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Wegrzyn, GI girls hoping for a strong finish

By Ryan Nagelhout Niagara Gazette

NIAGARA FALLS — Danielle Wegrzyn knows this is her last chance.

Watch her play guard for the Grand Island girls basketball team you know it, too.

The 5-foot-10 senior has started for the Vikings since she was a sophomore, and a trip to the Class A state semifinals is reason enough to go all in.

“I know the next game could potentially be my last and me and the seniors don’t want that to be the case,” Wegrzyn said. “Our goal from the beginning of the year was to get to the state finals”

Wegrzyn showed some of that resolve last Saturday in the Far West Regional at the Burt Flickinger Center against Pittsford-Mendon. While the Section VI champions struggled to keep up with the visitors from Section V early in the game, Wegrzyn stepped up with hook shots as the shot clock expired and second-chance points to keep the game within reach.

The senior had eight of her ten points in the first half but the Vikings trailed by 12 at the break. Stewing in that big hole at the half, the Vikings came back with a 22-3 third quarter explosion that booked them a trip to Troy. Grand Island coach Jenepher Banker said the senior’s work in the first 16 minutes was a crucial turning point in the win.

“She was very focused last week and that was evident in the way she came out,” Banker said. “She’s on a mission, and this time of year you want kids on a mission.”

On a balanced team like Grand Island (23-0), Wegrzyn tries to fill in where she can. As a starting senior along with Brooke DeMarco, that means occasionally getting dirty on the inside or coming up with steals on the defensive end.

“Usually my role is a shooter but I’ve been working harder to go outside of that,” Wegrzyn said. “Mostly on our defense and helping however I can, whether it’s distributing the ball or rebounding or stealing. Anything I can do to get my chance to help out the team.”

Wegrzyn’s steal with less than ten seconds on the clock at ECC sealed the 50-46 win over Pittsford-Mendon, sending Grand Island’s fan-made Viking ship down the I-90 to Hudson Valley Community College for a showdown today with Region I champion Peekskill at 1:30 p.m.

That Viking ship was made by a group of students that includes her younger brother

Jadon, a freshman who cracked the boys varsity team at the end of the regular season and saw significant minutes in Grand Island's first round win over Lake Shore.

The Wegrzyn clan is a basketball family through and through, with Danielle's older sister Kristin, who graduated last spring, playing basketball at Brockport this year.

"She's the person I looked up to playing basketball for the past two years on varsity," Wegrzyn said. "It's nice to have a basketball family because they all know how you feel. To be honest my outside family is just like my team family, they know so much."

Kristen will make the trip to Troy during her spring break, and Danielle said she hopes to make it through the weekend without playing her last high school game.

"It's about wanting to go farther than what's right in front of you," Wegrzyn said. "Even if these are my last two games, I'll take the whole experience in because it's been something I've worked for my entire high school career. Making it a step further every year, it's kind of been a relief this year to make it to states."

"Everything you've worked for is finally there."