

Narrow win puts McQ in semifinal

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — Tyler Relph had only scored three points all evening, going 1-for-8 from the field. With his McQuaid Jesuit basketball team on the verge of its first loss — and a season-ending defeat at that — Relph waved his arms for support from the crowd of more than 10,000.

The packed house responded, and Relph soon sent them into a frenzy by making the shot of the night. The senior guard's three-point basket put McQuaid ahead for good with just over a minute to play, carrying the Knights to a 48-44 win over Niagara Falls in a battle of unbeaten teams. The state Class A quarterfinal was played at Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial on March 8.

Relph said he didn't hesitate to pull the trigger despite his sub-par night. "I always want the shot. I'm going to take that 100 times out of 100 times," he stated.

Which is fine with Joe Marchese, McQuaid's head coach. "Absolutely. The kid's just clutch when the game's on the line," he said.

McQuaid, with a record of 25-0, will face Christian Brothers Academy of Section 3 in state semifinal play Saturday, March 15, in a 3:15 p.m. start at Glens Falls Civic Center. The winner advances to the next day's title game, also at Glens Falls Civic Center, at 3 p.m. against either Mount Vernon of Section 1 or Walt Whitman of Section 11.

Yet McQuaid was very nearly derailed by Niagara Falls, a Section 6 squad that came in with a 23-0 record and held the Knights 30

points below their season average. McQuaid led 13-9, 25-23 and 34-32 at the quarter breaks, and fell behind for the first time early in the fourth quarter.

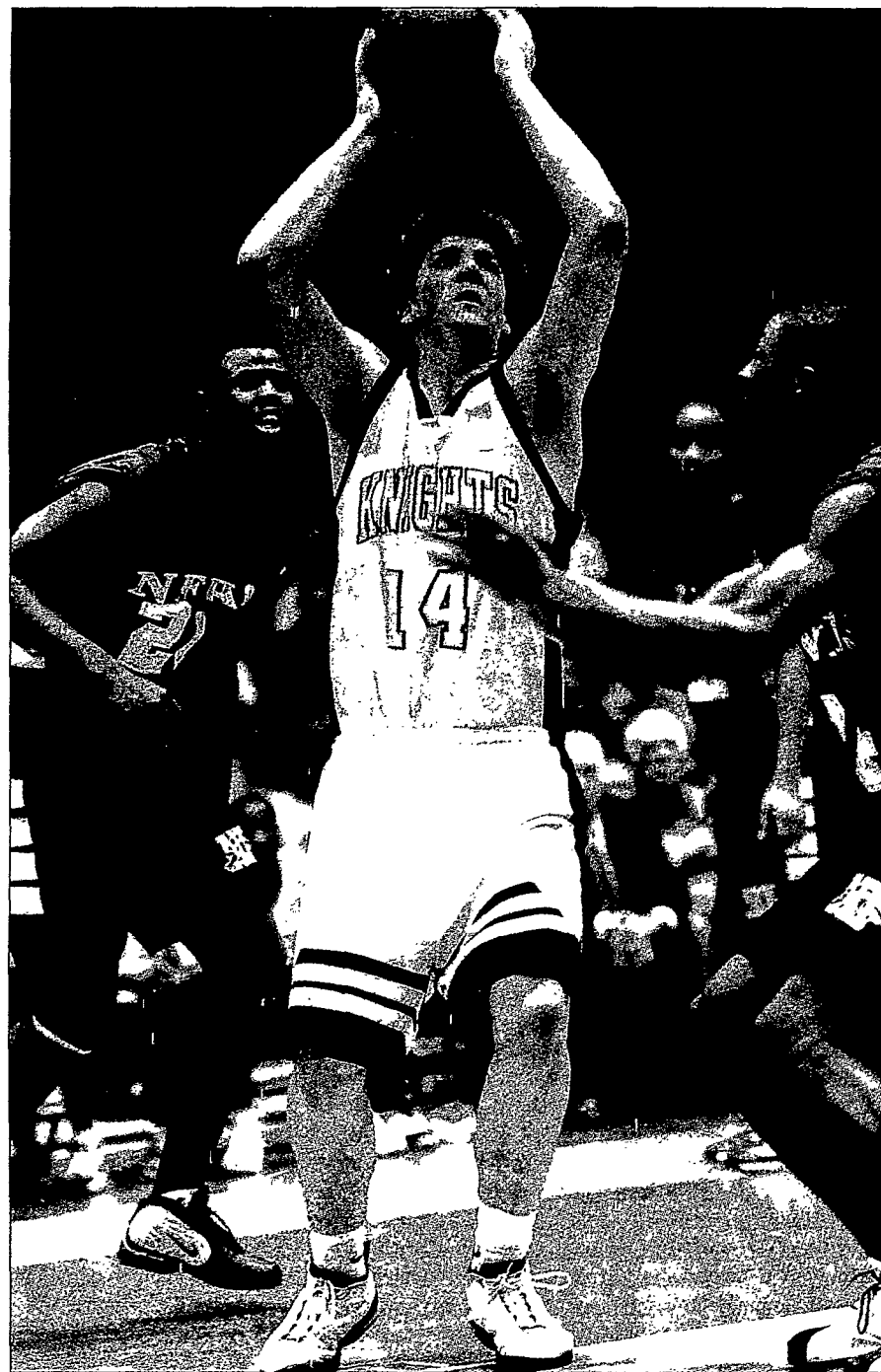
Senior center Ryan Pettinella fouled out with just over two minutes left and the Knights trailing 42-41. Yet Relph, who was guarded tightly all night by Wolverine guard Marcus Henderson, broke free near the top of the key and fired a three-pointer that hit all net with 1:08 to go, making it 44-42.

Relph, who finished with eight points, added two free throws with :16 remaining for a 46-42 edge. Henderson scored with :09 to go to make it 46-44 before McQuaid senior forward Marty O'Sullivan made two of four free throws in the closing seconds.

O'Sullivan continued his great post-season by scoring 23 points; he was also the Knights' top man with a 25-point night in a 67-46 win over East High in March 5 state-qualifier play. Pettinella, with seven points and 15 rebounds, was another key against Niagara Falls, as was sweet-shooting junior guard Jack Leasure, who finished with 10 points.

"When teams focus on the 'Big Three' (Relph, O'Sullivan and Pettinella) they leave me open. All I have to do is make the shot. I have the easy job," Leasure said.

With the narrow escape McQuaid is back in the state Final Four, where it finished as runner-up last year. The Knights, who won their second straight Section 5 Class A title earlier this winter, are ranked No. 2 nationally in a *USA Today* poll.



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

McQuaid's Marty O'Sullivan goes for a lay-up under pressure from two Niagara Falls defenders during the state quarterfinal game at Rochester's Blue Cross Arena March 8.

Nazareth ladies power into state Final Four

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Meghan Dahlman's ball-handling ability and shooting touch present a challenge for any opponent. Put those skills on a 6-foot-3 frame, and even the best defensive efforts may fail to keep the ball out of her hands.

And it doesn't hurt that Dahlman's entire team is clicking on all cylinders. As a result, Nazareth Academy is now within two games of a state girls' basketball title.

Dahlman was dominant in the Class B quarterfinals, totaling 30 points in the Lasers' 63-43 victory

over Williamsville East of Section 6 in a game played March 8 at Wayland-Cohocton High School. That triumph earns the Lasers a return to the state semifinals, which they reached for the first time in school history last year.

Nazareth, with a record of 20-5, faces New Hyde Park of Section 8 in a 4 p.m. game on Friday, March 14, at Hudson Valley Community College in Troy. Should the Lasers win, they will make their first trip to a state final on March 15 (6:30 p.m. start) against either Our Lady of Lourdes of Section 1 or Westhill of Section 3.

In the win over Williamsville

East, the Lasers throttled a team that came into the game with a 22-2 record. Nazareth led the Flames 16-5 after one quarter and 31-21 at halftime before putting the game away with a 20-11 scoring edge in the third period.

Dahlman had eight rebounds, three blocks and three steals to go with her 30 points, and junior guard Brittany Hussong added 11 points. In addition, a well-rounded effort came from junior forward Nikki Lockhart with seven points, nine rebounds, eight assists and four steals.

Dahlman, as well as her team, have been unstoppable in the post-

season. Dahlman had 24 points and 16 rebounds in a 59-32 state-qualifier win over Honeoye Falls-Lima on March 5, while Lockhart contributed 19 points and 11 boards. Two nights before the HF-L triumph, Dahlman poured in a school-record 42 points against Livonia in the Section 5 Class B title game. During this recent stretch, Dahlman has averaged 32 points as the Lasers have outscored three quality opponents by an average of 25.3 points.

"I didn't anticipate that, that's for sure," Coach Chris Belmont said. "It's definitely the right time of year for us to be peaking."

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