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HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

An ending for Eagles and coach

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EASTHAMPTON - Two key 3-pointers by Athol guard Kelsey Cass in the last 1½ minutes Monday night ended the season for the Easthampton girls basketball team in the final game it played for coach Amanda Kemp.

The Eagles had a two-point lead at the start of the fourth quarter, but the 3-pointers by Cass on two consecutive possessions from the same spot completed the Red Raiders' rally as they won 60-56. The loss denied Easthampton (9-11, 9-9 Franklin South) a spot in the playoffs.

"Unfortunately they started dropping the 3s in the final minutes and were able to pull it out in the end," said Eagles coach Amanda Kemp.

After 10 seasons coaching Easthampton basketball, seven with the varsity team, Kemp told her players she will not be back to coach next season.

"I told them I was very proud to have coached them and thanked them for a great season." Kemp said.

The game was tied at 44 with four minutes remaining, but the Red Raiders (15-4, 13-4 Franklin North) pulled ahead on the long balls by Cass with 1:20 to go and then with 46 seconds left.

"Her two threes were the whole game for us," said Athol coach Chris Sullivan. "She misses them and we probably lose."

The Red Raiders also made clutch free throws down the stretch to maintain the advantage. Cass, who finished with 12 points, hit two free throws with six seconds left to give Athol a four-point lead and seal the victory.

Easthampton point guard Alicia Carter scored a career- and team-high 19 points, including a 3-pointer with 10 seconds remaining to cut the Red Raiders' lead to 58-56.

"We did pretty good," said Carter of her team's season. "But it was tough because a lot of teams stepped up their game against us."

Eagles center Allyson Rannikko also hit a 3-pointer in the final minute.

"It felt good because I normally don't take 3s," said Rannikko, who finished with 17 points. "But I didn't hesitate when coach told me to take it."

Red Raiders guard Catie Brighenti surpassed 1,000 career points on a 3-pointer midway through the second quarter and finished with a game-high 20 points.

"It feels really good," said Brighenti on reaching the milestone in Athol's second to last regular-season game. "I owe it all to my coach, teammates and family."

Brighenti was playing on a hurt ankle which she re-injured late in the third quarter.

She returned to finish the game.

Easthampton led by as many as seven at the start of the second quarter, but Athol closed the gap and the lead seesawed throughout much of the second half.

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"It was tough, because it forced us to put Jen Rannikko in a position that she's not used to," said Kemp.

Before the game, Easthampton celebrated senior night honoring Gangne, Jasienowski and Allyson Rannikko.

"Senior night was a lot of fun," said Allyson Rannikko. "I feel sad to be leaving, but I'll be playing college next year hopefully."

Junior Jennifer Rannikko said she was happy for her big sister's success, but sad that this was their final game playing together in high school.

"I'm going to miss her a ton," said Jennifer Rannikko, who scored 10 points. "She's my moral support before and after the game."

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