

Mansfield Rallies in Third Quarter to Beat Milford



Mansfield went on a 22-0 run in the third quarter to overcome an eight-point deficit and come from behind to beat Milford on the road. (Josh Perry/HockomockSports.com)



By Josh Perry
Managing Editor

MILFORD, Mass. – Heading into halftime of Tuesday night’s game at Milford High, the Hawks seemed on the verge of an upset over Kelley-Rex division leader Mansfield, but a collision in the final minute of the second quarter proved to be the game’s decisive moment and sparked a big second half comeback for the Hornets.

Senior point guard Kate Irwin, who had been held to five points and two assists in the first half, but who drew most of the attention from the Mansfield defense, collided with Mady Bendanillo and landed hard. Irwin could not return and the Hornets were able to take advantage. Mansfield ran off 22 unanswered points in the third quarter to not only take the lead but also take control of the game on the way to a 53-40 victory that keeps the Hornets in front by two games in the league standings.

“This is a game that defines how good Kate Irwin is,” said Mansfield coach Mike Redding. “They’ve got a really good team but she’s the engine that makes it go. They had us on the ropes and we were going to be in deep trouble to get a win out of here with her in for a full game. She’s an MVP-caliber type player.”

With the Hornets mixing things up on defense and keying on Irwin, trying to keep the ball out of her hands, other Milford players needed to step up. Juliana Tracy scored all five of her points in the first, knocking down a three and scoring on a rebound, and Jess Tomaso drove to the hoop for two.

Mansfield would hold a 14-10 lead after the first thanks to senior center Meg Hill (17 points and 10 rebounds). She scored the Hornets’ first six points and, as the Hawks sank down on the paint, Emily Vigeant and Ann Maher (six points) drilled threes.

In the second quarter, Milford made the Hornets pay for giving so much attention to Irwin. After a jumper by Maggie Danehy (eight points and 10 rebounds) put Mansfield up by seven, the Hawks started to click.

Piergustavo knocked down a pull-up jumper, Gillian Valanzola drove to the basket for two points, and Julie Rabinowitz drilled a three to cut the lead to two. Piergustavo nailed her second three of the game to give Milford its first lead at 23-22, as part of a 13-0 run to close the half. Valanzola got free on another drive and Irwin caught Mansfield with a back cut and layup and Piergustavo closed the quarter with another three.

“I think we got good looks,” said Milford coach T.J. Dolliver. “We have the players to step up and make those shots. We’ve expected defenses to take away Kate, but we don’t really plan for it and we don’t really practice it too much because we have the pieces that we need to be a complete basketball team.”

Coming out of halftime, Irwin was forced to the bench holding an ice pack and the Hawks never recovered. Mansfield turned things around, locking down on defense and shutting out Milford in the quarter, while finally getting the offense in gear.

Maher hit a three to cut the lead to a single point and then the Hornets took back the lead after Vigeant tracked down a rebound and assisted on a Hill basket. Bendanillo added four points in the third and Sydney Mulkern came off the bench to score nine points on three shots from beyond the arc to push the lead to 14 (44-30) heading into the fourth.

“Not many kids can come off the bench and first shot bury the three but she’s cool and calm and she’s got confidence in her shot,” said Redding of Mulkern. “She gives us a really good defender. She’s quick, long and defends really well.”

He added, “We played a great third quarter. Obviously, it helped not having to defend Kate but we also woke up on offense, started passing it well, and making some shots.” The Hawks struggled without their point guard in the third, but Dolliver credited his team for not allowing the game to get out-of-hand and pushing back in the fourth.

“When Kate goes down and can’t enter the game again, the team is in shock a little bit,” he explained. “It takes a little while to get over that as an athlete, but I still thought we played well in the second half. There were the first five minutes or so where we were stagnant offensively, and defensively, and it’s a matter of picking yourself up and starting to play better.” Milford cut the lead to 12, but Danehy scored on an offensive rebound and Hill drained a jumper. Rabinowitz nailed her second three and Tomaso (six points) scored with a baseline drive, before Piergustavo (14 points) ended with her fourth three.

“People are going to look at the box score and say, oh Milford lost by 13, but that’s not the story of the game,” said Dolliver. “I’m very proud of the way we played and we’re just trying to get ready for the playoffs.”

Redding had a similar thought after the final whistle. He admitted, “We’re lucky to get out of here. Stoughton did us a favor and we almost gave it back tonight. I told the girls, from here on in everyone’s out to knock us off. We have to bring our ‘A’ game.”

Mansfield (12-4, 10-1) will get back into division play on Friday when it hosts Taunton. Milford (10-5, 6-5) will try to hold onto second in the Davenport when it faces Stoughton.

Mansfield 53, Milford 40

MILFORD — The Hornets (12-4) officially qualified for the MIAA Tournament with a Hockomock League victory over Milford.

Mansfield shut out the Hawks 22-0 in the third quarter, led by junior Sydney Mulkern's nine points on three 3-pointers. Meg Hill recorded another double-double with a game-high 17 points and 12 rebounds.

Junior forward Maggie Danehy finished with eight points and 12 rebounds (nine offensive).

Mansfield (10-1 in the Hockomock) hosts Taunton Friday.

MANSFIELD (53)

Daniel 2 0-0 4, Vigeant 1 0-0 3, Mulkern 3 0-0 9, M. Bendanillo 2 0-0 4, Kemp 1 0-0 2, Maher 2 0-0 6, Hill 8 1-2 17, Danehy 4 0-0 8, Carney 0 0-0 0, K. Bendanillo 0 0-0 0, S. Hottleman 0 0-0 0, totals 23 1-2 53.

MILFORD (40)

Erwin 2 0-0 5, Rabinowitz 2 0-0 6, Piergustavo 5 0-0 14, Valanzola 2 0-0 4, Thomaso 2 2-4 6, Tracy 2 0-0 5, totals 15 2-4 40.

Team	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	Final
Mansfield	14	08	22	09	53
Milford	10	20	00	10	40

3-point goals-Mansfield. 6 (Vigeant, Mulkern 3, Maher 2),
Milford 8 (Erwin, Rabinowitz 2, Piergustavo 4, Tracy).

JV: Mansfield, 53-26.