

Braintree bests Mansfield in South semifinal

By Mark Farinella

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Mansfield High's Meg Hill, left, has her layup attempt denied by Braintree High's Jeniyah Jones during their MIAA Division 1 South Sectional semifinal game Thursday at Taunton High School. MARK STOCKWELL/the sun chronicle

TAUNTON -- They were wearing their green road uniforms for the first time in this tournament, and it's almost as if there were different people wearing them.

The third-seeded Mansfield High girls' basketball team simply had no answer for the full-court pressure defense employed upon them by the No. 2 Braintree Wamps in the first half of Thursday's MIAA Division 1-South semifinal at Taunton High. And by the time it appeared the Hornets had figured things out, the damage had already been done.

"Everybody's athletic out there and they're getting in our passing lanes, and nothing's easy," Mansfield coach Mike Redding said after his Hornets' 68-40 loss to Braintree. "There just weren't many answers. They were simply the better team tonight."

For Braintree coach Kristen McDonnell, looking at the looming presence of 6-foot-3 Mansfield senior center Meg Hill in the paint, the decision to go to full-court pressure was a simple one.

"We wanted to press from the start, but we were so concerned about getting into early foul trouble, which we did anyway," she said. "So we figured, why not press at the same time. We have so much respect from Meg Hill, and our goal was to bring her as far away from the basket as possible."

The first of Hill's nine baskets (toward a game-high total of 19 points) gave Mansfield its only lead, 4-2, 1:17 into the contest. Braintree was able to create transition opportunities and outscored Mansfield 11-2 over the rest of the opening quarter -- but at the same time, as McDonnell feared, starters Adriana Timberlake and Mackenzie Moore drew two personal fouls apiece in the process.

At the start of the second quarter, Braintree threw caution to the wind -- and the gambit paid off. Pressuring from end line to end line, the Wamps made it tough for Mansfield's guards to get the ball into the halfcourt -- and once there, as the Hornets saw the gap between them and the Wamps widening, they lost their composure and started making unforced errors.

Braintree opened the second quarter with a 7-2 run, four of the points at the foul line, to lead 20-8 with 6:10 left. Hill countered with a score in the paint off Mady Bendanillo's feed, and Bendanillo stole the ball and appeared to be fouled in the act of shooting when, inexplicably, she was called for an offensive foul despite having been knocked sideways by her defender in the act of shooting.

If that wasn't enough of a momentum-breaker, the Braintree press reaped its greatest dividends in the last three minutes of the half. Junior guard Jeniyah Jones roared off the bench to score six points during a 12-1 run, both of her baskets coming off steals.

"We know (Jenna) Roche and Timberlake and Moore, but Jones was able to come off the bench and get some layups or get to the line, and she buries every free throw," Redding said. "Like I said in the pre-game, they make you pay for every mistake."

Even with the Hornets down 34-13 at the half, however, the game still didn't feel like a blowout -- especially not to McDonnell, who feared her plan to shut down Hill might backfire if the Hornets' outside shooters heated up.

"We had to double Meg, and she still scored 19 points," McDonnell said. "But we had to take the risk of coming off of their shooters at times, and if they were a little bit off, we were able to do that a little more."

Unfortunately for the Hornets, they hit just one of their 13 3-point tries. Hill's traditional three-point play was the only Mansfield oasis in the midst of an 11-3 Braintree run over the first three minutes of the half, when the lead reached a high of 29 points.

Emily Vigeant had a pair of baskets and Bendanillo and Ann Maher both scored on putbacks as Mansfield showed some life in the last 3:39 of the quarter, but the deficit was still 25 points entering the final eight minutes.

Hill, bound for Stonehill next year, scored the last four baskets of her 100-game varsity career in the fourth quarter, bringing her total to 1,090 points. She also exceeded 1,000 rebounds.

"She's been a workhorse," Redding said. "She hasn't missed a game due to illness or injury, and to average a double-double for 100 games is ridiculous."

Jones had 15 points, Timberlake 14 and Roche 11 for Braintree (20-3), which will face top-seed Newton South for the sectional title Saturday in Taunton.

Mansfield finishes at 20-6.

Braintree 68, Mansfield 40

MANSFIELD (40)

Daniel 0-1 0-0 0, Vigeant 2-9 1-2 6, Mulkern 0-2 0-0 0, M. Bendanillo 1-4 3-4 5, R. Hottleman 0-0 0-0 0, Kemp 1-2 1-2 3, Maher 1-7 0-0 2, K. Bendanillo 0-2 0-2 0, Carney 0-0 0-1 0, Hill 9-15 1-4 19, Danehy 1-2 3-4 5, totals 15-44 9-19 40.

BRAINTREE (68)

Timberlake 3-9 6-8 14, Ronca 1-2 0-0 2, Roche 3-8 5-6 11, Ducharme 0-0 0-0 0, Hester 1-2 2-2 4, Tenaglia 3-3 0-0 6, Fay 1-3 0-0 3, Tutkus 1-2 0-1 2,

Crowley 3-4 0-0 6, Mo. Moore 0-1 0-0 0, Hume 0-0 0-1 0, Ma. Moore 2-6 0-0 5, Jones 5-7 5-7 15, totals 23-47 18-25 68.

Team	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	Final
Mansfield	06	07	15	12	40
Braintree	13	21	19	15	68

3-point goals—Mansfield 1-13 (Vigeant 1-3, Mulkern 0-2, M. Bendanillo 0-1, Maher 0-5, K. Bendanillo 0-2), Braintree 4-17 (Timberlake 2-7, Roche 0-1, Fay 1-3, Mo. Moore 0-1, Ma. Moore 1-5).

Rebounds--Mansfield 30 (M. Bendanillo 6), Braintree 35 (Jones 6).

Assists--Mansfield 10 (Maher 3), Braintree 17 (Jones 6).

Total fouls--Mansfield 16, Braintree 17.

Hornets Stumble in Semi Against South Power Braintree



Meg Hill goes up for two of her game-high 19 points against Braintree in the Div. 1 South semifinal at Taunton High. (Josh Perry/HockomockSports.com)



By Josh Perry
Managing Editor

TAUNTON, Mass. – In the quarterfinal round against Wellesley, Mansfield (20-6) went on a quick four-point run at the end of the first half that cut the deficit to single digits and gave the Hornets, who have been a standout second half team all season, a little extra confidence heading into halftime.

On Thursday evening at Taunton High, the Hornets got off to a tough start to their Div. 1 South semifinal against Braintree. Plagued by turnovers and struggling to knock down shots in the first half, Mansfield was still able to cut the Wamps lead to 10 points and head coach Mike Redding implored the Hornets to win the final three minutes of the half.

Instead, it was the Wamps that went on a run that essentially won the game.

Braintree went on a 12-1 run in the final three minutes of the second quarter to push the lead to 21 and kept the pressure on throughout the second half, pulling out a 68-40 victory that advanced the Wamps to their seventh straight South final.

“It was kind of what they did last year, they put runs on us and we can’t answer the runs,” said Redding. He added, “The first half we were just so uncharacteristic, throwing the ball away, and we lost so many possessions and when we did turn it over it led to transition points.”

In last year’s South final, Braintree caught fire and rained down threes to beat Mansfield, but on Thursday the Wamps were struggling from the floor in the opening quarter. Braintree was

able to build a lead thanks to its defense, which forced a number of turnovers in the opening half and put pressure on the Hornets ball-handlers to deny the entry pass into Meg Hill in the post.

“I thought they played great defensively,” said Redding about the Wamps. “Everyone on the floor is athletic and they’re getting in passing lanes, nothing’s easy. Trying to get it into Meg, but they’re doubling; we didn’t hit many threes, just not many answers. They were simply the better team tonight.”

After Hill scored from a lobbed Ann Maher pass to make it 4-2, Braintree went on a 7-0 run before Hill scored again, this time on Steph Kemp assist. Jeniyah Jones beat the Hornets defense on the baseline and the Wamps led 13-6 after one.

In the second, Hill (19 points and five blocks) continued to be the lone Hornet to find any success on the offensive end. She scored four of the team’s seven points and had all four of Mansfield’s made field goals in the opening half.

Mackenzie Moore scored five points for the Wamps and Jones continued to fill up the score sheet with eight of her team-high 15 points, including the final six points of the half. She also finished with 10 steals, eight rebounds and five assists. Braintree turned a 22-12 lead into 34-13 by the end of the half and completely took control of the game.

“We know [Jenna] Roche and [Adriana] Timberlake and Mackenzie Moore,” said Redding, “but then kids like Jones come off the bench and get some layups, gets to the line and buries every free throw. I said pregame, they make you pay for every mistake and every turnover led to points.”

It may have been a little too late to save the semifinal; the Hornets did find their offense in the second half. Hill completed a three-point play, Kemp knocked down a jumper off a Sydney Mulkern assist, Maher grabbed an offensive rebound and hit a jumper for her only two points of the game, and Emily Vigeant chipped in with all six of her point in the third.

Mansfield scored 15 points in the third quarter, two more than it scored in the entire first half, but the Wamps were able to score 19 and continued building the lead. Timberlake (14 points) drilled a three, Jones added three points and assisted on back-to-back baskets for Alyssa Tenaglia. Braintree led 53-28 after three.

Maggie Danehy, who was coming off a career-high 20-point game against Wellesley, scored four of her five points in the fourth, but Hill was the focal point for the Hornets down the stretch, scoring eight points to close out her standout career, which Redding said was definitely worthy of the school’s Hall of Fame.

During her four varsity seasons, Hill went to four Div. 1 South semifinals and won three straight league titles, while playing in a remarkable 100 games for the Hornets.

“She’s been a workhorse,” Redding said of Hill. “She hasn’t missed a game due to illness or injury and to average a double-double for 100 games is ridiculous. It’s just a great senior class. I mean, four Final Fours in Div. 1 South, thee championships in a row...it’s tough to end in a game like this where you don’t feel like you competed but when you look at the whole big picture it’s been an amazing run for this senior group.”

The Hornets have been one of the most consistent programs in Div. 1 in recent years, but talented Braintree teams have always stood in the way. Redding is expecting that Mansfield will be right back in the mix again next winter.

He said, “We’ve got a slew of juniors coming back and we’ll compete next year. Braintree’s got a great program; I’m glad some of those seniors are gone so they may come back down to everyone else’s level.”