

# Lakers romp past Rocks

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Two teams collided and spun off into opposite directions at Monday's Class A girls basketball regional at Novi High School. But it didn't take a final shot, or even a final quarter, to decide which team was headed in which direction Tuesday.

This game was over early. A 19-point first half by Kim Kipela propelled a high-flying West Bloomfield team to a surprisingly easy 63-38 victory over Plymouth Salem, sending the Lakers (now 19-4) into the regional final against Birmingham Marian at 7 p.m. tonight at Novi.

The result sent Salem packing with an 18-5 mark.

"We couldn't make anything go," said Rocks' coach Fred Thomann. "We missed our inside shots, we missed our perimeter shots, we missed our free throws."

Against a high-level team like this, you can't do that. "Early in the game, we had some great looks at the basket. We just couldn't get them to fall."

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West Bloomfield — Kipela in particular — had no such problem. Two-and-a-half minutes into the second half, the tide started to turn in the Lakers' favor, and it never altered direction again.

Kipela was the key. The 6-foot-1 senior followed her first point first quarter by scoring 11 more in the second, nine of them coming in a decisive 18-2 run.

A basket by Salem's Tiffany Grubbaugh had given the Rocks a 17-13 lead with 6:43 left in the half. Jen Kristensen answered with a three-pointer 13 seconds later, and West Bloomfield was off and running.

Any good team has stretches of superb play in a game; that's what makes them good. The Lakers' 20-5 run in that final 5:30 of the second quarter was their game-winner; Salem's problem was, it could never find an answer.

"We wanted to play an up-tempo game against them, to see

how they'd play against pressure," said West Bloomfield coach Lance Davis. "We thought we could wear them down."

"Our focus was tremendous tonight. We can do some things better . . . We can score a little more from the perimeter. But our focus is right where I want it to be."

The Rocks, trailing 33-22 at the half, did have a chance in the second half to get back in it. Kipela, who didn't have a foul in the first half, had three before the third quarter was four minutes old and went to the bench. But by then, Salem's offense was off. The Lakers limited the Rocks to just three third-quarter points on 1-of-9 floor shooting. Salem contributed to its own demise by converting just 1-of-7 from the free-throw line and making eight turnovers.

West Bloomfield had increased its 11-point halftime cushion to 19 points after three — all while turning the ball over seven times in the quarter.

Kipela, who's committed to the University of Buffalo, finished with 24 points. When she got the ball at the low post, she

was unstoppable, even when triple-teamed. Heather Robbins added 10 points and Lisa Copeland scored seven.

Grubbaugh's 17 points paced Salem. Christine Phillips added nine. Andrea Pruett, the Rocks' best inside scorer, was sick and for the most part ineffective throughout the game, a key factor in the final result. Pruett scored just two points.

"We've played some really tough competition this season," noted Davis. "We've improved our schedule, so that in games like this we're better prepared. No matter how far we get down, we don't get rattled. We've learned how to handle adversity better."

That resolve will be tested tonight against Marian (21-3), the team that eliminated West Bloomfield in the regionals last year. "They match up to us pretty well," Davis said of the Mustangs. "But I think we have experience on our side, and we have the motivating factors on our side."

If the Lakers execute the way they did against Salem, Marian could be in for a long night.



Regional action: West Bloomfield's Lisa Copeland (left) knocks the ball away from Andrea Pruett Monday.

## Marian advances to regional final

BY JOE KYRIAKOZ  
STAFF WRITER

It's been a coach's nightmare since Dr. James Naismith laced up the sneakers.

When your talented group of athletes has a not-so-talented team staring from the other end of the court — especially in the playoffs — the playoff fire isn't exactly there.

It scared Birmingham Marian coach Mary Lillie-Cicerone, especially in the first half, but her Mustangs' second-half press caused numerous turnovers and pushed them to a 59-48 triumph over Detroit Northern Monday in the first round of the Class A Regional basketball tournament at Novi High School.

"We were just flat," Lillie-Cicerone said. "We tried some different things and we got after it better in the second half."

"They were looking past Northern. I got after them on the lack of intensity on defense."

And the 21-3 Mustangs

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pressed hard in the second half, snaring 13 of 18 steals in the second half and converting them into fast-break buckets.

Marian's victory puts them in position to take on a hot West Bloomfield squad. The teams square off 7 p.m. today at Novi High School.

The first 15 minutes of play was a back-and-forth battle, but Marian, down two with 38 seconds to go in the half, scored eight unanswered points. A spark by freshman Katie Solner boosted Marian, as she drilled a three-pointer from between mid-court and the three-point line at the half-time buzzer, putting Marian up 31-25.

Marian's second half attack revolved around getting the ball to 6-3 senior center Nicole Anaejionu, who had a considerably smaller player guarding her. Anaejionu cashed in and scored six third-quarter points to lift

the Mustangs to their biggest lead of 45-35.

Marian increased its lead to as many as 14 (55-41) with 3:09 remaining in the game and salted away the victory.

Anaejionu took some time before taking advantage of her size, much to the dismay of Lillie-Cicerone, who knows she has the ability to dominate the paint. "She's got to go to the basket," Lillie-Cicerone said. "The girl's got moves. They finally got her the ball."

The steady play of senior Kellie Byers accounted for a team-leading 15 points while Anaejionu followed with 12 points, 12 rebounds and seven steals. Junior Crystal Andrews helped with nine points and sophomore Sarah Cashen played solid defense with seven rebounds and three steals. Solner's contributions resulted in nine points and three steals, and Lillie-Cicerone was impressed with the freshman's ability to come off the bench and provide a boost.

"We need her now more than

ever," Lillie-Cicerone said, referring to Solner's ability to play point guard since regular starter Jasmin MacAlpine is out with a season-ending injury. "She's my only true point guard."

Marian's next task won't be as easy, as the Lakers, who dominated a strong Plymouth-Salem team, will out-size the Mustangs with three 6-footers to Marian's one — Anaejionu. Anaejionu has owned opposing defenders during Marian's playoff run, but she drew undersized players in most of her match-ups. The toughest challenge of the season now lies in front of the Mustangs.

"(West Bloomfield) has good inside players," Lillie-Cicerone said. "We're gonna have to protect the paint."

But she still has concerns about her team's hot-and-cold play.

"That's been a big problem all year," she said. "One night we're awesome, one night we're not. But here we are 21-3 and I'm complaining. But that's me, I'm always complaining."

## Crusaders too tall, tough for Blazers, 59-43

BY BRAD BEMONS  
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Livonia Ladywood gave a better account of itself in its Class A regional meeting Monday night with girls basketball power Detroit Martin Luther King.

But the Blazers will have to wait again until next year as the Crusaders' front line, led by 6-foot-2 junior Ovinia Lewis, was just too strong.

Lewis had 24 points and 17 rebounds as King advanced to the finals of the Dearborn High regional with a 59-43 win over Ladywood.

King (23-2) will face off for the fourth time this season against Public School League rival

Detroit Western in Wednesday's championship game at Dearborn. (Game time is 7 p.m.)

Western defeated Detroit Cody in the first game of the double-header, 54-46.

Ladywood, a 66-28 loser to King in last year's regional final at Southfield, bowed out at 13-11 overall.

But the Blazers played a scrappy game for four quarters and protected the basketball better (21 turnovers) than the 1997 game against King.

Offensive rebounds — 23 for King — and poor outside shooting by the Blazers — 16 of 68 from the floor (23.5 percent) — led to Ladywood's undoing.

"When we watched them

against Bishop Foley they got 22 offensive rebounds," Ladywood coach Andrea Gorski said. "You can't give them two or three shots. A lot of times we had them boxed out, but they'd jump over us and tip it to somebody else."

The 6-2 Lewis had help from teammate Stephanie Solomon, a 6-2 junior who finished with 14 points, and 6-foot senior Nathania Howard, who scored eight.

King led 16-10 after one quarter and increased their margin to 36-16 at intermission.

In the third quarter, Lewis scored all 12 of King's points, including a bucket with 2:47 left in the period for the Crusaders' biggest lead of the night, 48-20.

Ladywood refused to quit, scoring the next nine points capped by Elena Sventickas' two

free throws to make it 48-29 after three quarters. The Blazers outscored King 14-11 in the final quarter.

"In our half-court defense we forced them to take the shots we wanted and I felt our defense stayed with them, even when we had to go man-to-man in the second half," Gorski said. "And I thought we handled their pressure fine and got the shots we wanted."

"But mentally we were a little rushed and we couldn't knock our shots down. If we had hit the three's early it would have been closer."

Senior guard Erin Hayden, playing her final game as a Blazer, scored a team-high 14 points.

Sophomore Michelle Harankas was the only other Blazer in double figures with 10 points.

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