

Bears sink Lady Ocelots at buzzer

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It was one of those highlight film kind of plays, one you don't mind watching again and again — unless it was your team that was victimized.

Schoolcraft College's women's basketball team suffered through just that at last Saturday's NJCAA Region 12 District II Final at Owens Tech in Toledo. The Lady Ocelots went from hysteria to despair in a span of less than five seconds, the end result a 69-67 loss to Flint Mott CC.

"It was a very disappointing ending," said SC coach Karen Lafata. "But it was a very good ball game. Mott played outstanding. And so did we."

With the game tied at 67-all in the final seconds, the Ocelots' Devin Francois forced a Mott turnover, but as she drove to the Bears' basket she was whistled for an offensive foul, giving possession of the ball back to Mott.

"They had to go the full length of the court in 4.7 seconds," said Lafata. "We put on a soft press with a player on the ball at the end line."

"They threw a long pass and it was like Joe Montana to Jerry Rice. It was just a perfect pass."

The Bears got the game-winning layup at the buzzer to upset SC, which had beaten Mott in their Michigan Community College Athletic Association meeting by 10 points. The Ocelots bow out at 26-5; Mott improves to 20-10.

There was nothing for Lafata to be unhappy about regarding her team's play. SC converted 30-of-61 floor shots (49.2 percent), with Rachel Eley and Francois leading the offense.

Eley, named the Region 12 Player of the Year and the Eastern Conference MVP, collected 22 points (on 11-of-19 shooting), five assists and five steals, while Francois had 20 points (8-of-10 shooting, including 2-of-3 three-pointers), 10 rebounds and two steals.

Kera Hill added nine points, eight assists and two steals.

Mott, which trailed 32-29 at

Ocelots

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Ocelots had to take off again at 9 a.m. Saturday bound for Minneapolis, Minn.

Their plane, however, was diverted to Omaha, Neb. because of bad weather. And once they landed back in Minnesota, the Ocelots faced a three-hour ride by van into North Dakota, only to encounter high winds and temperatures below zero.

But the worst was the icy interstate, which made driving conditions both slow and treacherous.

"We got into Wahpeton around 9:30 p.m. and we left at 9 a.m.," Briggs said. "We didn't practice for two days."

"It would have been easy to go in the tank, but we showed toughness and accepted the challenge."

Schoolcraft led by only four at halftime, 49-45, as 6-10 center David Erbes kept the Wildcats in close contact with 20 of his team-high 24 points.

North Dakota Science had the game tied at 58-all with 13 minutes remaining and pulled within four with just under 4 minutes to go.

But Clark scored on a short banker and followed by nailing a triple from the wing. Harris followed with the dagger, hitting a big triple with the shot clock winding down with just under 2 minutes to play to put Schoolcraft ahead 87-75.

Clark and Williams each converted on a pair of free throws in the final minute to seal the victory.

For the game, Schoolcraft made 19 of 24 free throws (79.2 percent) and shot 34 of 60 from the field (56.7 percent). The Ocelots also outrebounded North Dakota Science, 45-35.

"We rebounded the ball better in the second half," Briggs said. "And we shot the ball well. When you do that that you have a chance to win."

Three other Wildcats scored in double figures including Patrick Miller (12), Jared Kenworthy (11) and J.R. Patrick (10). Miller also had six assists, while Erbes grabbed eight rebounds. "I think our early schedule being on the road has helped us at the end," said Briggs, whose team won three games over Thanksgiving weekend in Southern Idaho. "To get back to 'Hutch' you have to win on the road. Our scheduling has paid off."

WOMEN'S HOOPS

the half, got 24 points from Quonya Muldrew, 17 from Alex-niah Teverbaugh and 10 from Tiffany Nalls.

"We had a great season," said Lafata. "But that's tournament basketball. Sometimes you need a break to win, and we didn't get one."

While SC struggled to a two-point win Friday over host Owens Tech in its semifinal, Mott had

an easier time of it, beating Lakeland (Ohio) CC by six.

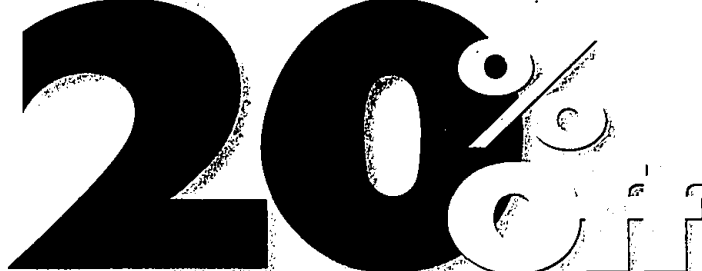
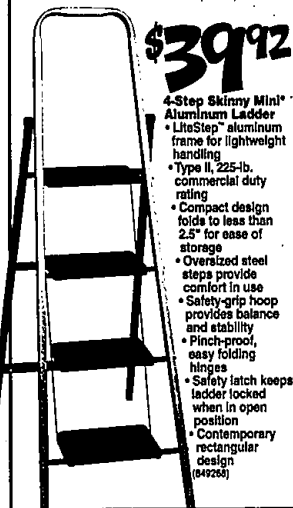
Eley wasn't the only Ocelot singled out for recognition. Francois was named to the all-tournament team and was second-team all-conference, and Hill was third team all-conference.

Ton Ocelots are sophomores, which means Lafata has a rebuilding job ahead of her.

"That was a great recruiting class, the best Schoolcraft has ever had," she said.



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