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Hornets Clamp Down on OA to Gain Division Lead

Josh Perry; HockomockSports.com

NORTH EASTON, Mass. – In the three games leading into Friday night's first-place showdown with Mansfield in the William F. Nixon Gym, Oliver Ames senior forward Kayla Raymond had averaged 32 points per game. But defense has been the cornerstone of back-to-back league titles for the Hornets and they came out intent on keeping the Stonehill-commit quiet.

Using a box-and-one defense and taking advantage of a roster filled with athletic wing defenders, Mansfield held Raymond to just six points on the night and the Tigers to only seven points as a whole in the first half to win 44-31 in the first of two meetings between the teams this season.

"We have the highest respect for Kayla and you have to start your defense with slowing her down," said Mansfield coach Mike Redding. "We're fortunate that we have Maggie [Danehy], Steph [Kemp], Emily [Vigeant], Sydney [Mulkern], four different people that can run around and are long enough and quick enough to keep it out of her hands."

He added, "We're really good defensively when we can zero in on one player and take her out and then rebound when other people miss."

The game plan worked to perfection in the first half. Mansfield held OA scoreless for the opening five minutes of the game, allowed only one made field goal in the first quarter and three made shots in the first half to build a 24-7 lead at the break.

"It disrupted us and we've got to be better at recognizing that other people can do things too," said OA coach Laney Clement-Holbrook of Mansfield's ability to deny Raymond touches. "We depend on Kayla all the time and the other kids have to gain the confidence in their ability to do what they're capable of doing and we didn't do that in the first half."

Mansfield also got off to a strong start offensively with Ann Maher scoring all eight of her points in the first, including a pair from beyond the arc, and Meg Hill getting five of her game-high 16 points. Hill also added nine rebounds and five blocks, just missing out on another double-double.

In the second quarter, Meg Holleran came off the bench and scored four points for the Tigers, one layup off a Raymond assist that momentarily looked like it might get the hosts going and a second after Katie Flynn pulled down and defensive board and sprung Holleran on the break.

"She did a good job," said Clement-Holbrook of Holleran. "She scored some points, she was physical inside, but we just weren't disciplined offensively."

Those were the only baskets of the quarter for OA, while Mansfield continued to get the ball into the paint with Hill scoring off assists by Maher and Kemp and Danehy (10 points and nine rebounds) scoring five in the quarter. Hill capped the half by knocking down a long jumper to make it 24-7.

The second half was much better from the Tigers, although OA only managed two made shots in the third quarter as well. Alex Sheldon scored all five of her points in the third and Raymond got on the board, going 3-of-4 from the line. Holleran (10 points) also knocked down one of her two second half threes but Mansfield matched the Tigers in the quarter.

The Hornets were sparked off the bench by Mulkern (10 points), who knocked down a three after Mady Bendanillo swung the ball around the perimeter and added four more points in the fourth as well.

“We did a good job getting Meg looks and then they did a good job doubling in the second half and Sydney Mulkern really stepped up,” said Redding. “They left someone open and it ended up being her a few teams. We’re good enough when they double Meg to keep people honest and give her room to score in the paint.”

OA was not able to close the gap in the third, despite having moments when it seemed as though the momentum may have swung to the Tigers.

“In the second half, we made a few adjustments and I think we got some positive things out of those adjustments,” said Clement-Holbrook. “[Ally] Scolnick had three threes that went in-and-out and I think if those go down it would have changed momentum a little.”

Erin Holmberg scored five of her seven points in the fourth, including a three on the game’s final shot, and Holleran knocked down her second three of the night. Raymond finally got a clean look and hit a three for her only made field goal in the game.

Hill scored twice in the fourth, both on assists from freshman Ashley Santos, to keep the Hornets ahead by a comfortable margin, as OA never got closer than 13 in the second half.

Clement-Holbrook said of her relatively inexperienced roster, “Those kids in those moments where there’s a lot of pressure on them, they’ve just got to be equal to the task and they’ve got to handle it. I have a lot of kids who haven’t played at this level, so they’ve got to be able to handle the bright lights.”

With the win, Mansfield moves a full game ahead of OA and Franklin in the Kelley-Rex, but Redding knows the Hornets still have a lot of work to do to clinch a three-peat. He explained, “It’s good to get to the halfway point controlling your own destiny. We’re in a good spot but there is a lot of basketball left to play. It’s going to be a good race to the end.

Mansfield (9-4, 7-1) will travel to Sharon on Tuesday, while Oliver Ames (7-3, 6-2) faces a trip to Milford.

Brutal start dooms Oliver Ames in loss to stingy Hornets

The Sun Chronicle:

The Mansfield High girls’ basketball team limited Oliver Ames to merely two first-quarter points in taking a 44-31 victory Friday in the Hockomock League game.

Hornet senior center-forward Meg Hill scored 16 points, took in 14 rebounds and blocked seven Tigers shots in helping Mansfield improve to 9-4 overall, 7-1 in the Kelley-Rex Division.

Kayla Raymond, the Tigers’ leading scorer, was limited to six points with Emily Vigeant, Sydney Mulkern and Maggie Danehy providing the lockdown defense.

Mansfield owned a 24-7 lead by halftime. Mulkern, a junior off the bench for Mansfield chipped in eight points, while Danehy added 10 points and Ann Maher hit a pair of 3-point field goals.

Mansfield next visits Sharon Tuesday.

MANSFIELD (44)

Daniel 0 0-0 0, Vigeant 0 0-0 0, Mulkern 2 3-4 8, M. Bendanillo 1 0-0 2, Santos 0 0-0 0, Kemp 0 0-0 0, Maher 3 0-0 8, K. Bendanillo 0 0-0 0, Hill 7 2-4 16, Danehy 2 6-12 10, totals 15 11-20 44.

OLIVER AMES (31)

Holmberg 3 0-0 7, Riordan 1 1-2 3, Sheldon 1 3-4 5, Halloran 4 0-0 10, Raymond 1 3-4 6, Flynn 0 0-0 0, totals 10 7-10 31.

Team	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	Final
Mansfield	13	11	11	09	44
Oliver Ames	02	05	11	13	31

3-point goals—Msf. 3 (Mulkern 1, Maher 2), OA 4 (Holmberg 1, Halloran 2, Raymond 1).