

BK season ends; Nietopski retires

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Ed Nietopski, storied coach of Bishop Kearney's Kings, ended his career with a 58-55 loss to Buffalo Traditional in the Class B state quarterfinals March 12, but he's still a winner in his team's eyes.

Just ask Dennis Milford, the team's senior center. Nietopski praised his players in the locker room at Buffalo State after the game, Milford said.

"His first words were, 'It's been a great season,'" Milford said. He added that Nietopski offered to assist any player anytime he needs help in navigating through life.

"He's just a great guy," Milford added.

Nietopski, who coached Kearney for 41 seasons, was slated to announce his retirement March 16. In an interview beforehand, the winningest coach in Section 5 history shared the reason he had decided it was time to go.

"I feel I can't give as much as I normally do, and I don't want to shortchange the players," Nietopski said. "I think it's better that somebody else steps in."

Nietopski ended his coaching career with seven Section 5 titles and 545 wins, the ninth-largest number of preseason wins statewide. The *Catholic Courier* will publish an extensive profile on Nietopski and his career in its May Milestones/Vocations issue.

Cold shooting plagued the Kings in the final game of their 21-3 season, Nietopski said. He noted that the Kings normally hit 40 percent of their attempted three-pointers, but were just 2 of 31 from the three-point range March 12.

"Normally, we're a very good outside shooting team and, unfortunately, it seems there was a lid on the basket," Nietopski said.

Milford seconded his coach's assessment of the Kings' performance.

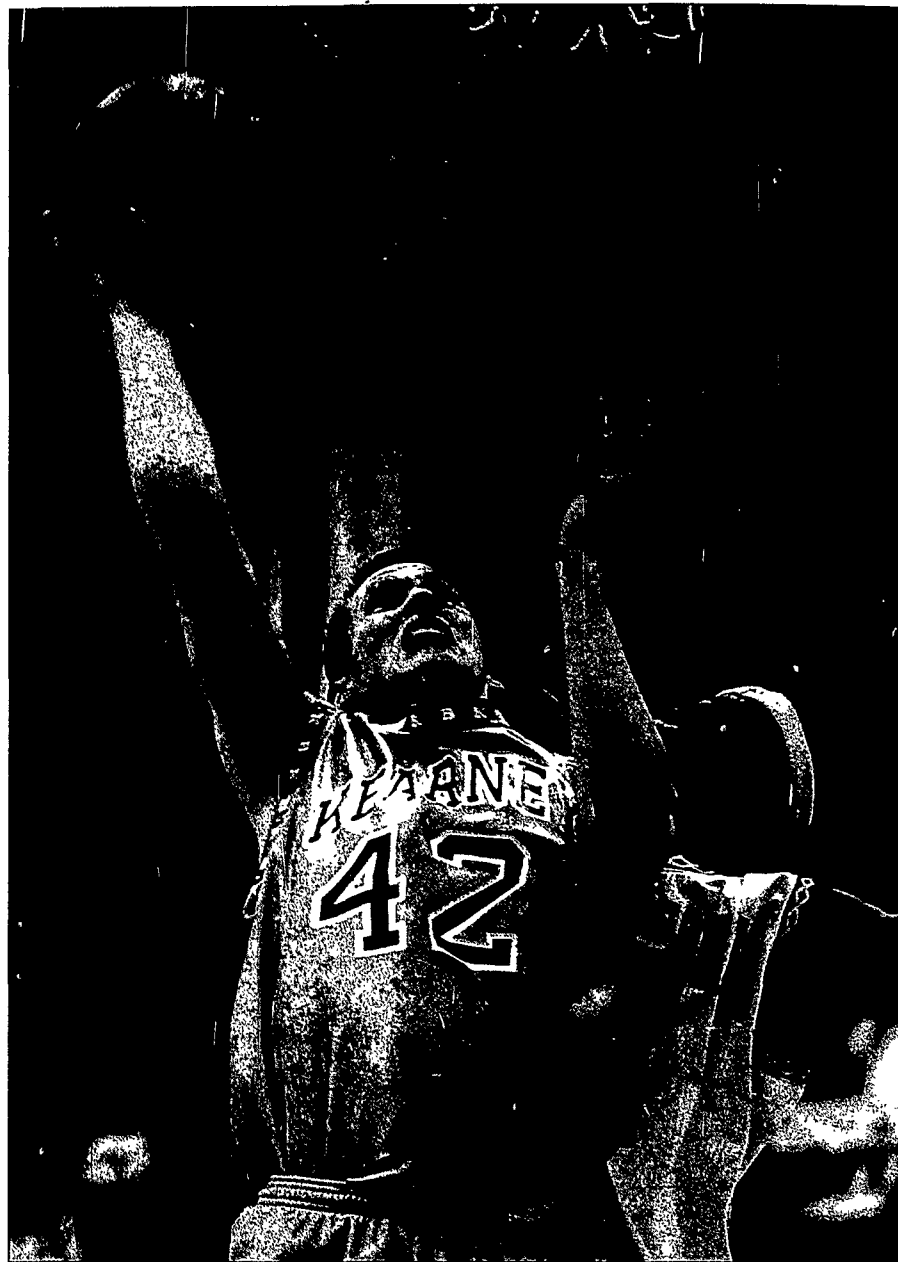
"We weren't forcing up shots, we weren't rushing — we had the open looks, they just weren't dropping for us," Milford said.

Senior Marshall Jones was Kearney's top scorer with 19 points. Forward Jamar Gray had 14 and A.J. White had 10. Kearney led by 11 in the first quarter, but Traditional cut the lead to one as Kearney led at halftime 24-23. A 7-0 run by Traditional in the third quarter put Kearney's opponents ahead, and Kearney trailed 41-35 going into the fourth.

Nietopski said that foul trouble helped to derail the Kings. In the fourth quarter, Milford, Gray and White, each found themselves with four fouls.

"They couldn't play as aggressively," Nietopski said.

Kearney and Traditional swapped the lead three times with less than five minutes to go. However, with less than 12 seconds remaining, free throws by Lazar Hayard, Traditional's center, sealed Kearney's fate.



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Bishop Kearney's Dennis Milford shoots over the outstretched arm of Buffalo Traditional defender Matthew Green during the second half of the Class B state quarterfinals March 12 at Buffalo State College.

Nazareth advances to semifinals

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Nazareth Academy's Lasers (20-4) shut down Fredonia's passing game March 13 to win the Class B state tournament quarterfinal 54-38 at Wayland-Cohocton High School.

The Section 5 champion Lasers will play South Jefferson of Adams in the semifinals Friday, March 19, at 10 a.m. at Troy's Hudson Valley Community College.

Fredonia's Section 6 Hillbillies have a strong passing game, but the Lasers used a 2-2-1 press in the third quarter to take an average of 15 seconds off the shot clock every time the Hillbillies had the ball, said Chris Belmont, Nazareth's coach.

"That made them rush their shots," Belmont said.

The Lasers were down 16-15 early in the second quarter. But then the Lasers exploded for a 13-3 run,

keyed by a steal made by forward Nikki Lockhart. Nazareth led 28-23 at halftime, then outscored Fredonia 16-2 in the third quarter.

Nazareth sophomore Samantha Gaetano had no points, but made six assists and five steals. Lockhart contributed 16 points, five steals, four rebounds and four assists. Both Sierra Speed and forward Rachel Boice contributed 10 points each. Senior guard Brittany Husong scored 12 points, made nine rebounds and contributed four assists.

Belmont said Nazareth has done as well as it has so far because it's not afraid to take on tough opponents.

"I think a lot of our success is because of the strength of our schedule," he said. "We've played in front of a lot of different people in a lot of different venues."



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