

SPORTS

Turnovers cost Bradshaw in NorCal final

By John Hull - Citizen Sports Writer



Photos by Keri Wood - Jordie Smith, left, consoles teammate Fernandi Espinosa after Bradshaw Christian lost to Pinewood, 53-47, in the Northern California Regional Division V final.

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The first trip to a CIF Northern California Regional final was a memorable one for the Bradshaw Christian High School girls' basketball team. Some good, some bad.

The three-time defending Sac-Joaquin Section champions had a chance to avenge a loss against Pinewood from Los Altos Hills, the squad that knocked them out of the NorCals' semifinals last season in a rude manner, 79-35.

For three quarters the Pride stayed right with the Panthers before turnovers and missed opportunities cost Bradshaw a shot at revenge and its first NorCal title. They dropped a 53-47 decision in the game played at Folsom High School, falling one win shy of reaching the state championship.

It was Pinewood's fifth NorCal Division V championship and second in a row. They move on now to face St. Anthony, the Southern California champion, Saturday in Bakersfield for the CIF title.

"I think the confidence of being there before, no matter how much the game swayed in (Bradshaw's) favor, helped (Pinewood) believe in itself and find a way to win," Pinewood coach Doc Scheppler said.

Bradshaw coach Mike Ruble thought he had his team ready for Pinewood's defensive schemes.

"(Pinewood) took it to another level. They knocked us on our heels offensively, but our girls kept pressing on," Ruble said.

The Pride committed 22 turnovers to Pinewood's 13, many coming midway in the third quarter when the Panthers began to take control. There were 14 lead changes and two ties in the game through the first three quarters.

Pinewood's Hailie Eackles had 21 of her game-high 24 points through the first three quarters. She scored most of her points on clean drives to the bucket.

"They weren't helping," Eackles said. "Cheyenne (Williams) wouldn't come over to help (defensively), so I had some open layups."

Williams, the lone senior on the Pride, had only four points, but collected a game-high 18 rebounds. She averaged 16 points per game this season.

"Even though it hurts right now, we had a heck-of-a year," Williams said. "Though I wish we could have another game, it was great to get as far as we did."

The Pride concluded the season with a 24-9 record.

Junior forward Lauren Beyer led Bradshaw with 19 points.

"Coach told me to go to the basket with confidence and I think I did that," Beyer said.

The Pride controlled the pace early and led 14-13 after the first quarter. Beyer scored on a pair of short jumpers to open the second quarter.

But, Pinewood went on a 10-0 run and had a 25-18 lead midway through the second.

A three-pointer by Fernandi Espinosa narrowed the margin to 25-22.

Beyer made a pair of free throws to grab back the lead at 26-25 with 41.7 seconds left. But, Seto Miranda hit a pair of free throws a few seconds later to give the Panthers a 27-26 lead at halftime.

Beyer again made a pair of bank shots, to start the third, and Bradshaw seemed to regain control of the game at the beginning of the second half.

Espinosa's fastbreak layup with 3:32 left in the period gave Bradshaw its largest lead of the game, 36-31.

Pinewood then capitalized on its full-court press. Center Jenna McLoughlin said their goal was to keep the ball away from Williams down low.

"She definitely had a size advantage over me," McLoughlin said. "We had a great help defense. I knew if she had me one-on-one she would take me every time so I tried to not let the ball get into her."

The Panthers then outscored Bradshaw 9-3 over the rest of the third and had a 40-39 advantage going into the fourth.

"I think we just got tired," Ruble admitted.

Pinewood's Emily Liang hit two three-pointers in the initial two minutes of the fourth for a 49-45 lead. The Pride managed only two points in the final 5:10 of the game.

With all but one player back for next season, Ruble says he thinks Bradshaw can return again next year. Last season they were ousted in the NorCal semifinals and in the quarterfinals the previous year.

"If we can stay consistent, then we can be back here," Ruble said. "We know the road will go through Pinewood. They're well-coached and the girls play hard.

"We're going to play a tough preseason," he added. "We have to because Pinewood and Branson get battle-tested every year."

Bradshaw will move into the Sierra Delta League next season under the Sac-Joaquin Section's realignment. The league will be mainly comprised of Division IV schools.

Yet, because of Bradshaw's enrollment, they will remain in Division V in the postseason.

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