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[Rochester East takes down GI](#)

By Doug Smith Niagara Gazette

CANANDAIGUA — For Rochester East High School Saturday, finding the court was hard, finding the cords was easy.

And so the momentarily disoriented Orientals guided Grand Island to the sidelines of the Class A girls playoffs, 59-54, despite 28 GI points by Cassie Oursler in the Far West Regional before a surprisingly scant turnout at Finger Lakes Community College.

Among the missing time wound down to high noon was the East team. Conspiracy theorists suspected that coach Mario Velazquez was keeping his high-powered five (17 straight victories by an average 20.1 points) under wraps. No such plot. Although East lies little more than a long 3-pointer from the gym, the bus got lost as other Oriental personnel frantically cell-phoned guidance.

At last the team straggled in and tossed up a few desultory shots as Coach Velazquez either declined, or didn't push for, additional warm-up time.

Then it got real.

Grand Island, which had trailed for less than a minute total in three play-in games, scored first on a nice side jumper by Megan Karpie after a stop at the other end. But from 5-4, East went on a 16-2 run, including consecutive threes by Aaliyah Dunbar and defensive specialist Renetta Fordham in the final minute of the first quarter.

Fordham's inflicted special pain, as she was backed out of range, the ball glancing two feet off the backboard and into the net. After Dunbar's side jumper two minutes into the second quarter, it was 21-6, and East had made eight of 15.

"Usually we're the ones who have to come back," said Velazquez.

"They shot out of their minds," said GI Coach Jenepher Banker, seldom disposed to hyperbole.

Two Oursler free throws stopped the bleeding and GI kept pace to halftime, then roared out of the second-half gate. Karpie scored on a 70-foot assist from Banker (gasps filled the hall), then on a little shovel from the side. When Karpie hit Oursler inside, the deficit was down to single digits, 34-26.

As the quarter ended. Olzewski set Oursler up for a three-point play, Banker escaped the

hard-pressing Fordham for a pull-up two and Oursler scored inside on a play that deserved two assists. GI trailed by a mere 41-37.

East opened the fourth with quick baskets by Taylor Hosbey and Ayala (a gorgeous hook shot), and then the hammer, a buzzer-beating 15-footer by Fordham with 5:40 to play. The Vikings wouldn't yield, executing three steals in the last 90 seconds, but East had it securely.

"Credit to them, they're a good basketball team," said Coach Banker. "We could have played tougher."

Coach Velazquez praised Fordham's work in holding All-Western New Yorker Kallie Banker to nine points, and even more so, his team's "keeping our composure" as "a very good Grand Island team" fought back into contention. It wasn't always easy, but as in its trip to the game, East found its way.

TOSS UPS: Junior Oursler made 11 of 22 field goal attempts, some on crafty hooks, and 6 of 8 from the line... FLCC employed the gold-standard Whitney Houston national anthem... Coach Banker hailed the leadership of departing seniors Kallie Banker, Karpie and Stephanie Senn... Junior Kassie Bennett chipped in two tough baskets as GI held it "close enough" to halftime... East made 22 of 43 field goals attempts, including 13-24 in the first half, and 9 of 11 fouls... Grand Island shot 23-59, just under 40 per cent.