

Panthers remain perfect: Romberg drops double- double, Mack B5 champs

Nick Wilson/The Times-Standard

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McKINLEYVILLE -- The Loggers gave the defending Big 5 champs a run for their money, but in the end, the Panthers proved too much.

McKinleyville's Sage Romberg had another stellar showing, pacing the Panthers with a game-high 20 points and 10 rebounds for a double-double, catapulting the champs to a 54-48 victory over Eureka Tuesday night.

Romberg also came up with five big blocks on the defensive end and prevented the Loggers from getting too comfortable in the paint, while teammates Kaila Johnson and Kaitlyn Miller combined for 19 points, and were equally detrimental to Eureka with their defensive efforts.

The win kept the Panthers perfect in league at 7-0 and 17-5 overall, also making McKinleyville the outright champions of the Big 5. Eureka meanwhile dropped to 4-4 and 14-8.

"It feels good," said McKinleyville head coach Dustin Dutra. "This has been one of our goals from the beginning of the season, and winning league is always special. We've had good team effort night-in and night-out."

Eureka was in contention throughout the game, and after trailing McKinleyville through the majority of the first half, the Loggers closed the gap when Jazmyne Younkin got a put-back bucket to beat the

second quarter buzzer. Younkin's shot made the score 23-23 and also gave the Loggers momentum heading into halftime.

Eureka carried that momentum into the second half and took its first lead of the game with a lay-up from Lorena Reynolds in the opening minutes of the third period, but McKinleyville's lone senior, Sara Shorey answered on the ensuing possession by draining a trey.

From there the lead changed hands a number of times. With 3.6 seconds left in the third quarter, Mack began to pull away when Romberg drove through heavy traffic on a fastbreak, hit a floating jumpshot and drew the foul. After making the free throw that followed, Romberg's three-point play gave Mack a 37-33 lead.

Eureka's Kelly Kime and Lorena Reynolds combined for 22 points and hit some nice shots down the stretch to keep the game close, yet the Panthers always seemed to respond with big shots whenever they needed one.

One such moment came when Johnson heaved the ball up in desperation to beat the shot clock and banked-in a three-pointer that put the Panthers up 54-43 with 1:23 remaining in regulation. The trey effectively put the game away and the Loggers' comeback hopes to bed.

"It was close all the way through," said Eureka head coach Joel Thornburgh, "If we make a few more baskets and they don't bank in that three at the end, we have a chance to win. We just wanted to put ourselves into a position to win, and we did that. Kelly (Kime) had a great game -- she scores, rebounds and does everything well. She's definitely an inspiration to our team."

McKinleyville rounds out the regular season this

Thursday as the team travels to Del Norte, while Eureka hosts Ferndale in a non-league matchup.

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