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## **Grand Island repeats as NFL champions**

By Ryan Nagelhout Niagara Gazette

GRAND ISLAND — This Valentine's Day, the Grand Island girls basketball team was out for revenge.

With the Niagara Frontier League title on the line, the Vikings outlasted Lockport at home, 37-36, in a thrilling game that earned Grand Island its second straight NFL crown.

"It's a real nice Valentine's Day present," Grand Island coach Jenepher Banker said. "We actually have two kids born on Valentine's Day, both (Cassie Oursler and Kassie Bennett) were born on the same day on Valentine's Day, so this is a nice birthday present, too."

Oursler (10 points) scored on a rebound inside with 2:50 to play in the fourth quarter, the eventual game-winning basket after a frantic finish in front of a big crowd that saw Grand Island (13-1 NFL) win its fourth NFL title.

"It's crazy," Oursler said. "I thought we could do it and I had faith in us, but it took a lot of work. With a new team and new girls — only three returners — we came so far this year to overcome and win the league."

Lockport (12-2 NFL) had a number of chances to tie in the final minutes of a game that had just two lead changes and one tie, but was close throughout.

"It wasn't the last possession, it was a possession somewhere in the first quarter, second quarter, third quarter, wherever," Lockport coach Bill Shaw said. "They just executed one more time than we did."

Grand Island's largest lead — a 26-19 advantage early in the third — was quickly erased. Sara Franco (10 points) briefly put the Lions ahead on their last possession of the frame, but a Kallie Banker jumper gave Grand Island the 31-30 lead headed to the fourth quarter.

Banker had 15 points on Tuesday, including 11 in the first half. Her coach said the gameplan called for the senior captain to shoot early on. The Rhode Island recruit took just six shots in a 44-39 loss at Lockport on Jan. 17.

"They shut me down the first game so I definitely came into this one looking to shoot more," Banker said.

Trailing by three with under a minute to play, Lockport's Marissa Guyton was fouled in the paint and made both free throws with 55.9 to play. She made both free throws to narrow the Lions margin to 37-36.

With the crowd buzzing and the tension high, an official walked over to the scorer's table during the full timeout that followed and asked, "Does it get any better than this?"

Grand Island's resulting possession ended in a turnover, giving the Lions a shot at the lead.

"We had one play set up and they switched their defense so we switched our play and didn't execute it very well," Banker said. "We kind of switched it on the fly. ... at that point were trying to play good defense."

With 10 seconds on the shot clock, Lockport took an inbounds pass in its zone with 14.4 seconds left on the clock and got the ball to Guyton inside. With four seconds left she let the ball go, crashing to the floor as the shot failed to hit the rim and went out of bounds as the shot clock horn sounded.

Officials, however, ruled it Lockport's ball and put a second left on the shot clock, with the game clock now stuck at 3.6 seconds to play.

Neither coach was happy. Banker wanted the shot clock violation, while Shaw wanted a foul called on Guyton's shot.

"I thought Guyton got just crushed on her jump shot with 2.5 seconds to go," he said. "I don't know what those guys were looking at but apparently they didn't see the same thing I was looking at."

With one last inbounds play, Lockport's Alexis Cheatham lofted a heavy 3-point attempt that went off the backboard and out of play. Lockport didn't press for the final .8 seconds, and the Vikings celebrated a title on their home floor.

"This is exciting," Jenepher Banker said. "This team, I love this group of kids and they've come together real nicely. I'm really proud of this group of kids."

Lockport senior Emma Sobieraski had 10 points for the Lions in the loss.