

Milford ends PBL's season

Emotions high for PBL's Gerndt, Portwood

By Will Brumleve

ROSSVILLE — One of the last to exit the PBL locker room at Rossville-Alvin High School Monday night, Nick Gerndt had every reason to feel loss and disappointment.

Gerndt and the rest of the Panthers had just lost a hard-fought battle to the Milford Bearcats in the first round of the Rossville-Alvin Regional Tournament. The 68-58 defeat ended PBL's season and the high school basketball careers of Gerndt and fellow seniors Forrest Heyman, Ryan West and Dane Elson.

No one wanted to win that game more than Gerndt. It was evident in the way he played; in the way he nailed back-to-back three-pointers to bring PBL back from a 10-point deficit in the fourth quarter; in the way he displayed his emotions on his sleeve when he missed one free throw in the second quarter and when a questionable loose ball foul was called against him late in the game.

Gerndt was hoping to feel the excitement he and several other Panthers had felt a year ago, when PBL struggled throughout the year but played a Cinderella role in the postseason, knocking off three higher-seeded foes on its way to a Danville Schlarman Sectional berth.

Instead, it was all a memory. But amidst the loss and disappointment were positive feelings — those of love and experience gained.

"We've had some ups and downs, but I love every one of these guys like a brother," Gerndt said while holding off tears. "We're just a team. I just wish we could have pulled this one off."

PBL coach Mark Portwood expressed similar emotions when walking out of the locker room minutes later.

"I think, especially for the seniors, we really thought we had a chance to win the game tonight," Portwood said. "The finality (of their careers) kind of starts to sink in after the game, and it's pretty tough.

"But I told (my players after the game that) one of the best compliments I can give them is I look forward to practice every day; I look forward to hanging out with these guys and being around them and talking with them; they're just good people to be around, and that's what it's all about.

"I'll remember all these guys for years and years and years, and hopefully the seniors will come back and visit us at PBL. A great bunch. Those four seniors are a great bunch of guys."

■ **Milford jumps out of gates**

The No. 8-seed Panthers (15-14, 6-4 SVC East) gained an early 4-2 lead but never led again against the No. 7-seed Bearcats (20-9, 6-4 SVC East), who advanced to a second-round game Wednesday against No. 2-seed Armstrong-Potomac.

Milford coach Eric Weaver made it a priority to swing the momentum in his team's favor early in the third meeting between the two foes this season. PBL led 23-6 after one quarter in the first meeting in December, resulting in a PBL home win; PBL also led 15-10 in the second meeting in January, although Milford pulled off the win at home.

"We talked about beforehand to be confident even if they get us down and that we can take care of it," Weaver said. (We said) let's not get in a first-quarter hole. (My players) really played with some confidence and executed and put it up. And even when Paxton made their runs at times ... our guys were able to play with confidence and know we played these guys throughout the year and that we can handle their pressure."

Milford's Brad Kunce put up six of his game-high 23 points in the first period. PBL sophomore Tyler Overstreet scored four of his 11 points in the quarter to keep PBL within 12-8 at the beginning of the second quarter.

In the second period, PBL made three three-pointers but no other field goals. PBL's Dane Elson opened the second quarter with a trey to bring PBL to within one point, down 12-11, and Overstreet made another three-pointer to bring PBL to within 16-15 midway through the quarter.

Milford closed the half with a 9-3 run and led 25-18 at intermission. Milford outscored PBL 19-18 in the third quarter and 24-22 in the fourth.

"I thought in the first half we played at the pace that they wanted," Portwood said. "It was a pretty slow game, a pretty methodical game, and I think that's what Milford was looking for. We tried to pick it up in the second half, but early on they did too.

"We lost guys in transition, and when they were able to build that lead it left us a pretty big hole to dig ourselves out of. We got down, but we battled back, kept fighting. But we didn't get enough stops throughout the night to get over that hump."

Portwood said his team, which made 16 two-pointers and 8 three-pointers, was forced to shoot from the

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outside too much. Milford had 23 two-point buckets and two from the perimeter.

"They did a great job of sagging off in the lane and stopping penetration; we couldn't get to the basket like we wanted to because they sagged off on us quite a bit, and therefore we shot more threes," Portwood said. "And we didn't get to the foul line as much as we needed to because we weren't going to the basket."

And when PBL did get to the line, it shot 2-for-10, compared to 16-for-22 for Milford. Bearcat Andrew Cooke earned nine of his 15 points from the line.

PBL got some spirited play out of its seniors late in the game. West made three treys in the second half, scoring all but two of his 15 points in that span. Heyman scored all seven of his points in the final period and held Milford's Curtiss Marcott to only five points. Gerndt (nine points) hit two treys in the fourth.

Elson scored two of his eight points in the third quarter.

Also scoring for PBL was junior Travis Enghausen, who made four field goals for eight points.

Besides Kunce and Cooke, also scoring for Milford were Patrick Laffoon (14 points), Jeremy Allison (seven points), Vincent Laffoon (four points).

PBL	8	10	18	22	— 58
Milford	12	13	19	24	— 68

PBL (15-14, 6-4) — Gerndt 3-1-9, Martin 0-0-0, West 6-0-15, Elson 3-0-8, Lewis 0-0-0, Overstreet 5-0-11, Enghausen 4-0-8, Skees 0-0-0, Pilcher

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