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HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Easthampton girls stay alive with win over Hopkins

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EASTHAMPTON - A strong defensive effort helped the Easthampton girls basketball team keep its postseason hopes alive with a 41-28 win Thursday night at home over Hopkins Academy, which was eliminated from playoff contention.

This is just the second time the Golden Hawks (8-11, 7-11 Franklin South) have not advanced to the tournament since coach Glenn Cooke took over the program in the 1989-90 season.

Point guard Alicia Carter led the Eagles (9-9, 9-8 Franklin South) with 14 points and a career-high seven rebounds.

"I was able to stay under control and keep my cool under their pressure," Carter said after the win. "When they play tight I sometimes get out of control."

Easthampton coach Amanda Kemp also noted Carter's composure on the court.

"She did a great job distributing the ball tonight," Kemp said.

Neither team was able to get in a rhythm shooting the ball at the start. The Eagles scored just five points and Hopkins was held scoreless in the first quarter.

"I thought we played excellent defense, but we struggled offensively in the first," said Kemp.

Easthampton guard Alyssa Reardon scored a career-high 11 points as the Eagles took advantage of frequent double-teams on their center Allyson Rannikko.

"The weak side was always open," said Reardon. "I'm not used to scoring, but I was able to build up my confidence."

"There have been a lot of double-teams on Ally," said Kemp. " We did very well reversing the ball and taking focus off the double-teams."

Despite Hopkins' defensive pressure on Rannikko, the center managed to get a double-double finishing with 10 points and 11 boards.

Her younger sister Jen Rannikko did not start after getting an elbow to the face against Frontier on Monday. She had not practiced since the injury, but she played Thursday and scored two points.

Jen Rannikko "had a really strong performance defensively tonight," Kemp said.

Golden Hawks junior Lisa Berg also had a career-high night, leading her team with 12 points.

"We all really worked good together," said Berg. "We played hard as a team, but we're upset obviously because we aren't in the tournament."

In the teams' earlier meeting this season, Hopkins won 50-46 in Hadley on Jan. 13.

However, the Golden Hawks struggled to find the basket Thursday night trailing by as many as 20 points in the final three minutes of the game.

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"We needed to get off to a good start, which we didn't," said Cooke. "We did a great job on defense ... offensively never were in rhythm and never really got anything going."

Easthampton now must win one of its final two games to make the playoffs. They play at Monson (14-3) at 7 tonight and host Athol (13-4) at 7 p.m. Monday. This is the only time the Eagles play the Mustangs this season, and they lost 60-49 at the Red Raiders on Jan. 16.

"It would be nice to come away with a win (tonight). We want to keep up the same defensive intensity," Kemp said. They key, she added, is "defense, defense, defense."

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