiber (99) won their respective weight classes. Senior Jacob Ferreira was the 182-pound runner-up, but is in a good position to receive his second straight wild-card berth.

Wolk was a sectional runner-up last year, but he, like Santos, would emerge a champion this time. Wolk registered a 9-0 victory over Mamaroneck's Trent Wechsler in the final, improving to 40-3 this season. Wolk pinned his first three opponents.

Wolk didn't put any pressure on himself heading into the final. Instead, he said he treated it like it was any other match, which proved beneficial because he recorded an early takedown to seize

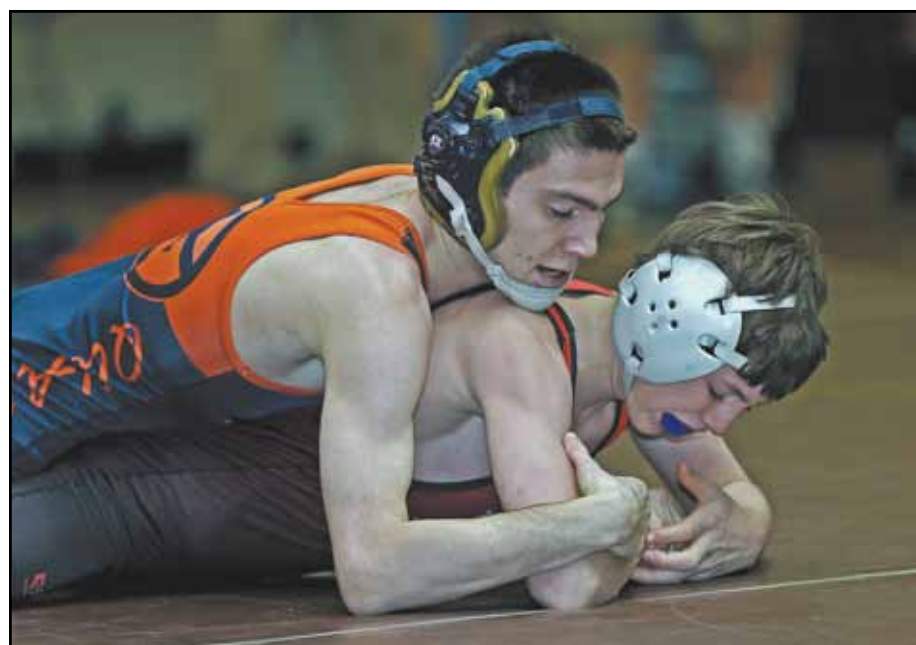
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Fox Lane's Johnny Santos, the large-school champion at 195 pounds, has control during his semifinal victory against Arlington's Gabe Duden on Sunday.



Fox Lane's Matt Grippi won a sectional title for the third straight year, this time at 152 pounds.



Greeley's Matt Schreiber has control over Fox Lane's Jake Hoffman en route to a third-period pin at 99 pounds. Schreiber wound up winning the sectional title over Byram Hills sophomore John Fortugno.



ANDY JACOBS PHOTOS



John Fortugno of Byram Hills won his semifinal match at 99 pounds over his younger brother, Justin, before settling for second place in Division I.

Horace Greeley senior Jacob Ferreira reached the finals at 182 pounds and improved to 34-4 this season.

Grippi and Santos Lead Fox Lane to Wrestling Title

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control of the match.

"It's pretty great to win a sectional title for the first time," said the soft-spoken Wolk. "I felt I wrestled my style and made it my match in the final, where last year I wrestled his match."

"I felt that I really improved a lot this year, and now I want to improve on my state performance."

Wolk was a wild card and went 1-2 at the 2017 State Championships. He is looking forward to heading back to Albany with Shreiber.

"Matt had a great match in the final and really showed his stuff," Wolk said.

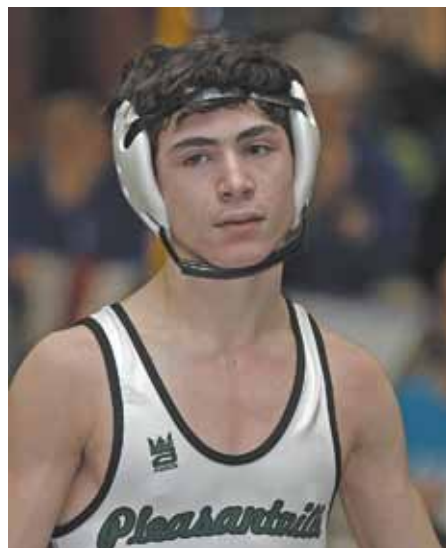
Horace Greeley finished sixth, with 101.5 points, and also had Josh McMillan place sixth (220).

The Fortugno brothers – John, a sophomore, and Justin, an eighth-grader – had an excellent weekend for Byram Hills. John was the 99-pound runner-up and Justin took third, also at 99 pounds. Both were wrestling in their first Section 1 Championships. Justin lost in the semifinals, ironically, to John, then won his two wrestle-back matches.

"Both had a phenomenal tournament," said Byram Hills coach Joey Grippi. "They both wrestled great throughout the weekend. It can't be easy having to wrestle your brother for a spot in the sectional finals, but they went out and gave it their all in every match. I'm very proud of them."

John Fortugno took down second-seeded Chris Crawford of Beacon in a quarterfinal and Justin Fortugno knocked off third-seeded Matt Russo of Somers, also in a quarterfinal, to set up the brothers' match, one that has probably been wrestled, unofficially, many times in the Fortugno house. John prevailed in their semifinal, 21-18.

However, Justin now had two more matches to wrestle and Grippi said the middle schooler bounced right back.



Pleasantville's Len Balducci won his second straight Division II championship, defeating Panther teammate Nayshawn Marks in the 106-pound final.

Justin defeated Carmel's Abby Duke 4-0 in a consolation semifinal, then pinned Fox Lane's Jake Hoffman in the third-place match.

"That shows a lot about Justin," Grippi said. "I always say it's harder to wrestle back and take third than win a tournament. It's not easy to pick up your head after a loss and win two more matches against quality opponents."

Even though Victor Perlleshi won a Section 1 Division II title last year, the Pleasantville junior returned this season highly-motivated.

"A lot of guys win one sectional title and are content with it, but meanwhile I worked even harder to achieve my goals," Perlleshi said.

That determination, motivation and hunger resulted in Perlleshi winning his second consecutive Section 1 Division II title. Perlleshi accomplished it with a 7-1 victory over Putnam Valley's Will Carano in the 126-pound final on Saturday at Hastings High School.

"It feels awesome and I'm happy that



Victor Perlleshi of Pleasantville captured another sectional title on Saturday at Hastings High School, defeating Will Carano of Putnam Valley by a 7-1 margin.

I won a second time, but I have more to accomplish," Perlleshi said.

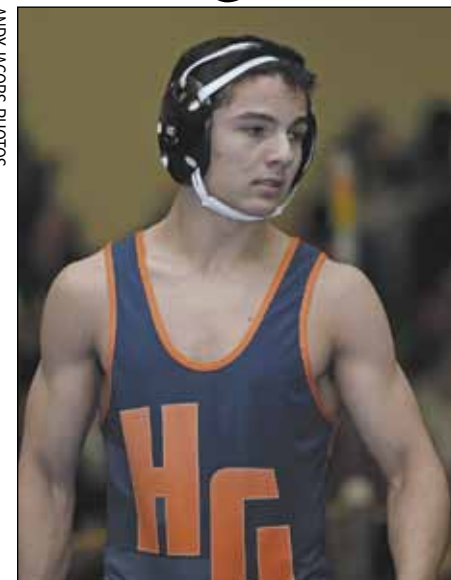
Perlleshi will be joined in Albany, for the New York State Division II Wrestling Championships, by teammate Len Balducci, who also won his second straight title. Balducci pinned teammate Nayshawn Marks in the final. Balducci surpassed his father, Lenny, and uncle, Chris, with two sectional titles. Lenny and Chris were sectional champions for Irvington.

Pleasantville finished second to Pearl River, 250.5-230.5 points. The Panthers had 12 wrestlers place in the top five. Along with Marks, Aiden Canfield (120) and Jaden Kammer (182) were also runners-up.

Michael Perlleshi (220), Victor's cousin, finished third. Michael Balducci (113), Chris May (132) and Eli Cunneiffe (170) placed fourth and

the Egan brothers -- Quinn (99) and Nolan -- and Keon Ansari (195) placed fifth.

"Len Balducci is an absolute stud and there is no surprise he won a second title.



Horace Greeley's Aaron Wolk captured the sectional title at 160 pounds.



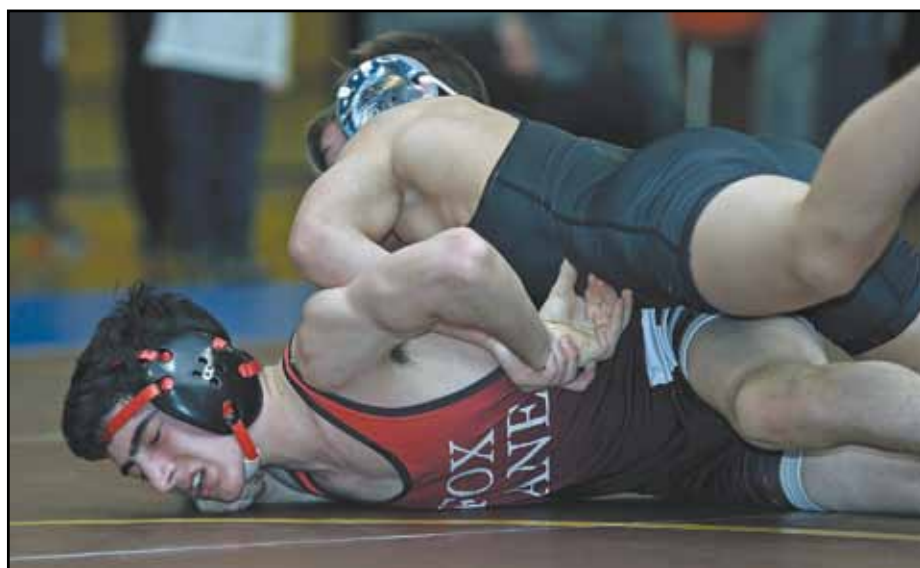
Amos Rivera of Fox Lane reached the finals at 120 pounds, but dropped a close 3-1 decision to Arlington senior Gavin Pasqualini in the championship match.

He really deserves it," said Perlleshi, who also conceded that finishing behind Pearl River this year in the team standings will give them added incentive for the 2019 Sectional Championships.

"Finishing second," he said, "gives us a lot more motivation to use for next year when we come back."



Fox Lane's Quincy Downes (top) wrestles against North Rockland's Naphe Powell at 152 pounds on Sunday afternoon at Clarkstown High School.



Fox Lane's Mitchell Antin upset the top-seeded wrestler at 113 pounds, North Rockland's C J McMonegal, in the quarterfinals but eventually had to settle for sixth place.

Quakers Stay Hot With a Victory Against Fox Lane

By Andy Jacobs

Even though the Fox Lane hockey team found itself already trailing by three goals after one period on Saturday evening, there was something to look forward to at the start of the second.

The penalty box for the host Horace Greeley Quakers was a bit crowded.

With a chance to skate with a five-on-three advantage, the Foxes had a big opportunity to get right back in the game. In an instant, though, the opportunity vanished as the Quakers' Ryan Renzulli burst out of the defensive zone, carrying the puck down the left wing. He got to the blue line, skated to his right and then sent a shot past goalie Will Brunner, all but assuring there would be no Fox Lane revival.

"In my eight years of coaching high school," said Quakers head coach Dan Perito afterwards, "I can't remember scoring down two men. I can't speak for them, but I know for us if you're up and then they score shorthanded, that's demoralizing."

Renzulli's shorthanded goal was soon followed by two more from the Quakers, who went on to an 8-2 victory over the Foxes on Senior Night at the Brewster Ice Arena. Dillon Rusiecki, Jake Potter and Dylan Mutkoski each finished with a pair of goals as suddenly red-hot Greeley won for the seventh time in its last eight games.

"You never know after going through all the pregame stuff, breaking from routine, how they'll come out," said Perito about his Senior Night concerns. "I wasn't really pleased with the warmup. But we came out possessing the puck, working the forecheck. We were able to get some pucks down low and get some shots, get some goals early to kind of ease into it. Once you get that, you can kind of settle in and breathe. That's always important."

The game was just 90 seconds old when Liam Whitehouse, on an assist from Renzulli, got the Quakers on the scoreboard. Fox Lane soon had two good chances to even the contest, but Eric Maiorano was thwarted in front of the net by Greeley goalie Arye Wolberg and then, 15 seconds later, Jared Greenberg's



Dillon Rusiecki, who had two goals, skates toward the net in Greeley's win over Fox Lane.

redirected shot from just left of the cage rolled tantalizingly all the way across the crease behind Wolberg before it was cleared away.

Just past the midway point of the first period, Potter poked the puck past the Foxes' Brunner to give Greeley a 2-0 lead. Then with 4:32 to go in that period, and the Foxes just five seconds away from killing off a Quaker power play, Rusiecki found himself with the puck in front of the net. He easily deposited it into the wide open right side, stretching the Quakers' cushion to 3-0.

But the period ended with both Whitehouse and Tyler Kay in the penalty box and the Foxes on the hunt with a two-man advantage. Just as Whitehouse's penalty was ending early in the second period, the Quakers' Evan Scott was whistled for cross checking. With another 46 seconds to skate with a two-man advantage, Fox Lane's prospects suddenly looked a bit brighter.

Renzulli's shorthanded goal in the opening minute of the second period immediately took away whatever momentum the Foxes were building. Instead of narrowing the deficit, they suddenly trailed by four goals.

"You know, I've seen it before," said Fox Lane coach Charles Berger of the goal by Greeley despite being down two players.



The Quakers' Jake Potter considers his options as he controls the puck in the win over Fox Lane.



Greeley's Ryan Renzulli is about to score the shorthanded goal that gave the Quakers a 4-0 lead over Fox Lane on Saturday night.

"When you're on the umbrella, that's one of the challenges you have because if they chip it by, they can go. It doesn't matter if it's five on three or five on four. I thought the power play got chances. We didn't finish. Their goalie played very well."

About four minutes after Renzulli's momentum-changing goal, the Quakers struck again, this time on their own power play, as Potter tipped in the rebound of a shot by Rusiecki. Then with 8:18 to go in the second period, Mutkoski came around the back of the net and slipped the puck into the near corner, enabling Greeley to build its lead to 6-0.

Late in the period, the two teams got into a skirmish behind the net the Foxes' Brunner was patrolling. The game was held up for over five minutes as penalties were doled out to three players.

"It's a rivalry game with Fox Lane," said Perito. "So I gave them a heads up last night and then today before the game. And then as the game started, 'Don't get caught up in anything extra after the whistle. You get tossed for a fighting penalty, then you're out for the next three games.' Two of those games are gonna be playoff games for us."

A minute into the third period, Rusiecki tallied his second goal of the evening to give Greeley a 7-0 advantage. Late in the game, the Foxes managed to get on the

board with goals from freshman Charlie Della Penna and then Maiorano 57 seconds apart before Mutkoski closed the night's scoring with his second goal.

The loss to Greeley concluded a busy week for the Foxes that was highlighted by last Monday's visit to the Barclays Center in downtown Brooklyn, where they skated against Pearl River before an Islanders game.

"Absolutely incredible," said Berger of the experience. "So happy we were able to do it. You know, even I got big-eyed walking in there. The stadium's so gorgeous and the ice is amazing. The kids just skated real hard and fought. Every kid had a smile on their face and had a really good time. I'd suggest it to every team. Go play in one of these professional arenas that allow it. What an experience."

The Foxes won't be playing at the Barclays Center again, but they can look forward to something else this coming week.

"Well, we're in the playoffs, which is a huge step for the program," said Berger. "After two wins last year, we're going to the playoffs. We know we're gonna have a tough opponent, but we're gonna be ready to go."



Horace Greeley goalie Arye Wolberg stays ready in front of the cage in the first period of Saturday's 8-2 win over Fox Lane.



Caitlyn Brown of Fox Lane passes the puck along the boards in the third period of Saturday's game against host Greeley.



Fox Lane's Eric Maiorano moves the puck away from Greeley's Evan Scott during Saturday night's game at Brewster Ice Arena.

Bears Roll Over Pleasantville in Season Finale

By Danny Lopriore

The Briarcliff Bears completed their regular season with an impressive 63-33 victory over the visiting border rival and defending Section 1 champion Pleasantville Panthers Friday night.

The Bears, who celebrated Senior Night, completed the season with a 16-4 record and will begin pursuit of a Section 1, Class B championship next week when the playoffs begin for them on February 15.

The Panthers, who have won 5 of their last 11 games after beginning the season 1-8, finished at 6-14 and look to defend their title in the sectional tournament beginning with a play-in game next week.

"Defend" was the very active verb for Briarcliff, which held the Panthers to 12 first-half points.

Playing what guards Jack Ryan and Miles Jones called "Bears' basketball," the home team boasted a physical brand of defense and rebounding that stifled the Panthers, building a big lead early and extending through the 30-point victory.

"We call it Bears' basketball, and everything comes from our defense and when we play well we win," Ryan said. "We had a great atmosphere here tonight and they are a big rival, but we have to play the same way against every other team in the playoffs."

The Bears, who got balanced scoring led by sophomore A.J. Panarese with a game-high 14 points, took advantage of their superior size and good ball movement



Pleasantville's Jared Wilens is met in the air along the left baseline as he tries to shoot by Briarcliff's Ross Lachtman and Miles Jones.

to open a 16-5 first-quarter lead and extended to a 30-12 edge at halftime.

"We had some problems earlier this year running plays too quickly and now we're more patient and getting deeper into the shot clock," Ryan added. "The first five plays tonight, we got good shots and made them. That has to be our focus in the playoffs."

Senior Jackson Gonseth, playing his last regular-season game along with his classmates, scored 11 points and grabbed eight rebounds for Briarcliff.

Despite the final-game loss, the Panthers and their coach Chris Welsh are hoping to recover last year's success in the playoffs. Pleasantville also lost both regular-season games to Briarcliff last season, but defeated the Bears in

the Section 1 title game at the packed Westchester County Center.

"We're going to get a playoff game, I don't know who it's going to be, but we'll be there," Welsh said. "We have to have a better effort than we did here. Listen, my guys are resilient, they're tough. We played them very well (in a 10-point loss on Feb. 5). Credit to them, they shot the ball very well."

The Panthers struggled to get more than one shot at the basket in each possession against the inside height advantage of the Bears. Danny Melillo (8) and Jack Minerva (7) led the team in scoring.

"Their size gives us problems, so we have to play some zone defense and we have to keep an extra guy in the paint, which opens their 3-point shooters," said Welsh. "Today wasn't our day, but I know my guys will give the effort next week."

Briarcliff limited Pleasantville's offense by forcing rushed shots and grabbing defensive rebounds. The Bears outrebounded the Panthers 33-15 overall. Will that defensive style continue into the one-and-done playoffs?

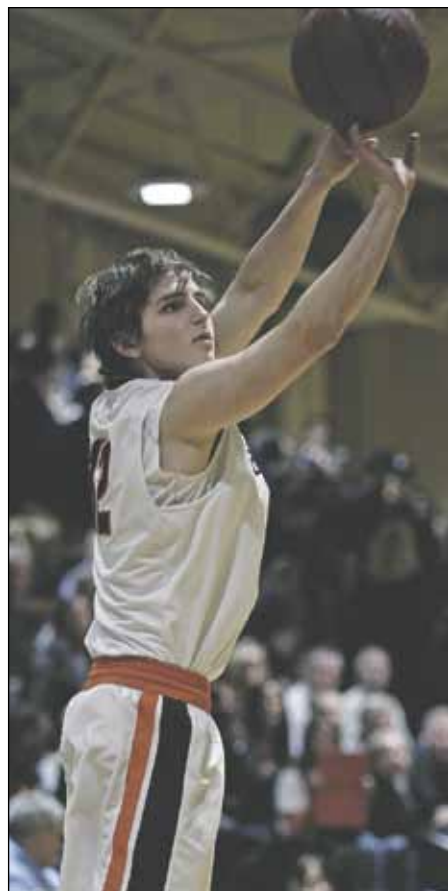
"We want to play the same way in the tournament that we play during the regular season," Jones said. "We will face different defenses that we have to adjust to, but if we maintain our defensive intensity we should be successful."

Ryan and fellow senior Ross Lachtman scored eight and seven points,



Briarcliff's A.J. Panarese takes the ball to the basket from the left baseline in Friday's win over Pleasantville.

respectively, as 12 different Bears had at least one point. A highlight of the Senior Night celebration came when Lachtman, a reserve guard, got the start and opened the scoring with a drive to the basket to the delight of the crowd.



The Bears' Nick Reish fires a jumper from the right corner in the fourth quarter of Friday's home game.



Spencer McCann of Briarcliff pulls down a rebound in the Bears' lopsided home win over Pleasantville.



Pleasantville senior Jack Minerva dribbles the ball in the backcourt during Friday's game vs. Briarcliff.



Pleasantville point guard Danny Melillo handles the ball near midcourt vs. the host Bears.

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focus on
GIRLS' HOOP
Rivalry Games



Westlake forward Viktoria Hudd pushes the ball up the floor against visiting Valhalla last Thursday afternoon.



Valhalla's Shannon Brosnan shoots the ball in the Viking win over Westlake.



Pleasantville head coach Myndi Hill talks to guards Mary Grace O'Neill (35) and Julia O'Reilly during a brief break in Friday's game vs. Briarcliff.



Westlake's Angelina Guarnieri boxes out Valhalla's Sam Morillo in last Thursday's game, won by the Vikings.



Jamie Perfito of Westlake shoots the ball on Thursday afternoon against Valhalla.



Valhalla's Sam Morillo hauls in a rebound during Thursday's 58-38 win at Westlake.



Westlake junior Emily Sardo dribbles the ball beyond the top of the key during last Thursday's home game.



McKenzie Flaherty of Valhalla lines up a shot from the left corner in last week's win over host Westlake.



Valhalla's Shelby Sekinski shoots the ball with her left hand as Westlake's Jesi Oswald defends during Thursday's game.



Westlake junior Elle Verna dribbles across the midcourt line in the Wildcats' home game vs. rival Valhalla.



Briarcliff guard Kacey Hamlin takes the ball into the lane during the Bears' 56-40 victory over host Pleasantville.



Briarcliff freshman Jordan Smith sets her sights on the basket as she holds the ball in the Bears' win over Pleasantville.



Alana Lombardi of Briarcliff scores on a fast break in the second half of the Bears' victory over the Panthers.



Julia Barbalato shoots the ball on the move during Briarcliff's 56-40 win on Friday afternoon.



Jenna McAllister of Pleasantville drives on Briarcliff's Kaitlyn Ryan in the second half of Friday's game.



Lila Donohue of Pleasantville dribbles around Julia Barbalato in the fourth quarter of Friday's game.



Briarcliff's Maddie Plank battles for rebound position with Pleasantville's Analese Picart in the Bears' win over the Panthers in the regular-season finale.



Analese Picart of Pleasantville has her path to the basket blocked by Briarcliff forward Jordan Smith.



Pleasantville's Mary Grace O'Neill dribbles out of the backcourt in Friday's game vs. visiting Briarcliff.



Maddie Plank of Briarcliff rises for a jump shot in the second half of Friday's win at Pleasantville.



Pleasantville's Julia O'Reilly tries to dribble past Briarcliff's Kaitlyn Ryan during Friday afternoon's Panther home game.



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Prelude to the Playoffs

**Nick Salzarulo and the Panthers
Battle Briarcliff on Friday Evening
During the Regular-Season Finale
With Another Matchup Looming
in the Class B Sectional Playoffs**

