

Buzzer beaters help, hurt BSM in section final rematch

Game for the ages fitting comes down to the wire

By **JASON OLSON**
jason.olson@apgecm.com

Three buzzer-beaters. Section final. Trip to state.

There was a good reason the proverbial lid lifted off the roof at Benilde-St. Margaret's Haben Center as Orono eventually beat the host and top-seeds 86-84 in double overtime with a half-court buzzer-beater by Spartan Nolan Groves.

The sequence only took a couple of seconds but seemed to last an eternity.

Down to 6.5 seconds on the clock at the end of the second overtime, BSM senior Jayden Daisy hit the rim with a free throw. Groves battled in the paint for the ball, spinning his way free with a chance to rush the last-second basket.

In a game filled with breathtaking plays – offense and defense by both teams, this was the culmination of so many stand-out plays to reach this point.

Groves launched the ball one step behind the halfcourt line, a buzzer sounding as the ball hit the apex of flight before ricocheting off the back of the iron and in. Swish. The eruption from the Orono bench, student section and adults, all on the east side of the gym, signaled the end of a well-fought contest.

Orono coach Barry Woehler added: "You cannot draw that up... gets the ball and makes a half-court shot."

BSM coach Damian Johnson had all the confidence in the world in Daisy, given that he was nearly perfect from the line



(SUN PHOTOS BY JASON OLSON)

Above: Benilde-St. Margaret's junior guard Jaleen Donley drives against Orono during the Section 6AAA final on Thursday.

Left: BSM's Abu Keita steps to the free throw line against Orono in the Section 6AAA final.

before that point, making 7-of-8 free throws. "You feel for the kid because it can either make or break you," Johnson said of Daisy who made several key plays all game from setting up teammates, taking tough shots, or making plays on the defensive end of the floor. "My goal is to keep being there for support to help them," he said.

Impact

Groves' shot wasn't his only impact on the game, finishing close to a triple-double with 45 points, 18 rebounds and six assists. Wooley also had a double-double with 17 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists.

Hold onto your seats as the Red Knights forced overtime going coast-to-coast with just 2.4 left, trailing 70-67. Abu Keita found Jalen Wilson near midcourt for the in-bounds pass. Wilson found Jaleen Donley open on the opposite side of the logo. A rare high bank shot from behind

the arc was how Donley not only beat the buzzer but started a pre-emptive celebration.

As for preparing for anything like a last-second shot leading up to the big game, Johnson said they worked a lot on the close finishes and what to do. "Jaleen worked on that play a couple of times. We knew if we could get Jalen [Wilson] the ball at halfcourt, we would maybe have streakers open. So we got the look and result we wanted – Jaleen an open look at a shot. Great execution on his part to make that shot.

"Jaleen loves the big moment and during the timeout, he kept saying, 'I've got to shoot this.' He wanted that. You have to enjoy players who want to embrace that moment."

Orono's Riley Nelson dished the ball off to Brady Wooley inside who laid the ball off the glass as time expired tied 73-73 after the first four-minute session.

"That was a really good game, a great environment to be part of," Red Knights coach Damian Johnson said. "It's March madness, no other way to look at it."

The teams lined up for another jump ball at midcourt, the fourth of the game after the initial start was called back for a redo.

The teams traded baskets throughout the final overtime scoring a collective 24 points. Donley fed Daisy inside for the opening basket before Groves made a 3-pointer to take a 76-75 lead in a precursor to the grand finale. Donley kicked the ball out to Wilson who drained a 3-pointer to retake a 78-76 lead. Wilson capped off another impressive offensive sequence with a putback to take an 80-77 lead with under two minutes to go.

Ron Lee converted a layup after Donley poked the loose ball ahead to take an 84-81 lead with under 30 seconds to play.

Orono finished the game on a 5-0 run leaving the Red Knights

completely exhausted and heart-broken on the court.

To get to overtime, BSM had to erase a 12-point second-half deficit, 60-48 with 6:58 to go in regulation.

Wilson came through with an emphatic dunk to pull BSM within three points, 64-61 with 2:45 to go.

Johnson added: "I've been part of sports for a long time and I know it is tough to be on a team three times in the same season so I knew it would be tough plus our teams know each other so well."

Johnson praised the scout team for preparing the team for the moment. "Everything we practiced happened in the game on Wednesday so it was great to see the way we fought back."

As for playing for a section title at home, Johnson liked the idea of hosting the section final, "and hopefully we get to be part

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Park Hall of Fame induction scheduled Sunday, April 14

Among the honorees are Chad Goldstein, Tom Burns and Stephen Quade

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jason.olson@apgecm.com

The St. Louis Park Athletic Hall of Fame banquet is set for Sunday, April 14 at the Minneapolis Golf Club (2001 Flag Ave. S.).

The Class of 2024 includes Austin Delaney (2008), Tom Burns (1966), Daryl Bittmann (1978), Jessica Gust (1999), Maggie Neck (2003), Stephen Quade (1959, posthumously honored), Bryan Mortland (1974) and Chad Goldstein (1989); Coach Jack Willhite (posthumously honored); Lifetime Achievement Award: Karen Gleason (coach) and

Mitch Seidenfeld (1981); State championship teams: 1962 boys track and field and 1974 synchronized swimming.

Social hour and check-in begins at 10 a.m. followed by brunch from 11-noon and the induction ceremony at noon. Tickets are \$45 (children 10-under are \$30).

Chad Goldstein

A state champion in the shot put, Goldstein captured the 1989 state title with a throw of 60 feet, 5 inches, while still holding the Orioles' all-time record of 61-11 1/2. Goldstein went on to capture the 1993 Big Ten Conference title in the Shot Put with the Minnesota Gophers and placed eighth at NCAAs earning All-American honors. He currently coaches track and field at Somerset High School (Wisconsin) after previously coaching at Armstrong. Goldstein and his wife Shan-

non have two daughters Eve and Ruby.

Stephen Quade

A state swimming champion at Park, Stephen Quade captured the 200-yard Freestyle in the 1959 state meet in an all-time record of 2:00.1 to also earn All-American status. Quade was second in the 50 free and fifth place in the 200 free as a 6-foot-4 junior. As a senior, he set Lake Conference records in the 50 and 100 freestyle events. He also anchored the 200 medley relay which placed third at state. He went on to swim at the University of Minnesota, placing fifth in the 400 freestyle relay at the NCAAs in 1961 to earn NCAA All-American honors.

Tom Burns

A 1966 Park grad, Burns won the high jump that year at the state meet clearing 6-foot-4. His title helped the Orioles cap-

ture the state title with 20 points while Stillwater was second with 16 points.

Burns decided to give high jump a try during an open tryout and cleared 5-2 without coaching support. A year later he claimed the state title and attributes credit to coach Lefty Wright for teaching him how to high jump and how to be a better person. Burns won 16 of 19 meets as a senior and went on to compete in the event at Minnesota State University, Mankato where he set the school record of 6-7 3/4. Burns moved to New Jersey while working for a large retail store in 1980. Burns and his wife Linda have three daughters Barbara, Betsy and Kate along with a granddaughter Nykki.

Link to banquet registration: forms.gle/zBC3v4gUULyas9Ub6

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Playing in foul trouble, Scott was limited to just under 20 minutes on the floor. She was efficient when on the floor making 6-of-9 shots and made 2-of-3 free throws. She added five assists and had one steal but also turned the ball over three times.

“Aneisha’s a great player, a handful to guard because she can weave her way amongst the bigs and find a way to get her shot off,” Ellefson said. “We didn’t game-plan for her to get into foul trouble but I think it was tough luck to be in the wrong place at the wrong time but that’s part of the game and had an impact on the game.”

Bishop picked up two fouls in the opening half which forced her to focus more on defense and getting the ball to her teammates to take the pressure off her.

BSM closed out a competitive opening half on a 10-2 mini-run just before halftime to carry a 42-37 lead into the break.

Trailing 34-32 with 4:01 to go in the half, Olson grabbed a defensive rebound before scoring a layup in transition. She was fouled and made the extra basket to take a 35-34 edge. Bishop was next up to collect the ball on the defensive end and drive the length of the court before kicking a pass out to Watkins for an open look at a 3-pointer, making the basket. Less than 20 seconds later Friedly got into the action with a steal and layup and soon after Kapsner forced a turnover in the paint, making the layup to take a 42-34 lead with 2:11 before halftime. Josie Nnaji forced a turnover in the lane before adding a layup after subbing Olson out at the 1:56 mark. Nnaji’s points came with 33 seconds to go and a 44-37 lead.

Over the second half BSM went on a 37-19 run to take control of the game after DeLaSalle cut the lead to 48-46 with 15:08 to go on a free throw by Scott but that would be as close as the Islanders would get.

BSM went on a 15-0 run spanning 6:27 to build a 63-46 lead with 8:41 to go.

“We kept stressing to what we do,” Ellefson said of the halftime message. “Do it well and when we execute other teams tend to wear down either physically or mentally. We just kept doing what we do



(SUN PHOTO BY JASON OLSON)

Four Benilde-St. Margaret's were named to the Class 3A All-Tournament team including back row, fourth from right Olivia Olson, Pressley Watkins, Zahara Bishop and Kate Kapsner.

with loose balls, and deflections and turned them into layups and some timely shots. Momentum is a great thing and we got some of that in the second half.”

Bishop said they felt the Islanders take a step back without getting a shot to fall during the run which fueled the Red Knights to keep the pressure on.

“We kept getting steals and fastbreaks and it gave us more energy,” she said. “They’re a great team but we kept pushing.”

BSM had five steals and two blocks in the second half alone while limiting the Islanders to 32 percent shooting from the floor and just three free throws in the second half. They finished the game making 12-of-13 free throws but turned the ball over 16 times compared to just nine turnovers by BSM.

After a 3-5 start to the season, BSM won 24 consecutive games all coming in 2024.

“We prepared for a long time to play high-level basketball throughout our season and the girls craved more,” Ellefson said. “They were excited to play every game down the stretch and it was fun and satisfying as a coach to have a team that is as focused and confident in what we were doing. It was a pleasure to be on the sideline.”

Wild season

From breaking a hand in the season opener to having successful surgery to repair the break with plates and bolts, the 2023-24 season was a series of highs and lows and in the end, way more highs for Olson.

“It’s crazy,” the McDonald’s All-American said. “It was so hard for me at the start to go down in the first minute of the first game of my senior year. I thought it was over for my senior year but it helped the team rally around each other, we became so close on and off the court. People stepped up at different times, [Bishop] stepped up Kate [Kapsner] stepped up, and everyone played a part in the whole season. When I came back, it pieced together but it is crazy to think it is over now. I’m just glad I was able to get back and help our team win.”

Ellefson was asked what Olson means to this team. “Not just this team but this school. Everything she touches is with grace and I often talk about our program being about dedication, sacrifice, perseverance, and relentlessness and she shows that every day. Always trying to get better, working hardest, and setting a great example for everyone. She’s the jokester but knows when it is time to compete. It’s just a great mix that is irreplaceable but we are going to try our best, for sure. I’ve known her for a long time and I knew what I was

getting when I came here. Someone to build the program around as her as the model of working on her game, being a good teammate and that tells her way more about the points she scores. Her legacy will carry on past her, always looking to her as the beginning of it.”

Olson said it was surreal to absorb everything that comes along with the success they had on the court. “Our goal first practice was to do it again and to rally around everyone, working so hard all year, such a cool way to rally together and I’m going to cheer them when I’m in college.”

Road to the final

To return to the title game, BSM defeated unseeded Minneapolis Roosevelt 75-40 at neighboring Maturi Pavillion on March 13 which set up a 2023 title game rematch against Stewartville on Thursday at Williams Arena. The Red Knights once again pressed ahead for a 73-42 win.

In just over 30 minutes on the floor, Olson had 32 points on 12-of-23 shooting. She made all five of her free throws.

The Red Knight built a 34-24 halftime lead and didn’t let up over the second half outscoring Stewartville 31-19 in the second half.

When BSM wanted to push the pace, the Cougars couldn’t keep up (15-0 fast break) and were

outscored 12-6 in second-chance points.

The Red Knights used their size advantage to outscore Stewartville 34-24 in the paint doubled them up 12-6 in second-chance points and when pushing the pace, held a 15-0 margin on the fast break.

Stewartville had the edge in turnovers by a 19-7 margin.

Bishop added 18 points and Kapsner added six points as 10 different BSM teammates scored. Olson grabbed seven rebounds and Nnaji added six rebounds to pace the team. Olson and Kapsner each blocked a shot. Olson was one of three teammates with two steals as the team had 11 steals.

Friedly went coast-to-coast creating a turnover under the BSM basket before making a jump shot to build a game-high 33-point lead, 73-40 with 41 seconds to go.

Stewartville’s Audrey Schnindelar led the team with 16 points on 6-of-11 shooting from the field and Savannah Hedin added 9 points on 3-of-13 shooting.

Quarterfinal

Similar to the state opener, played next door at the Maturi Pavillion on March 13, BSM downed unseeded Minneapolis Roosevelt 75-40.

Olson had 35 points and Bishop added 18 points as the Red Knights shot 43.8 percent from the field (14-32) and 11-15 from the free-throw line. Kapsner had seven points, four rebounds and three assists. Olson added eight rebounds, four assists and four steals to help guide the team.

Friedly pulled down nine rebounds to go with five assists and five points in a team-high 30:29 on the court. The Red Knights had 13 steals and five blocks with Watkins and Mari Wismer each blocking two shots.

BSM dominated inside outscoring Roosevelt 40-18 in the paint, 23-6 in fast breaks and 11-6 in second-chance points.

BSM led 33-27 at the break but turned up the defensive intensity over the second half by a 42-13 margin with a tough 2-3 zone that the Teddies couldn’t solve.

Roosevelt was led by Olivia Wren with 17 points who fouled out with 7:17 to go in the contest and Jayla Bennett with 10 points.

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Red Knights

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of it again. I thought it was a great environment and a great game to be a part of.

Budding rivalry

The two teams have seen each other a lot since becoming Metro West Conference foes for a third season (2021-22). Orono won a less-dramatic 2023 section final, 66-62, and played a neutral-site Chanhassen High

School. BSM swept both conference games as the two teams played for a third time since Jan. 29. The Red Knights won 83-54 in Orono on Jan. 29 and at Haben Center 85-68 on Feb. 23 to set the scene for Thursday. Groves had 25 points in the first meeting and 35 points in the second meeting.

The teams split the 2022-23 conference games before Orono went on to win the third-place trophy at state.

Spartans coach Woehler praised the atmosphere at the St. Louis Park campus.

“Packed house, two really good teams, two rival teams, and they took it to us the first two times but

the guys showed some pride and decided we were going to be the aggressor tonight,” he said. “[The game] went back and forth – we are up 12 they make a great comeback. Benilde has a bunch of tough kids who are well coached.”

Johnson echoed similar thoughts: “We’ve had some great battles with Barry and I think it is turning into a rivalry for us, we thrive on it. It’s fun to compete and that’s what Barry does as a coach, compete. It’s fun to have a guy like that to keep it going.”

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