

Lourdes boys take team to memorable heights

Second-place state finish ends impressive season

By Brad Hartmann
HERALD CONTRIBUTOR

The dream finally came true for Lourdes Academy seniors Benny Huizenga and Henry Noone that they been craving for as young boys — playing on the biggest stage inside the Kohl Center in Madison.

“It’s a dream come true. Ever since I was a little kid I dreamed of getting here and so has he,” Noone said. “Benny has always been involved with Lourdes. His dad has been here for 20 years coaching. We are just thankful to get here, honestly. All the nights in the gym that we could have been out with friends, but in the end it’s all worth it.”

Noone and Huizenga led the Knights out of the tunnel in Saturday’s WIAA D4 championship game, where free throws and fatigue played a role in them coming up short in a 67-62 loss to New Glarus (26-2), who were making their first return to state since 1932.

“I thought our guys came ready to play and if you’re not come championship Saturday at 1 p.m. for a state title, then they shouldn’t be playing,” Knights coach Brad Clark said. “I saw that we were a little tired and little fatigued there in the end. We missed shots that we normally don’t.”

“I thought this was the first time this year we were fatigued. There was a lot of pressure on these kids and sometimes that’s not fair. You get put in that situation and you either come through or you don’t.”

Huizenga was one of the contributing factors in how the Knights (26-2) advanced to its fourth WIAA state appearance, battling back from a knee injury and having it scoped, but credits his doctors for getting him back on the court in five weeks.

“I thought for him realistically playing on one leg for the last four weeks is just great,” Clark said. “He was with us every step of the way since his injury in December and he really took a lot of things into perspective and when he came back he did what he could.”

When the final buzzer sounded Huizenga shared an emotional hug with his father, Ben, an assistant coach.

“It was both of our dreams to get there,” the younger Huizenga said. “I have watched him coach 17 years of my life and to finally get there with him was a special feeling with him.”

Just like in Thursday’s 70-68 semifinal victory over Osseo-Fairchild, Huizenga started the game swishing the first three as Jack McKellips was credited with the assist.

All season long Knights sophomore Preston Ruedinger has shown he is a gamer and played almost 36 minutes with 15 points against Osseo-Fairchild. He deliv-



Photos by Andy Ratchman

Lourdes defenders guard the rim against New Glarus in the WIAA Division 4 championship game Saturday in Madison.



Benny Huizenga scores two of his 13 points against New Glarus.

ered a three-pointer with 6:34 left in the first half against New Glarus as the Knights regained the lead 25-23. Ruedinger, who had 17 points, five assists and three steals, hit a layup to regain the lead for the Knights with under a minute in the half in a game that had 18 lead changes and 12 ties.

It was an off night for Noone, the state’s top three-point shooter, but with 8:44 left he hit his first to keep the Knights within a point at 49-48.

“I was finally happy to see one fall in for

the night. It was a great feeling. I thought maybe that would give us the momentum to go on a little run. I feel every shot that I took had some significance, even my makes and misses,” said Noone, who had 11 points and six rebounds.

The Knights missed five free throws in the final 8 minutes but Ruedinger hit two with 2:03 left to trail 63-61.

“I needed to hit those to stay within three but there were no nerves,” Ruedinger said. “Our coaches have told us all year our free throws are going to come down to us winning a gold ball or not and today it didn’t happen for us.”

The Knights’ student section had to be one of the most creative bunches at the tournament with chants of “moist mash potatoes,” “spicy cajun gumbo” and “warm choccymilk,” and when New Glarus missed two free throws toward the end they erupted as it left an opening. But with 1:19 left New Glarus capitalized on a Knights turnover to extend its lead to 65-61.

Hayden Jones (16 points, 10 rebounds)

converts one of two from the line with 26.5 seconds left to cut the deficit to four. The next possession Josh Bauer made a heads-up play throwing the ball off a Glarner Knights player’s chest to create turnover. In the end a Knights’ pass went out of bounds with 5.6 seconds left as the chant of “thank you seniors” could be heard.

In Thursday’s semifinal Jack McKellips came away with one of his biggest rebounds of the year with 34 seconds remaining that led to Ruedinger bounce-passing to Jones for a layup to advance them to the championship game.

On their way to a silver ball trophy the team set a new school record of 26 wins while the senior class were part of a four-year record of 75-26.

“Every year is special. I told them to hold your head high and that you have nothing to be ashamed of,” Clark said. “Obviously they must feel dejected but they have to be so proud of what they accomplished. I told them there are 10 teams playing today and that they are one of them. We did get some hardware and not many teams can end the season by coming home with some hardware.”

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