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[GI girls hold on at West](#)

By Brandon Koch [Niagara Gazette](#)

TOWN OF TONAWANDA — A feisty Kenmore West defense gave the two-time defending champion Grand Island girls basketball squad all it could handle Tuesday night.

But not quite enough.

Cassie Oursler sparked a 13-2 run in the fourth quarter, scoring seven of her team-high 13 points to help the Lady Vikings get past the host Lady Blue Devils 40-38 in a battle between two of the top teams in the Niagara Frontier League.

Ken West's Melanie Fisher launched a last-second, 3-point heave following a timeout with 3.7 seconds left on the clock, but her shot aired right and Grand Island (4-2, 3-0 NFL) escaped a near upset.

"I'm just proud of our kids for perservering," Vikings coach Jennepher Banker said. "We had to do some different things than we normally have done and we were a little bit out of sync because of those things. So I was glad that our kids just perservered."

Ken West (5-2, 2-1 NFL) threw Grand Island off schematically from the get-go, pressuring point guard Kallie Banker with a full-court press and double-teaming her in the offensive zone to disrupt the Vikings' flow.

"We had to change a lot of stuff which required people being out there that didn't know what they were doing. So that threw us out of sync on the offensive end," Banker added. "We were a little bit out of sync and we went back to doing what we needed to do in the fourth quarter."

Grand Island slowly got out to an 8-6 lead after one in which Ken West forced plenty of turnovers but failed to convert all but a pair of 3-pointers. The Blue Devils remained determined to bottle up Banker and challenge Oursler inside. Lexi Panepinto (12 points) guarded Banker for the majority of the night despite the size difference, and held her to just four points.

"She's very quick and a very good player, so it was a tough defender for me to play against," Kallie said. "We had to pass the ball more, swing it around so they couldn't have enough time to double team us. They did a great job double-teaming, so that was difficult."

Lexi Panepinto, meanwhile, netted two of her four 3-point shots in the second to help the Blue Devils close the gap to 21-20 heading in to the break.

Ken West used that momentum to start the third as Fisher drained the opening seven points of the half to give her squad a 27-21 advantage. Lexi Panepinto scored again from deep range to make it 30-25 heading into the fourth.

Ken West's Lauren Czarniak (five points) hit a trey to start the final frame, but Oursler and Co. took over. A timid Blue Devils bunch surrendered an eight point lead, the largest of the night to that point, and Oursler led the 13-2 run to put Grand Island up 38-35 with under two minutes to play.

Fisher, who had a team-high 14 points, answered right back with a 3-pointer to tie at 38, but Megan Karpie's (10 points) layup with a half a minute to play proved to be the difference maker. Fisher missed a pair of critical free throws with 10.9 seconds left on the clock as well.

"We went in with confidence and I think we played with a lot of confidence," Ken West coach Mike Licata said. "But I also think part of this is convincing ourselves at this point that we can play with teams that are regarded as very good basketball teams."

Oursler added 12 rebounds while Banker finished with eight assists.

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