

Lions *from B1*

The Lions took just a one point lead into the fourth quarter, 29-28, and the game remained tight until senior Ema Gardner foiled Marist's last-ditch efforts.

With under a minute to play and down six, 43-37, the Spartans began fouling, counting on the Lions to miss their free throws and give themselves a chance to shoot their way back into the game. Gardner had different plans, going 4 for 4 from the free throw line in the final minute to put to rest any hopes of a Spartan comeback.

"I just kept telling myself that I couldn't miss," Gardner said. "Because when the [Marist] student section is in your ear, it makes it harder and you're like, 'I gotta prove it to them that I can put it in the basket,' so I was just mentally telling myself that I was gonna put 'em in."

And put them in she did. Gardner finished her all-around game with 4 rebounds, 4 assists and a block, but it was her unselfishness in helping the team facilitate its offense, getting the ball in the post to utilize the Lions' size and strength advantage, where her presence was most felt throughout the game. Including fellow senior Megan Schatz, the Lions are rarely without a cool, experienced head on the court.

"I think we have really good senior



PHOTO BY NICK SNYDER/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

CGHS senior Ema Gardner stood strong at the free throw line in the final minute, hitting four free throws to seal the Lions' win.

leadership this year. They really hold everything together," said Eastburn.

Cottage Grove roared out of the gates, opening up an early 12-0 lead and not allowing Marist to score their first points until halfway through the second quarter, but until late in the final period, much of the rest of the game belonged to Marist who outscored the Lions 28-20 in the second and third quarters.

"At some points it was a little rough out there," said junior post player Maty Ladd. "But in the end we're a team and I just kept reminding everyone of that. I think at the end we definitely came together and played well."

Ladd used her height and strength advantage en route to 13 points, 8 rebounds and 3 blocks, scoring a

number of key baskets late in the second half. Ladd's partner down low, sophomore Gracie Arnold, once again proved her scoring prowess, pouring in 19 points

to go with 3 steals before fouling out with 1:40 left to play.

All in all, it was an important test for a team that has high hopes come playoff time and, by the end, the game metrics — and final score — showed a superior team with a chance to make some postseason noise.

"It was definitely different because people we have been playing haven't been putting that pressure on us," said Gardner. "So playing here tonight was fun for us. It was good for us because now we know what we need to work on."

In the earlier game, the Cottage Grove boys (5-14, 1-4) faced an even more difficult test and were taken down by the #2-ranked Spartans, 54-37, but were almost entirely done in by a scoreless second quarter. After multi-game absences due to injury, the Lions got back sophomore point guard Landon Colburn and freshman post Brennan Murphy and will look to close the season strong with a healthy roster.

Both teams next play tomorrow, Fri., Feb. 7 at home against Marshfield. The girls game begins at 5:45 p.m. followed by the boys at 7:15.

Skyline *from B1*

— the Warriors couldn't always do what they wanted in this one.

The Warriors are a team defined by their defensive identity, a full-court intensity that seems to never let up for the full 32 minutes, but Elkton is a team that can counter it with pressure of their own.

"They're dangerous," Cyr said of the Elks. Elkton coach Rob Parker and his team of experienced players proved that true, as they fell in an early 11-0 hole, but battled out of it, in part, by getting the Warriors into foul trouble.

"A lot of it really depends on who gets in foul trouble and where that foul trouble comes from," Cyr said. "It's kind of interesting as the game goes on how the matchups unfold because we can exploit some things and they can exploit some things."

Warriors' post player Rielie-Jo Olds, for example, got some early whistles called against her and it forced North Douglas — a team already lacking in vertical size — to go small for most

of the rest of the game.

North Douglas, however, stepped up to the pressure and was able to finish a close game in a season where they haven't had many. Freshmen Brooklyn Williams and Savannah Harkins went 7 for 8 from the free throw line in the final three minutes to wrap up the win and Williams ended the game as the Warriors' leading scorer with 13.

The Elks were led by junior Margaret Byle and senior Alexis Halstead, who had 11 and 10 points respectively.

Both area teams find themselves in good position with the playoffs looming, as the two teams hold on to one of the coveted top-three spots in the Skyline, earning them a chance to compete for a place in the state tournament. The Warriors in particular are just three league wins away from completing an undefeated Skyline season.

The Warriors next play on Fri., Feb. 7 at home against second-place Pacific/Powers (14-7, 8-2) while the Elks travel to Riddle (6-13, 4-6) on the same night. Both games begin at 6 p.m..



PHOTO C/O BECKY GERRARD

Freshman Brooklyn Williams (20), seen here matched up with Elkton's Alexis Halstead stepped up big in crunch time for the Warriors, hitting a bevy of free throws that helped NDHS get the win.

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