

Mansfield charges back to top Lowell in home-court 'Classic'

By Mark Farinella Feb 21, 2018

MANSFIELD — If the Mansfield High girls' basketball team needed a test before the MIAA Division 1-South Tournament, it certainly got one Wednesday night.

Mike Redding's Hornets battled back from an 11-point, third-quarter deficit to defeat Lowell, 50-48, and earn the championship of the Mansfield Roundball Classic at the Albertini Gym.

Senior center Meg Hill and junior forward Maggie Danehy used their 6-foot frames to best advantage, combining for 33 points and 24 rebounds to fully exploit their size advantage over the 16-6 Panthers.

"Maggie handled one side and Meg handled the other," Redding said. Hill, bound for Stonehill next year, scored eight of her team-high 19 points and grabbed four defensive rebounds in the fourth quarter, and Danehy had a basket and two rebounds as Mansfield rallied from a 40-37 deficit with 6:36 left to play.

After a free throw by Iona-bound Shyan Mwai, Mansfield ran off the next eight points — two free throws by Hill, a short Hill jumper off Sydney Mulkern's feed, Mulkern's basket off Danehy's feed and Danehy's lay-in from a pass by Ann Maher, all over the course of 2 1/2 minutes.

The Hornets built their lead to 49-42 inside the last 33 seconds, but Lowell's Brittany Mota knocked down consecutive 2-pointers to pull back within a point with 3.4 seconds left. Maher was strategically fouled with 2.5 seconds left and hit the first of her two shots, but missed the second — and as everybody in the gym held their breath, the rebound rolled out of bounds off a Lowell player, enabling Mansfield to kill the clock on the inbounds pass.

"This is a good win," Redding said. "It secured the No. 3 (seed in the tourney bracket) and it secures two home games — which, in our division, is a pretty valuable place to be."

The teams battled through nine lead changes and two ties in the first half before Mota netted two baskets to lead Lowell in a 7-0 run to close the first half, putting the Panthers up 29-20. Mota's early success (16 of her game-high 22 points) was Lowell's compensation for Mansfield's tough box-and-one defense on Mwai in the first half.

Danehy, Maher and Hill combined for a 9-2 run midway through the third quarter, pulling Mansfield back within four points (35-31) before Mwai (12 points) completed a three-point play with 2:54 left. But Emily Vigeant scored on a putback and Kara Bendanillo hit a 19-footer to whittle the deficit down to a manageable three points entering the final quarter.

Maher added nine points and a game-high five assists for the Hornets, who improved to 18-5 overall and 16-3 for tournament qualification. Pairings for the postseason will be announced Friday.

Hornets Rally in Second Half to Win Roundball Classic

Josh Perry

MANSFIELD, Mass. — All season long, Mansfield has found a way to turn games around in the second half by locking down on the defensive end of the floor and getting good looks on offense. The Hornets needed those in-game adjustments again on Wednesday night in the final of the Roundball Classic at the James Albertini Gym.

Mansfield went on an 18-4 run between the third and fourth quarters to turn around a nine-point deficit against Lowell and then held off the Red Raiders in the closing seconds for a 50-48 victory in the regular season finale.

"The third quarter has been pretty good for us," said Mansfield coach Mike Redding. "The kids are pretty smart, so we make a couple of adjustments on 'O' and 'D' and they execute at both ends. The triangle-and-two, we didn't practice it yesterday, we just practiced box-and-one, but they executed like we practiced it for a week."

At the start of the game, Mansfield went with a box-and-one, using Sydney Mulkern and Emily Vigeant (with the other four defenders always looking to help) to face-guard Lowell senior Shyan Mwai. It worked to stop Mwai, who hit a step-back three but was held to four made field goals and 12 points in the game.

The problem was that her classmate Brittany Mota was finding spaces in the zone and knocking down shots. She scored five in the first to help Lowell build a 12-9 lead after one quarter. She caught fire in the second, getting open looks from both corners and knocking down three from beyond the arc and scoring 11 of her game-high 22.

On offense, Hornets were getting decent looks but were unable to knock down shots consistently. Meg Hill (19 points and 14 rebounds) hit a jumper that cut the Lowell lead to 22-20 but the Red Raiders finished the half on a 7-0 run.

Redding was frustrated during the second quarter, at one point yelling for his team to 'wake up.' Apparently the halftime conversation did just that because Mansfield came out of the break looking like a different team, in part because of a defensive switch.

"Mato killed us in the first half, so we went from a box-and-one to a triangle-and-two and that seemed to slow them down a little offensively and our other three kids were able to keep the other three off the boards," Redding explained.

Ann Maher was switched onto Mato, holding her scoreless for the first 15 minutes of the second half. Still, when Mwai went down the lane and scored plus the foul, the Hornets found themselves trailing 38-31, but the Red Raiders would not make another shot from the floor until the final minute of the game.

Vigeant hustled to score on an offensive rebound and Kara Bendanillo knocked down a pull-up jumper to close the gap to three points heading into the fourth. Hill and Maggie Danehy (14 points and 11 rebounds) each scored four in the third, as the Hornets started to get the ball inside.

"We got simpler on offense because of all the traps and just moved the ball so much better in the second half without the turnovers," said Redding. "It makes a world of difference when you're not turning it over and getting it inside to Meg Hill."

That was the game plan for the fourth, as Hill got the ball under the basket on numerous occasions. Vigeant got a steal and fed Hill for a layup and she scored off a lobbed assist by Mulkern that put the Hornets ahead 41-40, their first lead since it was 13-12.

Danehy, who was named the tournament's MVP, assisted on a layup for Mulkern and then chased down an offensive rebound and scored to build the lead. After a pair of Lowell free throws, Hill scored again in the paint, this time from a Maher assist, and then Maher (nine points) added a pair at the line to seemingly ice the game at 49-42.

Mato had other ideas. She buried a three to cut the lead to four and then added a second three with 3.4 seconds remaining that got the visitors back within one. Maher made 1-of-2 at the line but Lowell could not collect the rebound and the game ended with a narrow Mansfield win.

"This was a really good test against a quick defensive team that had a couple really good offensive players and our division is really good but there's not a lot of size...so they're kind of the same style as Wellesley and Braintree," said Redding as he looked ahead to the state tournament.

He added, "This was a good win. It secures No. 3 [seed], it secures two home games, which in our division is a pretty valuable place to be."

Mansfield finishes the regular season at 18-5 (16-3 in terms of seeding for the tournament).

Mansfield 50, Lowell 48

LOWELL (48)

Ravagli 0-3 0-0 0, Meehan 0-2 0-0 0, Mwai 3-16 5-7 12, Mota 8-18 0-0 22, Yrrizarry 1-4 2-4 4, Paulino 2-6 0-0 4, Martinez 2-5 2-3 6, totals 16-54 9-14 48.

MANSFIELD (50)

Daniel 0-1 0-3 0, Vigeant 1-4 0-1 2, Mulkern 2-6 0-0 4, M. Bendanillo 0-2 0-0 0, Kemp 0-2 0-0 0, Maher 2-13 3-4 9, K. Bendanillo 1-4 0-0 2, Hill 8-11 3-6 19, Danehy 7-14 0-0 14, totals 21-57 6-14 50.

Team	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	Final
Lowell	12	17	09	10	48
Mansfield	09	11	15	15	50

3-point goals—Lowell 7-21 (Ravagli 0-2, Meehan 0-1, Mwai 1-8, Mota 6-9, Martinez 0-1), Mansfield 2-19 (Daniel 0-1, Vigeant 0-2, Mulkern 0-3, M. Bendanillo 0-1, Maher 2-12).

Rebounds--Lowell 38 (Martinez 9), Mansfield 43 (Hill 13).

Assists--Lowell 6 (Mwai, Yrrizarry 2), Mansfield 15 (Maher 5).

Total fouls--Lowell 17, Mansfield 14.

Fouled out—Yrrizarry.