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Vikings girls start with a win

By Doug Smith Niagara Gazette

AMHERST — Most Valuable Player Kallie Banker made four free throws down the stretch, but lesser lights lit the way and that had coach Jenepher Banker talkin' proud, not loud, after the defending Section VI Class A girls champs won their opener Friday night (Dec. 2).

"It gave our new players big game experience and they really came through," Coach Banker said following a tense 55-51 victory over Sacred Heart in the Pastor-Cooper Memorial Showcase at Daemen College.

Behind for most of the first 20 minutes, the Vikings strung 10 points for a 35-31 lead midway through the third period. Right in the middle of the run was a slick feed from rookie Grace Olzewski to Megan Karpie. Olzewski had little if any playing time last year and Karpie was scoreless in the state semifinal game.

Stephanie Knight, another varsity newcomer, had six points, including a big rebound basket in the fourth, and a bit later Banker hooked one in for a 50-41 lead, the game's largest separation.

When Sacred Heart got it down to 51-48 with 40 seconds to play, Banker cashed a pair of one-and-ones so that a last-second Shark basket drew only applause, no blood.

"Our kids fought hard," said Shark coach Maria Pares, "but we had no answer for Oursler." The good Sister was referencing 6-foot-2 forward Cassie Oursler, whose "official" rebound total of 11 seemed vastly understated. Besides the boards, she maintained Viking possession at least three times by slapping loose balls off Sharks and out of bounds.

"I was lucky," she claimed in the hallway. Nobody gets that lucky that often.

The shooting charts really looked like opening night. Grand Island shot just 9-31 in the first half but a Banker "hat trick" of threes enhanced the numbers in the third. She scored 20. Multi-talented La'trice Hall put up 16 for Sacred Heart.

QUICK POINTS: Only one foul was called in the first six minutes of the second half. ... Kallie Banker was handed her MVP trophy by the grandchildren of the showcase's founder. ... Two Vikings were on injured reserve and a third out of town at a soccer tournament. ... "It's a year I hope we're better by the end," said the coach.