

Take five: Crusaders claim 5th consecutive Little 4 crown

Nick Wilson/The Times Standard

Posted: 02/07/2009 01:30:16 AM PST

EUREKA--St. Bernard's head coach Steve Thrap said that he hopes the streak doesn't end on his watch.

Well, he's safe for now.

In front of a packed home gym, the Crusaders locked down their fifth consecutive Little 4 crown with a convincing 64-51 victory over the Hoopa High Warriors Friday night.

"It's just great," Thrap said. "There's always great pressure to carry on the tradition -- it can't last forever. Tonight we played great team defense, and defense wins championships."

St. Bernard's Andrew Ayers set the tone by scoring the team's first seven points to help spark a 9-0 run in the opening minutes, and went on to finish with 11 points.

Ayers also spread the wealth around by kicking the ball out to teammate Nick Dalby or over to Stephen Papstein whenever Hoopa doubled down on him. The strategy proved more than effective as St. Bernard's systematically picked apart Hoopa's defense throughout the contest.

Always quick to convert, Dalby led the Crusaders with 19 points, while the towering Papstein added 10 with his presence in the paint.

"We wanted to get Papstein involved -- he adds

more dimension to our team," said the SB head coach. "Other teams can't just key in on Ayers when Papstein gets going."

Hoopa assistant coach John Williams concurred with Thrap, pointing to Papstein as the Crusaders' difference-maker down the stretch.

"We had no answer for Papstein," Williams said. "We also struggled in the first half -- shots just weren't falling for us and the team wasn't patient enough on offense."

Though the St. Bernard's jumped out to an early lead, Hoopa stepped up its intensity and was able to close the gap in the second quarter with Roman Hutt spearheading the charge. At the 5:54 mark of that period, Hutt elevated above his defender on a fastbreak to convert a game-tying layup, and after Hoopa scored on its next possession, the team held its first lead of the game. That lead would be the Warriors last, however.

The Crusaders were consistent from the charity stripe in the second quarter (11-of-14) and went into halftime with a 27-20 lead. And the home team only continued to pull away after the break.

In the fourth quarter, Hoopa's Dion Hutt had the hot hand, putting up 15 of his game-high 27 points, but even his impressive offensive output proved too little too late.

With the win, St. Bernard's improved to 5-0 in league and 15-8 overall, while Hoopa fell to 3-2 and 9-8. Both teams play next Wednesday, with the Warriors traveling to Fortuna and the Crusaders rounding out the regular season as they host Ferndale.

