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## **Vikings hope to take control in Troy**

By Ryan Nagelhout Niagara Gazette

NIAGARA FALLS — The ancient Greeks used to say ‘know thyself.’

That’s good advice when the team you’re playing lives a six-hour drive away from home.

For the Grand Island girls basketball team, a matchup with Section I Peekskill is as much a test of quick scouting as it is relying on what got the Vikings to the Class A state semifinals at Hudson Valley Community College.

Grand Island (23-0) has a 1:30 p.m. tip against a Peekskill (22-1) team that relies on a much different game than the Vikings according to Grand Island coach Jenepher Banker.

“They rely on making you turn the ball over,” Banker said. “Steals, deflections, etcetera. They rebound really well, so we have to take care of the ball and we have to box out.”

That means a lot of fast-break points for the Red Devils, and Peekskill averages a whopping 16.5 steals per game. Being responsible with the ball will be the task on offense, but the Vikings defense will be focused on stopping four solid Peekskill shooters led by 5-foot-6 junior point guard Asia Jackson.

Junior guard Kallie Banker leads the Vikings in scoring, and she said the key to playing an unfamiliar team is staying confident in what they’re good at.

“We just know it’s going to be a tough game and we have to give it our all,” the junior said. “When we don’t know a lot about the team, the way we have to play is really important.”

Grand Island had gotten used to playing at the Burt Flickinger Center in Buffalo, with three straight playoff games there including a 50-46 win over Section V Pittsford-Mendon in the Far West Regional last Saturday. Two busloads of students are expected to make the voyage to Troy along with family and friends, and the Vikings hope the fan support makes it feel like home.

“Obviously you lose the comfort of being the home team and having a lot of fans there,” Vikings guard Danielle Wegrzyn said. “But it’s something we’ve been striving for and hopefully it’s just one of the steps to our goal this year.”

That goal is the state championship game on Saturday at 7:30 p.m., and coach Banker said the chance for a state title isn’t something the Vikings take lightly after an overtime loss in the Far West Regional last season.

“This is what these kids have wanted from last year,” Banker said. “To be able to come back and do that and do it undefeated, we’re really looking forward to it. You don’t always get those opportunities.”