

# **Grand Island's Banker playing through pain**

## **Vikings junior fights through injury and illness to lead her team to Class A state semifinals.**

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Add "quick healer" to the long list of Kallie Banker's accomplishments this season.

The Grand Island junior, who has her team two wins away from a state title in girls basketball, has won her share of battles on and off the court.

She's fought through injury and illness to lead the Vikings to a 23-0 record and a date Friday with Peekskill of Section I in the Class A semifinals at Hudson Valley Community College in Troy.

Banker first felt a shooting pain in her right wrist after the season-opening basketball tournament in Orlando, Fla. She has felt weak and sick since the Feb. 26 Class A-1 semifinal game against Kenmore East, saying "we think it was the type of illness that makes you tired."

Some wonder how she continues to play, but Banker isn't the first athlete capable of normalizing injury and illness.

Banker flies in the face of the common belief that today's athlete is soft. She'll have a wrist X-ray and see a doctor -- as soon as the season is over. Bad news on either front would mean unacceptable down time.

"It blows up really bad after games, it's gross," Banker said of her wrist. The pain? "Sometimes it's bad, it comes and goes, it's not unbearable."

To combat her illness, she's missed a lot of practice. No matter. The show must go on.

Watching Banker play the point, she sure doesn't look like she's hurt or sick. In five postseason games she's averaging 15.8 points, including 19 against Pittsford-Mendon in

the Far West Regionals. She brings the ball up the floor -- bad wrist and all -- with authority, and her jump shot comes off that bad wrist with swish appeal.

Banker's mother, Jenepher, is also the Vikings coach with the same burning desire for a conquest in Troy. She said Kallie obviously would not be playing if she were diagnosed as being hurt or sick.

"She's pretty good at not paying attention to that kind of stuff. She's pretty good at blocking things out. She doesn't want to know," said Jenepher. "It's a decision we let her make. I know all of this makes me sound like a horrible mother ...

"She's getting better. She was real sick the week we played Pioneer and Williamsville East. She's still trying to get her energy back. I hope she has her legs this weekend, that's kind of what we're hoping for."

Grand Island will need all of their parts in working order to beat Peekskill, located in the lower Hudson Valley.

GI's 6-foot-3 sophomore center Cassie Oursler is ready for the challenge. She's playing with confidence while averaging a double-double. The Red Devils don't have a player on the roster taller than 5-10, which is good news for the Vikings if they can work the ball into Oursler.

"She worked a lot at going in different directions, doing different things once she gets the ball," said Banker. "Last year she had one move and that was it. This year she does more with the ball and keeps getting better and better and she's got size you don't see every day."

Senior guard Danielle Wegrzyn has shown leadership and focus and should be primed to perform on the big stage at states. Her three baskets in the first quarter against Pitt-Mendon helped offset a slow start for GI