Ryan Duffy’s Dramatic Kick Return Helps Lift Westlake Past Marlboro in the Class B State Regional Final
Wildcats Stop Marlboro’s High-Powered Offense in Regional Final

By Andy Jacobs

A classic showdown between the unstoppable offense of Marlboro and the shutdown defense of Westlake on Saturday afternoon figured to yield some clues about the outcome in a big hurry.

“When you get to this level of regionals, you never know who your opponent is,” Wildcats head coach John Castellano would explain afterwards. “There’s no common opponents. You just don’t know. So you just say, ‘Hey, listen, five minutes into the game we’re gonna know whether or not we belong on the field with this team.’

Facing an unbeaten Iron Dukes team that has now won the Section 9, Class B championship five years in a row and came into the state regional final averaging a whopping 52 points a game this season, Castellano and the Wildcats quickly discovered they certainly had what it takes to diffuse Marlboro’s firepower.

Overcoming a 3-0 halftime deficit with a pair of electrifying touchdowns, one by Ryan Duffy and the other by Anthony Sardo, to start the third quarter, Westlake went on to a surprising 14-5 victory to the delight of its large and vociferous cheering section that filled the sundrenched stands at Sleepy Hollow High School on a chilly, blustery autumn day.

“I’m just so happy for these kids,” said a jubilant Castellano shortly after his upstart team had advanced to a state semifinal meeting next Saturday afternoon up at Kingston’s Dietz Stadium against Section 2’s Schuylerville. “They work so hard. They just keep working and working and working. And they believe. These kids believe. They just believe in themselves, and it’s a great situation, a great situation.”

By the time the first quarter had ended, the Wildcats’ defense had begun to turn the Marlboro faithful into believers too. The Iron Dukes hadn’t scored fewer than 41 points in any of their nine victories this season, surpassing 60 on three occasion, but realized soon after the opening kickoff that points were going to be hard to come by on this day.

The two teams were still locked in a scoreless battle as halftime approached. Though the Wildcats threatened late in the first quarter, advancing all the way to the Marlboro 31 before the drive stalled, into the second quarter Marlboro’s Josiah Alvarez tries to make a one-handed grab as Westlake’s Ryan Duffy and Michael Love defend during Saturday’s Class B regional final.

confidence rose along with his players. “I knew right then and there that if we could just hang in there and play...”

Still, the Wildcats departed at halftime aware that starting quarterback Tom Castro would not be returning after injuring his throwing shoulder late in the half. When they returned to the field to start the third quarter, they needed to find a way to support their stellar defensive unit and reenergize their fans by putting some points on the board. It didn’t take Duffy very long to provide them. He took the opening kickoff of the third quarter a few yards in front of his end zone, spun away from a pair of would-be Marlboro tacklers and headed toward the left sideline where he turned on the speed and outraced everyone all the way down the field for a dramatic 93-yard touchdown that sent the Wildcats in front to stay and their fans into a frenzy.

“Oh, that was great,” said Castellano. “That’s what we needed. We needed a spark and Duffy gave it to us. We needed a spark and he gave it to us.”

According to the Wildcats’ Sardo, who would soon add another big spark, he and his teammates hadn’t been the least bit daunted by their inability to score in the opening half. “I don’t know,” he said when asked about the halftime message, “that we’re still in the game. I mean, anything could happen. 3-0, that’s nothing. And we took the kick right back and that uplifted our whole team, and we just took it and ran with it.”

After Duffy’s kickoff return, the Wildcats defense again stopped Marlboro, limiting the Iron Dukes to one first down and then forcing a punt when Drew Kapica batted down a third-and-11 pass. Westlake got the ball back again and soon faced a third-and-three near midfield. Sardo took a handoff from backup quarterback Rob DiNota, broke through the line of scrimmage and easily won a foot race to the end zone.

His 52-yard romp and Michael Love’s point-after kick extended the Wildcats’ lead to 11 points not even four minutes into the second half. By the time he crossed the goal line, Sardo was convinced the Iron Dukes were finished. “I just knew at that point our defense was gonna stop them,” said Sardo, who finished the day with 126 yards on the ground. Marlboro’s Frank Zebrowski can’t catch up on the other end zone.

The Wildcats’ Ryan Duffy is off and running down the left sideline on his 93-yard kickoff return against Section 9 champion Marlboro on Saturday.

Jason Kalle starts running with the ball after fielding a punt in Westlake’s 14-5 win over Marlboro in the state playoffs.

Wildcats’ head coach John Castellano named the game’s outstanding lineman, starts to celebrate after the Wildcats defeated the Iron Dukes in Saturday’s regional final.

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ground after being called upon more than ever with Jason Kalle sidelined in the third quarter. “I knew they had no chance right after that one.”

“Well, I knew if he got into the open he could run away from these people, and he did;” added Castellano about the long touchdown run by Sardo. “You know, they (the Iron Dukes) made some adjustments to that offensive set, but at that point, a 14-3 lead, I knew the way we were playing defense we were gonna be tough to beat.”

Even a turnover at their own 33-yard line on a pitchout to Love with four and a half minutes left in the third quarter didn’t cost the Wildcats because, just three plays later, Will Snyder was in the right place at the right time, intercepting a deflected pass to end a rare Marlboro scoring chance.

The Wildcats seemed on the verge of adding to their lead when Duffy scampered 40 yards down to the Marlboro 30-yard-line on the second play of the fourth quarter. The drive soon stalled, but Marlboro quickly relinquished the football again as a first-down pass over the middle was picked off again by Snyder.

Marlboro’s sagging hopes were momentarily revived with just over four minutes remaining when a Wildcat punt was blocked and Joseph Ferri was tackled in the end zone for a safety. But with 2:10 left in the game and facing fourth-and-18, the Iron Dukes’ fate was finally sealed as Mongelli’s 46-yard field goal try fell well short.

“I knew they were a good football team,” said Castellano. “They put a lot of points on the board. Again, I think people underestimate how we play defense. We’re pretty good on defense. We’re gonna make sure you’re gonna work for everything you get.”

So now the Wildcats find themselves just one win away from a trip to Syracuse to play in the Carrier Dome for a state championship.

“Yeah, one more win,” said Sardo. “Let’s try to get there. That’s what we wanna do.”

His team’s latest triumph left even Castellano, who guided Nyack to two state titles more than a decade ago, struggling to believe what he has witnessed this postseason.

“You know, it hurt losing my quarterback at the half,” he said. “I lost my running back in the third quarter. But the bottom line is, these kids, they find a way to win. They just find a way.”
By Albert Coqueran

On Thursday, Nov. 12 the Westchester Knicks, the NBA Developmental League local affiliate of the New York Knicks, opened their second season at the Westchester County Center.

To say the least, nobody actually knew what to expect regarding the Westchester Knicks this season after the local D-League team concluded its inaugural season 10-40 overall, with only one win in 26 road games.

After an outstanding rendition of the National Anthem by the first-ever winner of America’s Got Talent, Bianca Ryan, the local Knicks tipped-off against the Maine Red Claws, the D-League affiliate of the Boston Celtics.

The Westchester Knicks fired their inaugural Head Coach Kevin Whitted with four games remaining last season and hired former Austin Spurs Assistant Coach Mike Miller, prompting uncertainty about the upcoming season.

The Westchester Knicks greeted County Center fans on opening night with a completely revamped roster containing only three players from last season. One of those three returning players never actually played a game for the local Knicks last season. Hence, even more anxiety concerning the Knicks 2015-16 season.

The Westchester Knicks players each selected a young fan to escort them onto the court as they made their 2015-16 season debut. Louis Falasca, a sixth grade student from Alice E. Grady Elementary School in Elmsford had a thrill of a lifetime. Falasca walked with forward Sean Marshall, as the Boston College graduate (’07) made his first regular season appearance for the Westchester Knicks.

“Sean Marshall picked me to walk with him. It is really good and personally I love the Knicks. I came to games last season and it is a great time, ” Falasca said.

Creating even more doubt about the possible success of the local Knicks this season was the decision by their number one draft pick (second overall) in this year’s D-League Draft, Jimmer Fredette, to sign with the New Orleans Pelicans two days before the season commenced.

However, many doubts were erased when the newly formed Westchester Knicks beat the Maine Red Claws, 105-103, in a thrilling Home Opener at the County Center.

Westchester Knicks forward Thanasis Antetokounmpo returned to the County Center court after signing and being waived by the upstart NY Knicks in the offseason. Antetokounmpo had 11 points, eight rebounds and five assists in the game.

Also returning to the local Knicks roster is 7-2 center Jordan Bachynski, who played 18 games with the County Center dwellers last season, after the D-League Knicks acquired his rights on Feb. 13. Bachynski had 15 points and nine rebounds in the Home Opener, while acquainting local fans to the fact that he is here to make an impact.

Nonetheless, these two players on a roster of 10 were the only players to see action with the Westchester Knicks last year. Forward Dajuan Summers is technically a returning player after being selected in the 2014 Expansion Draft by the local Knicks. However, he is seeing his first action in orange, blue and white, after playing last season in Spain.

Summers is a veteran of four seasons in the NBA, having played with the Detroit Pistons (2009-11), New Orleans Hornets (2011-12) and Los Angeles Clippers (2012-13). Despite his NBA pedigree, the question remained how he would help a 10-man roster with most players playing together for the first time.

Nevertheless, Summers acquainted Westchester Knicks fans to his talents immediately and even helped them win free Buffalo Wild Wings on Opening Night.

When the local Knicks score 100 points and win the game, fans with a ticket to that game at the Westchester County Center, receive a free snack size of wings at Buffalo Wild Wings throughout that day with no purchase necessary.

When Marshall drove to the hoop and scored at 4:20 in the fourth quarter to make the score 101-92, all the Knicks had to do was win for free wings all around. Summers made sure of the treat by being credited for a goal-tending offense on a jumper to put the Knicks ahead, 103-101. Then he faked away and hit the game-winner with 14.2 seconds on the clock.

Summers had a remarkable Westchester Knicks debut with 28 points and nine rebounds, with 11 of those points coming in the fourth quarter. Marshall ended the game with a double-double, 18 points and 11 rebounds and Travis Trice II finished with 18 points in the Home Opener victory.

“I was just trying to stay aggressive and show some leadership. Sean (Marshall) and I are the older veterans on the team, so we understand what it takes to win tight games,” said Summers.

What was even more amazing about the start of the Westchester Knicks second season is that they also won their second home game at the County Center, while beating the Erie Bayhawks, 83-79. Summers again led the way with 30 points; Trice II netted 21 points and dished seven assists and Antetokounmpo added 15 points.

The Westchester Knicks at this point of their second season have already won one-fifth of the games that they won in total last season. Maybe, this is a sign of things to come; it certainly adds promise to the local Knicks this season.
Sets Open Their New Season With a Pair of Victories

By Andy Jacobs

It's been a couple of years since the Pace University women's basketball team finished with a winning record. That obviously doesn't sit too well with veteran head coach Carrie Seymour, who has guided the Setters to a dozen 20-victory seasons in her 23 years at the helm.

According to Seymour, she isn't the only one determined to put an end to all the recent losing.

"Actually, our seniors, Rachel (Dortch) and Yuni (Sher) are very motivated because they're the only class that hasn't gone to the NCAA tournament in the last 24 years," Seymour was saying on Sunday afternoon.

"More than that, actually. Probably pushing close to 30 years. So they're really motivated to get back there."

For the Setters to return to the NCAA tournament again, they'll have to play the way they did at times this past weekend while opening up big early leads during back-to-back home victories over LIU Post and New York Institute of Technology in the season-opening NE-10/ECC Challenge.

"We wanna be in the conversation to be in the NCAA tournament at the end of the year," said Seymour. "We haven't played anybody yet in conference, obviously, but I think we have the strengths to do that. We've got to do a better job taking care of the ball and we do have to rebound the ball better."

The Setters only won 11 of their 40 Northeast-10 Conference games over the past two years and enter the 2015-16 season looking to replace leading scorer Margo Monteleone, who averaged 10 points and 7.5 rebounds a year ago; Jaclyn Oskam, a graduate who averaged 11.5 points and 7.2 rebounds a year ago; and New York Institute of Technology in the back-to-back home victories over LIU Post and NYIT at the Goldstein Fitness Center, Pace, New York.

But in Sunday afternoon's 74-65 win over NYIT at the Goldstein Fitness Center, Pace, a team hampered by just 39 percent shooting from the field a year ago, connected on 12 of 24 shots from beyond the arc. Three of the treys came from junior Christina Rubin, who made seven of her 11 shots from the floor and finished with a team-high 19 points in just 24 minutes of playing time.

It was actually her sister, Gabriella, who wound up hitting the biggest shot of the day, a left-corner 3-pointer off of an inbounds pass with 55 seconds remaining that extended the Setters' lead to nine points and sealed the outcome. Pace had built a lead as large as 16 points late in the first half following an 8-0 run that started and finished with 3-pointers, first from freshman guard Stefanie Svoboda and then by Christina Rubin.

The big Pace lead was eventually whittled away by the Bears, who had beaten Adelphi less than 24 hours earlier. Their full-court pressure bothered the Setters, and a steal and layup by Nina Vukosavkvic, the game's high scorer with 21 points, narrowed their lead to just 67-61 with 2:17 remaining.

Two free throws by Sher with 2:04 to go helped give Pace a bit more breathing room, but it wasn't until Gabriella Rubin scored her big 3-point shot a little more than a minute later that Seymour could finally start to relax.

"The team we played today was very good," she said. "We lost our composure at the end of the game, but that wasn't really completely unexpected. They're a good team. They're probably an NCAA team. It was a big win for us and a big win for our conference."

There were fewer worries for Seymour and the Setters on Saturday afternoon when they opened the NE-10/ECC Challenge by defeating LIU Post 71-56 behind a game-high 18 points from Sher and 11 each from the Rubin sisters. Pace built a 41-18 lead at halftime, stretched it to 26 points three and a half minutes into the second half and never allowed the Pioneers to get closer than 11 points the rest of the way.

Sher, who averaged nine points and nearly seven rebounds a year ago, scored six consecutive points, hitting two free throws and a pair of short jumpers, in the midst of a 17-4 Setter run in the first half that turned a nine-point lead into a 37-15 cushion just before halftime.

"Yuni can be one of our best players in our conference," Seymour predicted. "She could be one of the top 10 players in our conference. She has a different skill set than most of the post players. She's strong, she's fast. She can shoot out to 15 feet. I think there's less pressure on her this year. We have more depth, so I think it's gonna help her."

Part of the added depth comes from the arrival of precocious freshmen guards Svoboda and Allie Monteleone, both of whom starred locally in the Section One region. Monteleone provided eight lightning quick points within a 70-second span shortly after entering Sunday's game against NYIT.

"Our freshmen are very talented," said Seymour. "They just need to get game experience. They're ready. They're pushing the upperclassmen and it's made a big difference."

Other key players Seymour will be relying on this season include sophomore point guard Geena Rosalbo, who started half the games a year ago; Jachyn Oskam, a graduate student and the team's most accurate 3-point shooter in 2014-15; Kirsten Dodge, a 6-5 junior center who grabbed five rebounds in just seven minutes against LIU Post; and Shanice Maynard, a grad student finally back on the court after starting all but one game two years ago and averaging nearly 10 points.

"We don't have a lot of experience, but we're more mature than last year," said Seymour, who has to go back half a dozen years to remember a Setter team that could match the work ethic of this year's roster. "I think by the middle of the year, we're gonna be a different team."

The Setters return to action on Saturday afternoon when they host Le Moyne in their NE-10 opener, and Seymour will be anxious to see if her players can build on the momentum of their two NE-10/ECC Challenge wins.

"Yeah, it's definitely a lift," she said. "We're not gonna play anybody nonconference better than New York Tech and they are gonna win a lot of games. I'm happy. I think the good news is we're 2-0, but, even better, we have a lot to work on. So I think we have a lot of things we can improve on."
Success of the Wildcats Brings a Community Together

By Justin Thomas

Normally the saying goes that the community that does something together, stays together. But in the case of Mt. Pleasant, it's the close-knit community that drives the narrative. So, it's more like the community that stays together, plays together.

The Westlake Wildcats' support group isn't quite to the level of "Friday Night Lights," which, based on the book and the movie, is probably a somewhat positive thing, but this community loves its Wildcats, and has for generations.

"I think athletics brings people together," Westlake athletic director Donna Pirro said. "Whether you're a coach, or whether you're around athletics, players, parents...the community itself rallies around...and it just makes it great fun."

But we all know that in sports, you win some and you lose some. Standing among the largely blue-and-white crowd in Somers last week, it was easy to detect that the championship victory by the Wildcats meant something more.

Certainly, a 32-year-drought is a long time to wait for another section title, but just what is it that makes the success of this team so important to these community members?

Former Westlake High School principal and Mt. Pleasant Central School District superintendent John Whearty has a pretty good idea why that's the case.

"Westlake has always had good team spirit," Whearty said. "And it always has had great parental support. Building a program like we enjoyed in the early 80's was very special, and many of those players are now parents that send their kids to Westlake High School."

With that in mind, the crowd composition makes a lot of sense. The student body came out in huge numbers to support their classmates, but there were also community members of all ages and all generations. There weren't just parents and students cheering on classmates and loved ones. There were aunts and uncles of players, alumni dating back decades, teachers, and community members who have shown tremendous support throughout their lives in Mt. Pleasant.

And the best thing about it? They were all standing together as one. Generations of Westlake fans created a sea of blue in the stands nearly half an hour away from home, and shared tears, cheers, and elated speechlessness.

Fans were in the crowd from this generation of Wildcats, from the generation that last won, and from the generation of parents to those who last won in the early 1980's. The fact that people who were there at the time are still heavily involved in the community means they remember the last Golden Age of Westlake football.

The last time the Wildcats could call themselves Section champs, they won back-to-back titles in the 1982 and 1983 seasons. The '82 squad boasted a perfect 10-0 season that was capped off with a 42-20 Class B Bowl Game (Section Championship) victory over Our Lady of Lourdes. Next year's team, while not perfect, followed suit with an 8-2 season that ended in a 36-13 Class B Bowl Game victory over Rye.

"The team brought about school spirit like never seen before," Whearty, who was the district superintendent at the time, said. "And we will all remember the constant excitement that they provided. We did it in '82. The perfect season."

This new generation of Wildcats football now has a chance to do something their predecessors didn't. For the '82 and '83 teams, their season ended with the Class B Bowl Game, which was the equivalent of the Section Championship. There was no state tournament beyond that.

With their 14-5 win over Marlboro this past Saturday, the Wildcats are breaking new ground, and going further than they've ever had the chance to before. For many of these community members, it's like they're back in high school alongside this generation, providing decades of school spirit.

"There's a tremendous family spirit," Whearty said. "And we've always benefitted from, for all the years I've been here, which is over 50 years...from the parents, this great responsibility for their children. They support them. All you have to do is go up to the school on any afternoon on a weekend, and it's jammed...I'm very proud of this team this year because it's certainly generating a community spirit that we're very proud of."

"The community's spirit very obviously extends beyond the grounds of any game as well. All you need to do is walk around all of the areas of Mt. Pleasant, and you'll see people of all ages sporting their Wildcat pride, even when they're just running their errands around town. Just stop inside one of the local delis and you'll hear people talking about all kinds of things taking place in the district, and recently, those talks have largely been about this football team."

"When I visit my local deli, a lot of the old-timers are having their coffee in there," Whearty said. "And they're so proud that this group of kids has brought back to Westlake the respect and the championship-level play."

Of course, if you ask the players on the team, such as star linebacker Greg Alfieri, they'll be thrilled and say, "We were overdue." But they also know that they have a chance to do something no Westlake team has ever done before, and they're going to take their shot.

"We're not going to stop working," Alfieri said. "We're just going to keep going hard and keep working."

Wherever the Wildcats go, this close-knit community will support them all the way. This community is proud of their Wildcats, and they have been for a very long time. As the Wildcats keep trying to make their way through the state tournament, know that family members, community members, and current students and alumni alike will all be standing strong in number with their Wildcats.

"After the team's success in '83, the Class of '84 wrote something in the yearbook about their beloved Wildcats football team that perhaps members of next year's Westlake class will get a chance to repeat. They wrote, "It was a day of excitement and victory for the Wildcats that will hopefully continue to be carried on as a tradition in future years.""
Nicole Pappalardo gets set to hit a serve for the Foxes, who reached the sectional semifinals.

Lachlan Spence gets set to hit a backhand return in a doubles match at John Jay.

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Kate Muller (left) and Juliette Miranda rise for a block during a home volleyball match.

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A Toss in Traffic

Pace’s Gabby Rubin Has Company as She Takes the Ball to the Hoop During the NE-10/ECC Challenge at the Goldstein Fitness Center