

Grand Island repeats as Class A champs

By **Mary Jo Monnin**

Updated: March 6, 2011, 12:24 AM

Pioneer, hoping to upset Grand Island in Saturday's Section VI Class A final, only managed to scare them.

The undefeated Vikings made it back-to-back titles with a 54-46 victory before an estimated 350 at Erie Community College.

The Vikings will put their 22-0 record on the line next Saturday when they play the winner from Section V in the Far West Regionals.

Grand Island enjoyed leads of 17-2 and 26-5, but in the end it was Pioneer giving the undefeated champions of the Niagara Frontier League a run. Pioneer closed to within six points, 48-42, with 1:07 left in the game, but could get no closer.

GI had four players in double figures led by Cassie Oursler with 21 points before fouling out. Kallie Banker ended with 11 and Danielle Wegrzyn and Brooke DeMarco had 10 each.

"Cassie just played an all-around great game," said Banker, a senior guard. "Not just shooting, but she also rebounded the lights out and she finished everything. It's hard [after she fouled out] when you go from having a 6-4 kid rebounding to 5-10 guards. It was a hard transition, but we pulled it off at the end."

Grand Island jumped out to a 16-2 lead after the first quarter with Banker and Oursler combining for 13 of those points. The score was 26-5 in the second quarter before Pioneer ran off eight points in a row to trail, 26-13 at the break.

The teams played even in the third quarter and Pioneer outscored GI, 20-14, in the fourth quarter.

"We have a 3-2 press that was very effective all year," Pioneer coach Bill Connelly said. "We usually start it at the foul line, but we started it all the way up. We're athletic enough that we were able to force some steals, force some [bad] passes. It got us running a little more. All night I wanted us to run more."

"We were still in it. We were missing good shots. We just weren't getting the bounces on our shots," Connelly added. "I didn't like being down 26-5, but I knew we were still in the game because we were getting good shots."

Pioneer ends the season 20-2. The Panthers lost their first game of the season and their last. Jenna Crabb finished with 16 points. Kiley Titus added 10 points and Mikaela Connelly added nine.

--- With two minutes left in the third quarter, a fire alarm went off in the building delaying the game for several minutes. Fans were in the middle of evacuating the building when the alarm stopped and they were allowed back in by a firefighter on the scene. It ended up being a false alarm with building officials saying a moisture buildup in the duct work, brought on by Saturday's rain, caused the alarm to sound.