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GI coach Beutel hopes tryouts pay dividends

By Ryan Nagelhout Niagara Gazette

GRAND ISLAND — Coaches like to say they're starting fresh in the postseason, but Grand Island boys basketball coach Nate Beutel is taking that to the next level for sectionals.

The first-year coach brought up a half-dozen players from the junior varsity program just before the regular season ended and told his Vikings every roster spot for the playoffs was up for grabs.

"We came in and said 'we're going to have tryouts,' " Beutel said. "We're going to have tryouts last four or five days and formulate our team, our rotation and roster based on who was going to bust their tails over the next four or five days."

In other words, every roster spot was back up for grabs until today's game at home against Lake Shore (2-15).

"Our team doubled in size," senior Steve Vitello said. "We brought up a lot of JV kids. Coach said 'It's 0-0. Time to go.' "

Beutel said the shake up was an effort to motivate his group after a disappointing run to end the regular season.

"It's nothing against the kids I have now," Beutel said. "I certainly wouldn't want to say they didn't put in the effort, but we kind of needed a spark. In practice we've gotten one and hopefully it translates into the game and beyond."

For Vitello, who leads the Vikings in points, rebounds and blocks, the shake up was a chance to show the JV kids what varsity basketball is all about.

"I've never been so motivated," Vitello said. "Coach kind of surprised us, but we have the JV kids and we want to show them that varsity is a whole new level and try to get them ready."

Beutel said three former JV players expect to get some minutes in today's 7 p.m. tip, including sophomore Jordan Jelks, freshman Jadon Wegrzyn and sophomore Corey Adamshick.

The first-year coach said the youth movement has given the Vikings "the best practices we've had in a month," and his seniors reacted well to the challenge Beutel issued.

“Most have stepped up to the plate,” he said, mentioning Tom Dzielski and Liam Dodd among a number of seniors who have worked hard over the weekend.

Grand Island expected to see West Seneca East in the Class A-1 prequarterfinals, but Starpoint leaped up the seeding after winning its last two ECIC II games and Lafayette didn’t decline a sectionals invite; giving Grand Island hosting duties in the play-in game.

Lake Shore brings a young outside shooting team to the play-in game as a 13-seed, with the winner earning a trip to fifth-seeded Sweet Home tomorrow at 7 p.m. For Vitello, the extra game is just another chance to win in his senior season.

“Getting some wins my senior year would be exciting,” Vitello said. “In sectionals anything can happen.”