

Boys basketball: Miletic puts exclamation point on another Rolling Meadows regional crown

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Playing in his last home game at Rolling Meadows, Ian Miletic became one of the few Mustangs in program history to win three regional crowns as a four-year starter.

When the Marquette-bound 6-foot-7 forward swiped a pass in the Palatine late in the third quarter and proceeded all alone to the basket for a slam dunk, the crowd came to its feet. The play put an exclamation point on what would become a 53-40 victory for the No. 2 seeded Mustangs (28-4) over the No. 7 Pirates (19-14) in the Class 4A Rolling Meadows regional.

“I love getting the crowd going and bringing energy for my guys,” said Miletic, who plans to study in the business field in Milwaukee. “Energy plays like that make a big difference in a game like this, especially when you have the home-court advantage. I’m just thankful to all the fans who came out here and all the glory to God at the end of the day. I’m very thankful for what He has done for me. I am just a product of God’s spirit and playing through that.”

The Mustangs will move on to the Schaumburg sectional and face No. 3 Stervenson (22-10) in Wednesday’s 7 p.m. semifinal.

“And we’re not finished,” Miletic added. “We have a lot left in the tank and we have a whole lot more to give. We’ve got a lot of hard-working guys. We’ve got a lot more left to prove and we’re looking forward to the rest of the state tourney.”

Miletic shared game scoring honors with classmate Lazar Lazarevic. Both had 15 points while Jack Duffer added 13.

“When we walked out in the second half, Miletich had 6 points and we are down 16 points,” said Palatine coach Eric Millstone, who guided the Pirates to the final four last season. “I think that speaks to the depth they have with anyone they put on the floor.”

Lazarevic came off the bench early and scored 8 points in the first quarter. The Mustangs also got 7 points from junior Kenan Pekovic and 3 from senior Ryan Meyer for a total of 25 points off the bench.

“Lazar came in and gave us a huge spark,” said Meadows coach Kevin Katovich, who has won three regionals in the last four years, the most impressive string in program history since winning four in five years from 1985 to 1990 when Hank Szymanski won three and Dave Brown one. “He (Lazarevic) was on fire. That’s what makes this team special. We have eight or nine guys who could potentially be starters.”

The start for Palatine was a good one as it took a 6-0 lead with a free throw and tip-in by 6-4 junior Tony Balanganayi and a 3-pointer from classmate Darrin Dick with 5:51 left in the quarter.

“I was obviously worried a bit but I knew there is a lot of resilience in this group,” Katovich said.

“And obviously they didn’t really bat an eye. They just battled back.”

Meadows took the lead for good on Lazarevic’s tip-in with 18 seconds left in the period. Then his 3-pointer at the buzzer that gave the Mustangs a 14-9 lead.

The Mustangs outscored the Pirates, 19-9, in the second quarter.

A nifty spin move by Miletic resulted in a 6-footer to start the period and Duffer’s 8-foot floater made it 18-9 with 5:50 left.

Balanganayi’s driving layup got the Pirates to within 21-14 with 4:47 left but that’s as close as they would get as Meadows went on a 7-0 run to lead 33-14 at intermission.

After a 3-pointer from Pekovic, the Mid-Suburban East champs took their biggest lead in the third quarter on Miletic’s big dunk for a 40-23 lead with 2:53 left in the period.

“I was really happy that we could do this on our home court,” Katovich said. “This senior group has put in so much time. To do it on this court makes it even sweeter and it was against a good Palatine team that is well-coached and talented.”

Millstone’s Pirates had won five straight games.

They were led by Balanganayi (12 points), Carter Monroe (10), Brady May (6) and Dick (5).

“You always want to be playing your best basketball at the end of the season,” said Millstone, who like Katovich is one of the winningest boys basketball coaches in MSL history. “And I felt we did that. But at some point you’re just going to run into a team that is better than you. And all the credit to Rolling Meadows. Some of our shots weren’t falling and I think they had a lot to do with that. They just have so many weapons. When you key on one person, other guys are going to step up and hurt you.

“I thought all of our kids just left it all on the floor, which is what you expect them to do and what they did. I couldn’t be prouder of these kids. It’s a great group and I don’t think there is no second guessing what we did.”