



TOP: Sadness is etched on the face of Naselle junior Kaylin Shrides as she pauses during a late timeout and looks toward the Comet fans yelling with enthusiasm. Naselle's run to the WIAA 1B state championship title was stopped last Thursday night by No. 1-ranked Mount Vernon Christian whose players built a solid lead and kept adding to it. Final score was 47-26. **BELOW:** Lauren Katyryniuk scored 22 points for Naselle from every corner of the court to put the Comets into the 1B WIAA quarterfinals March 2. **BOTTOM:** Inspirational Comet co-captain Peyton Dalton only knows one direction in basketball and that is forward to the hoop. She and freshman Ava Myers-Marshall (22) move toward the well-guarded Mount Vernon Christian hoop during state quarterfinal action March 3.

PHOTOS BY PATRICK WEBB

ONE PLAYER'S FACE TELLS THE STORY

Naselle's state run shifts from ecstasy to agony

By **PATRICK WEBB**
For the Observer

SPOKANE — Kaylin Shrides did not say a word.

The sadness was evident. During a timeout at the WIAA championship, the Naselle junior turned to look toward the Naselle fans.

They never stopped yelling, "Comet power! Comet power!"

But the scoreboard clock ebbed the power away.

The girls from Mount Vernon Christian were not going to be stopped on their way to the 1B state title.

Naselle lost 47-26, unable to replicate the fluency 24 hours earlier when Comet junior Lauren Katyryniuk caught fire with a 22-point basketball clinic.

What followed is something Naselle will want to forget. Two minutes into their next contest against regional rivals Mossyrock, defensive warrior Echo Cenci went down.

Coach Russ Hickman had lost his "spark plug."

With her ankle heavily iced, the senior co-captain returned to the bench on crutches, tears streaming down her face, and urged on her team.

Mossyrock won 46-12, prompting the veteran coach to tell his squad, "It was not us out there."

A smile

Naselle had performed with mixed success during a long winter characterized by continuing covid restrictions and the early loss of another teammate to injury.

After state, captain Peyton Dalton dried her tears and chose to focus on the season, not the two losses in Spokane. "I think we started off a little rough and then we had lots of ups and downs," the senior said.

Then her face brightened into a smile. "I am so proud of us for com-

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ing together and playing the best basketball we have ever played, playing as a team, and not letting any of these things interfere with how far we get to go," she said.

Hickman, who returned to NHS to coach for one season, sought to brighten the mood. "It was a great group to be with," he said.

'Confidence'

At the end of the opening victory that sent Wellpinit home, the Naselle bench erupted onto the court to embrace the Comet victors, Hickman raised both hands and pumped the air at the 53-45 win, then marshaled his squad to applaud the Naselle fans.

Wednesday's smiles were earned. Katyryniuk wasn't the only one performing well. Another junior, Brynn Tarabochia, scored 15 points and Shrides added 11.

"I am almost in disbelief," the coach said, recapping the season. "Our goal was to get here and win one game at state," he said. "They are playing with confidence. We thought that we could take advantage of our physical attributes and it really worked."

Katyryniuk had scored all three of her 3-point attempts and all seven free-throws. "She has elevated her game," her coach said.

Dalton contributed a calm presence organizing her team, fellow senior Morgan Reitz was the rebound queen with 10, and Cenci demonstrated fire on defense, letting no one pass her and wrestling for the ball three or more times.

'IT WAS A GREAT GROUP TO BE WITH.'



Russ Hickman
NHS girls basketball coach



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Raymond girls place 6th at state basketball

Seagulls leave 2B tourney with trophy; county's best result

By **PATRICK WEBB**
For the Observer

SPOKANE — Raymond High School has earned a state team trophy.

The girls basketball team placed sixth at the WIAA 2B championships at the Spokane Arena.

The Seagulls had won two and lost one in their path to the trophy round. In their final game Saturday, Raymond lost to LaConner 67-52.

The game featured an exciting first half in which the lead changed five times and was tied three times. LaConner shifted in a high gear in the second and built a lead. Despite all efforts, Raymond was not able to catch up.

The Braves came into the tournament ranked No. 1 following a regular season with only one loss and a 91-54 regional win over Chief Leschi. But a quarterfinal loss to No. 2 Warden pushed LaConner into the consolation bracket where they defeated Lake Roosevelt 69-61.

At the half

The first half ended with the Braves ahead 33-31 after a spirited two periods. Senior Grace Busenius claimed the first points, snatching up a loose ball and firing it in. On defense she was a solid opponent, stopping several LaConner moves.

Sophomore Kyndal Koski fought on the ground for the ball and contributed to several passing moves. Senior Kyra Gardner was in her element, directing action, shooting for twos and threes, racing back in defense to bat away a shot. The second period opened with the Braves 19-13 ahead, but Gardner and freshman Karsyn Freeman hit consecutive 3-pointers and Gardner's sleight-of-hand pass gave the ball to senior Izzy Silvermail who brought the scores closer. As the half ended, Gardner stole the ball and fired it clear down the court to Freeman who scored while being fouled. She missed the free throw, but got the ball back and hit her second chance.

Close but not quite

In the second half, LaConner senior Sarah Cook hit 3-pointers that ran up the score. With eight minutes remaining in Raymond's season, the deficit was 49-45. But as the final quarter began, the Braves scored a 3-point shot, then another player drove to the basket for two, was fouled and hit the free throw. At one point the LaConner lead was 18 points, as the clock ticked down, and the Braves passed the ball around to burn off the minutes. Paige Williams, an enthusiastic sophomore, had the last word, nailing a free throw to bring the score to 67-52.

Raymond was presented with its sixth-place trophy then led the applause for LaConner.

Afterward, coach Jason Koski was disappointed in the game, but happy in the season, which included success in league and at Districts. "The second half got away from us, as we weren't very disciplined on some easy assignments," he said "That No. 33 (Cook) kind of had her way in the second half with those threes. She had four threes in the second half and you can't be undisciplined against good teams. So a lot of credit to them and hopefully those are things that we can learn from."

Other issues emerged. "Rebounding is another one," said the coach. "They got some offensive boards that hurt us and offensively we struggled, we didn't get people involved as much, not being able to play 5-on-5 sometimes hurts you."

'Grown'

As the high school season ends, Koski will lose Gardner's sharp mind and top-level



Raymond High School girls basketball team earned the sixth-place trophy at the WIAA 2B state championships in Spokane Saturday. The team is coached by Jason Koski with assistants Butch Betrozoff and Sarah Sides. On the roster are Kyra Gardner, Izzy Silvermail, Grace Busenius, Karsyn Freeman, Page Chan, Olivia Stigar, Sidney Swogger, Alia Enlow, Kyndal Koski, Emma Glazier, Megan Kongbouakhay, Tymber Livingston and Paige Williams. Managers were Kassie Koski and Callie McVey. Steve Silvermail, Briana Freeman and Julie Gardner kept stats. Athletic Director, not pictured, is Mike Tully.

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The cheering section from Raymond helps a basketball player at the free-throw line with the traditional quiet finger wiggle during action at the WIAA 1B state championships. Seagulls cheerleaders Tressa McMullen, Brooke Bednarek and Presley McVey led the way and performed an excellent routine for the crowd's entertainment. In the final battle Saturday, their three voices rang throughout the giant stadium, louder than the seven-girl LaConner squad.

PATRICK WEBB



Raymond sophomore Kyndal Koski, left, finds her path to the hoop blocked by a strong LaConner defender during action in Raymond's season-ending state trophy-round contest against LaConner. She scored six in the loss.

PATRICK WEBB

physical ability to Washington State University. "Just phenomenal basketball skills," he said. "I have never had a player like her."

He called freshman Freeman a "great athlete." All season she has just gotten better and better. She brings a real toughness mentality and a scorer's mentality for us."

His daughter, Kyndal, a sophomore, contributed in all games. "She has started to attack the basket a little bit more this year. She didn't really get a lot of looks, but she's grown as a player."

Mention of junior Alia Enlow produced

a chuckle. "I call her 'Gumby' because her arms and legs are all over," laughed the coach, "but she is so athletic and gives us the ability to guard outside or inside — and she has lots of energy."

The other standout was Busenius, whose work on defense was noticed. At the beginning of the season, he told her, "You are going to be a starter for us, and you are going to have to play 'dirty minutes,' and 'dirty minutes' are the strength game and getting on the floor and doing that stuff that people don't see but I see," said the coach.

Overall, Koski reflected on his mission. "The most important memories are the relationships that are formed between player and player, and player and coach, because they are going to come back in 20 years, just like my assistant Sarah (Sides), going and they are going to have the same memories — and that's what I want to provide."

Mixed success

Raymond's path at state launched Gardner into the spotlight again with a 30-point performance in a first-round win against Mabton. The 5-11 senior, named league player of the year for three consecutive years, dominated play, bombarding the Vikings' net with shots but passing almost as often.

Raymond won 65-44 with Freeman scoring 13.

The Seagulls had built a 23-12 lead after the first quarter and then kept adding to it. Score was 40-23 at the half.

In the quarterfinal, Gardner's team-high 21 would usually have been impressive. But two Colfax players had hot streaks of their

own. Freshman Brynn McGaughy scored 27 points and senior Asher Cai had 22, including four 3-point shots, as the Bulldogs roared to a 67-34 win.

The game started out reasonably evenly, and Raymond had a brief early lead, but two quarters either side of halftime — Colfax outscored Raymond 18-7 in each — put the outcome beyond doubt.

Rolling

The Colfax loss put the Seagulls into the consolation bracket and a matchup with Chief Leschi Friday. Raymond led all the way to win 56-42. Freeman was again on top form, scoring with a 3-pointer then on a solo play in which she cleverly kept the ball from going out of bounds, drove to the hoop and scored while being fouled. Shortly afterward, Gardner engineered several passes, but teammates just couldn't find the hoop.

After some close-in tussles, one passed it out to the far side of the court where Gardner fired in a 3-point shot. As the half ended, Gardner, back helping in defense, stole the ball from a Warrior player and accelerated down court for a lay-in. The halftime score was 35-15, and as the game resumed it was Gardner again running to the hoop to score despite some fierce defense and at one point Raymond led by 21.

Fellow Busenius had some good plays throughout and was on target from the free-throw line and Izzy Silvermail demonstrated her strength.

Leschi narrowed the lead throughout the second half, outscoring Raymond with junior Tala Mitchell proving dangerous with 17 points. But with some solid free-throws Raymond kept the margin from becoming close. Gardner finished with 24, Freeman 12 and Williams eight.

Graduating

The season ended Gardner's stellar high school basketball career as Athletic Director Mike Tully continued to tally how many school records she had broken. Players graduating with her will be Silvermail, Busenius, Page Chan, Olivia Stigar and Sidney Swogger. Other underclassmen on the roster were Williams, Enlow, Kyndal Koski, Emma Glazier, Megan Kongbouakhay and Tymber Livingston. The team is coached by Jason Koski with assistants Butch Betrozoff and Sarah Sides.

Raela McVey had schooled her cheer squad well. Tressa McMullen, Brooke Bednarek and Presley McVey were in full voice, leading the Seagulls fans with gusto, as they had all tournament. The trio outshouted LaConner's seven-girl squad throughout.

Naselle

Continued from Page A10

Wellpinit's strategy was to shoot from far out. Junior Melissa Seyler nailed four 3-pointers and more shots from close. Her tally of 19 would have been off the charts — and Naselle would have been driving home — had she scored with her missed 3-point attempts. She had 14.

Moments

Mount Vernon Christian won the 1B title, defeating Neah Bay 37-33 Saturday. Against Naselle Thursday, the Hurricanes were a whirlwind.

Shrives leapt high to win the tip-off, but Mount Vernon soon gained possession and began demonstrating why it was ranked No. 1.

At 6-0, Hurricanes' sophomore Allie Heino proved her strength at both ends of the court. She was a formidable presence, helping her team to a 27-7 halftime lead.

Katryniuk was unable to repeat the prior day's rhythm, scoring seven, but she did combine with Dalton on a superb pass that sent her captain in to score two of her team-high eight points. The Comet bench rose to cheer and the celebration was amplified shortly afterward when Shrives hit her lone 3-pointer from way, way out.

bench. At one point she intercepted a pass and raced across halfway, only to be called for bumping against a defender. Dalton and Tarabochia combined well with a passing move in the fourth quarter, but the clock showed only four minutes remaining.

Morgan Reitz, another senior, had a hand in many passing moves and subs Bella Dunagan, a junior, and two seniors, Courtney Paul and Grace Hunt, had their moments.

Hickman commended the Hurricanes. "They have got all the pieces. You hope that they don't bring their best game — but they did."

Their opponents' ability to score from far out shaped the game. "You play great defense for 28 seconds and they bury a three. Those are killers ... those are deflators."

But Naselle's second-half rally of 19 points pleased the coach. "If we had played a little bit more aggressive at the start of the ball game we might have lost by 10 instead of 20. But I am proud of my kids, the way they fought today."

Rivals

Naselle's season record against Mossyrock showed one win and two losses. There is a friendly rivalry. At state volleyball in Yakima last year, they rooted for each other with genuine enthusiasm.

At Spokane Friday, the Vikings took

care of business. After Cenci left, nothing worked for the Comets. Their shots just didn't drop. Mossyrock built a lead that was never going to be overcome.

"It's hard to always finish a season on a loss, but it's even worse when you played like we did," Hickman said. "Boy, I thought we were ready. We seemed to be pretty well focused. But hats off to Mossyrock. They came out and played really well and, of course, they shot the ball well."

Vikings junior Payton Torrey had 25 points and classmate Caelyn Marshall added 11; five Comets were on the scoreboard.

Tarabochia had Comet fans on their feet with an early 3-pointer, but four more shots from distance bounced away. At one point, Shrives and Reitz battled for the ball under the hoop then rolled their eyes when possession was awarded to their opponents.

Katryniuk fought under the hoop and drove to the basket for two points to add a glimmer of hope. Later, Shrives and Reitz took turns fighting for the ball on the ground. Paul subbed in and contributed some excellent passing.

But there was no comeback. Mossyrock advanced to play for hardware Saturday, placing sixth after a 57-48 overtime loss to Pomeroy, which took fourth.

'Better'

Hickman was eager to praise his five

seniors' contributions.

The loss of Cenci, falling heavily after a collision in the key, meant the coach had to reshuffle. "She has been our 'spark plug' on defense. That just killed us — that was our whole defensive scheme, and when we lost her we didn't really have a good rotation," Hickman said. "Not that it would have mattered tonight, because I thought Mossyrock was much better."

The coach summed up Dalton's contribution. "She had really improved and she is such a team leader — a real tenacious attitude about things," he said.

Reitz' family moved back to Naselle a while ago and contributes greatly to Comet programs. "This is her first year playing for us, and she really helped us out," the coach said, "because we lost Delaney Kragerud to a concussion at the start of the season, and we didn't have another post in the rotation, so Morgan really helped us out. She did a great job. There were many games she was in double-digit rebounds for us."

Hunt and Paul both played with poise. Their coach heralded Hunt as a good team player, and smiled when asked about Paul. "She is our P.E. 'ratballer,'" he said with a laugh, and noted that both stepped up. "They had to tonight, because we were shorthanded."

At the end, subs Dunagan, Ava Myers-Marshall, Jessah Watson and Gladys Wilson had a brief taste of state action.