

## LONGFORD, LIONS WIN IN HUNT FOR A TITLE

BY MIKE RUIZ  
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The Longwood girls basketball program has waited nearly two decades hoping to secure its second-ever Suffolk county title.

Following their performance Tuesday night, they'll have an opportunity to capture that elusive championship on Friday.

"This is what we've been working for," said Nyia Longford, who had 19 points and 11 rebounds for No. 1 Longwood in a 54-47 victory over visiting No. 5 Half Hollow Hills East in a Suffolk AA semifinal.

"It's a big accomplishment for us."

Longwood (20-2), which last won the county title in Class A in 2000, according to coach James Castiglione, will face Northport in the county final at 7 p.m. at Whitman. The Lions defeated Northport, 48-45, on Dec. 22.

"It's about surviving and advancing at this point," Castiglione said. "It's the first time since 2006 we've been in a county final, so it's nice to be relevant again. We're going to prepare and hopefully we can get one."

"We have to have great intensity," said Kanesha Strider, who added 10 points for Longwood and made a three-pointer from the right wing to give the Lions a 21-13 halftime advantage. "We can't sleep on anyone. We have to come at them with everything we have."

A layup by Taydra Simpson at the 3:13 mark of the third quarter gave Longwood its largest lead of the night at 39-18. She played a crucial role with 14 points and seven rebounds.

Back-to-back threes from Alyssa Studdert gave Hills East (20-3) a jolt of energy and cut the deficit to 47-42 with 1:33 remaining, capping off a 24-8 run.

Strider helped regain momentum for Longwood, however, as she converted a free throw on the ensuing possession and followed with a steal at half-court and a



JOSEPH D. SULLIVAN

Nyia Longford, putting up a shot, led Longwood with 19 points and 11 rebounds.

CLASS AA SEMI	
 <b>54</b> : <b>47</b> 	
LONGWOOD	HILLS EAST

Half Hollow Hills East	7	6	9	25	-	47
Longwood	10	11	18	15	-	54
LW: Longford 19, Simpson 14, Strider 10, Picton 7, Stevens 4, Totals 10-7-54. HE: Tawil 20, Studdert 9, Stein 6, Jones 5, Graham 4, Salti 3, Totals 9-6-47. Three-pointers: LW 7 (Longford 3, Strider 2, Picton, Simpson); HE 6 (Studdert 3, Tawil 2, Salti).						

three-point play on the other end to make it 51-42 with 57 seconds to go.

The Lions entered the fourth quarter ahead by 17 points before the Thunderbirds fought their way back with Sophia Tawil leading the way, scoring 13 of her 20 points in the period.

"I told them to stay composed and stick with the game plan," Castiglione said. "We knew they would hit some shots. I didn't think they'd come like that, but we pulled it out."

Simpson is confident that the county title drought could be over Friday night.

"I think we can go all the way," Simpson said. "I think we can finish it out as long as we play good team basketball."



KATHLEEN MALONE-VAN DYKE

Northport players bring it in after their 61-56 win against Ward Melville in a Suffolk Class AA semi.

# Pavinelli propels Tigers to AA final

On injured ankle, she scores 20 in win over Patriots

BY KENNY DeJOHN  
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Northport coach Rich Castellano said he could tell Danielle Pavinelli was a step slower than usual. But with a brace on her right ankle, Pavinelli powered through an injury suffered four days prior and willed the Tigers through a back-and-forth slugfest.

She had 20 points, six assists, four rebounds and four steals as the second-seeded Tigers defeated No. 3 Ward Melville, 61-56, in a Suffolk Class AA girls basketball semifinal in front of a packed Northport gymnasium Tuesday night.

Her driving layup with 7:13 left in the fourth quarter gave Northport a 51-49 lead, and the Tigers held on from there — even if the finish was a nail-biter.

Noelle Richardson made two free throws with 5:32 remaining, cutting Northport's lead to 53-52. The Tigers (21-2) responded with a 6-0 spurt — capped by Pavinelli's runner from the free-throw line — and

CLASS AA SEMI	
 <b>61</b> : <b>56</b> 	
NORTHPORT	WARD MELVILLE

Ward Melville	17	20	10	9	-	56
Northport	14	22	11	14	-	61
NPT: Pavinelli 20, McLaughlin 14, Dennin 11, Stockman 10, Cronin 3, Yearwood 3, Totals 21-4-61. WM: Hansen 33, Richardson 7, Wenzler 6, Agostino 5, Greek 5, Totals 12-5-56. Three-pointers: NPT 4 (McLaughlin 2, Pavinelli, Yearwood); WM 5 (Hansen 3, Agostino, Greek).						

took a 59-52 lead.

Ward Melville (20-3) cut it to 59-56 on a pair of free throws from Lauren Hansen with 42.8 seconds left, but Northport hung on. Kerry Dennin (11 points, eight rebounds) scored eight second-half points, and Kelly McLaughlin (14 points) was a key defensively.

"This is just a start," said Northport senior Hannah Stockman, who had 10 points and seven rebounds. "We're going to go as far as we can, and I really think tonight gave us that little push."

Northport will play No. 1 Longwood in the county championship on Friday at 7 p.m. at Whitman.

A high-scoring first half had Ward Melville ahead 37-36, behind 22 points from Hansen. The Auburn-bound senior had 33 points in her final varsity

game but was held to 11 points in the second half when Northport utilized a rotating, trapping press that mostly kept the ball out of her hands.

The different look left Ward Melville's potent offense unsettled, and Northport capitalized.

"I thought earlier, when we lost to Longwood, the comment that I made to my assistant was that I don't think we know how to win," Castellano said. "Then we lost to Hills East and we weren't ready, and it looked like the same thing. We had to learn how to win close games."

Pavinelli, a junior, said she rolled her ankle after landing awkwardly late in Northport's quarterfinal win over Whitman on Friday. Castellano said Pavinelli's parents took her for X-rays that night and then to physical therapy the next morning.

He wasn't sure she'd play after she sat out practice Saturday and practiced by herself Sunday, but she participated in all non-contact drills Monday.

"I knew I was playing even the night that I got hurt," Pavinelli said. "There was nothing that was going to let me not play this game. I knew how much I wanted to be out there, and I didn't want to let my team down if I didn't play tonight."