

Boys basketball: Monroe's clutch play helps Palatine get past Lake Zurich

By Marty Maciaszek



Palatine's Carter Monroe hits a three-point shot as Lake Zurich's Evan Peterson defends during the Rolling Meadows Class 4A boys basketball regional semifinal on Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2025 in Rolling Meadows. Joe Lewnard/jllewnard@dailyherald.com

Carter Monroe transitioned from guard to free safety with Palatine clinging to a 1-point lead and less than three minutes left in Wednesday night's Class 4A Rolling Meadows boys basketball regional semifinal against Lake Zurich.

Monroe read a baseline drive to the basket and kickout pass perfectly for an

interception. And from there he barreled to the other end for a layup with 2:40 to play that helped the seventh-seeded Pirates (19-13) get an intense 48-42 victory over the 10th-seeded Bears (13-18).

“When I saw him drive the baseline I wanted him to make that pass,” Monroe said of the last of his 11 points. “I knew I could grab it and once I did it was full steam.”

And that’s how the Pirates have been playing with five consecutive wins. Six-foot-4 junior big man Tony Balanganayi had 18 points and 12 rebounds and Darrin Dick and Brady May added 8 points apiece to put them in Friday’s 7 p.m. regional final against second-seed Meadows (27-4), which rolled past No. 16 South Elgin 60-23 in the first semifinal.

“The way we’re finishing the season off,” Balanganayi said, “we can make a run this year as we made a run last year (to finish fourth in the state in 4A).”

The Pirates lost 53-30 to Meadows in December and 54-40 to Lake Zurich on Jan. 18. But they are 6-2 since a 54-46 loss to Hoffman Estates.

“That was a turning point,” Monroe said. “After that effort we said we’ve gotta make a change now or it’s not going to happen. I think we’re a different team.”

But the postseason opener was far from easy against the Bears and their physical man-to-man defense. Kain Kretschmar had 17 points on 6-for-11 shooting with three 3s, Connor Strauss had 13 points and 6 rebounds and Adrian Riep had 9 points and 6 rebounds while battling Balanganayi inside.

“It’s exhausting playing against them,” Palatine coach Eric Millstone said in admiration of Terry Coughlin’s team. “You feel like you accomplished something getting out with a ‘W.’”

Lake Zurich had leads of 37-34 with 7:24 left on Strauss’ 10-foot

turnaround in the lane and 39-38 with 4:50 left on Kretschmar's long jumper. But the Bears' only other basket in a 3-for-12 fourth quarter was Kretschmar's 3 off a Strauss offensive rebound and assist to cut their deficit to 44-42 at 1:31.

"They made a couple of adjustments defensively in the second half in their (1-2-2) zone where they dared us to skip the ball a little more and we didn't do a great job of skipping it," Coughlin said. "We guarded really hard and guarded their actions really well. The kids were prepared and tough as nails."

Palatine had extended the lead to 44-39 when Dick found Balanganayi down low for a layup. Dick and Balanganayi also hit 2 free throws apiece in the final 56 seconds to finish the victory.

"We knew coming out for this game we'd have to dominate after our tough loss to them last time," Balanganayi said.

"Basketball's a long season and you've gotta weather the highs and lows," Millstone said. "We had a little stretch early in the year where we weren't playing our best but we're starting to click right now."

Rolling Meadows 60, South Elgin 23: Second-seeded Rolling Meadows (27-4) got all the publicity it needed last Wednesday for winning the Mid-Suburban League championship. In its regional opener it scored the first 15 points, played its top eight less than 16 minutes and had a running clock the entire fourth quarter as it won for the 10th time in 11 games.

"We had a game plan and came in here and took care of business," said Meadows junior Kenan Pekovic, who scored all 10 of his points on 4-for-6 shooting in the first half and hit two 3s. "Coach (Kevin Katovich) tells us we don't want to be in the headlines in a bad way."

Marquette-bound Ian Miletic had 14 points on 5-for-9 shooting with 2

assists and two 3s and Patrick Coen had 6 points and 4 rebounds. Sean Kerr had 7 points and Lazar Lazarevic and Andrew Krestel had 6 points apiece.

“Our guys were focused and ready to go,” Katovich said. “With this group I’m never worried about their approach to the game. They’re all business-like.”

No. 16 South Elgin (9-24), which got 6 points from sophomore Aman Chiluka, committed 19 turnovers which Meadows turned into 27 points.