

Zajacs' buzzer-beater lifts Raiders

SV boys survive Norwin, 52-50

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JACKSON TWP — The ball wasn't supposed to go to Zac Zajacs.

Instead, as the final seconds ticked down in a tie game, the play was drawn up for Marcus Might inside the paint.

Norwin had a foul to give and the Seneca Valley hope was Might would either bull his way up for a layup or get fouled doing so.

"But it wasn't there," said Seneca Valley boys basketball coach Kevin Trost.

Instead, the ball was in the hands of Zajacs, a tall and lanky guard who is deceptively quick.

Despite having that one foul to give, Norwin failed to get enough of Zajacs to draw a whistle. Instead, he was able to weave through the Knights' defense for a layup at the buzzer to give Seneca Valley a dramatic 52-50 home win in the regular-season finale Monday night.

"It felt great. It just really felt great," Zajacs said, smiling. "If the play broke down, I was supposed to go to the hoop. I just made a play."

Norwin coach Lynn Washowich said he thought Zajacs was fouled on the way to the hoop — a rare time when a coach hoped his player committed a foul.

The play was set up by Gabe Lawson on the defensive end.

Lawson took a charge on a drive through the lane by Norwin's Jayden Walker with six seconds remaining, giving the Raiders possession and a chance to win.

After Norwin (8-13) gave away a foul with three seconds left in front of the Raiders' bench, Zajacs ended up with the ball in his hands and a path to the hoop.

With arms reaching, Zajacs found a way to the hoop and made the shot as fans erupted.

"I thought we fouled (Zajacs) about three times," Washowich said. "But it happens. Their kid did a nice job and took a charge — and it was a charge."

The wild ending was a microcosm of the game.

After Seneca Valley (11-10) took an early 12-4 lead, Norwin stormed back to tie the game at 16-16 in the opening seconds of the second quarter.

The two teams then exchanged the lead nine times.

"It was a hard-fought game and I give my kids a ton of credit," Washowich said. "We're

obviously eliminated from the playoffs. I was really curious to come up here – we haven't played anyone from the north all year long and being 1-9 in our section, I was curious to see how we would come up and compete. I was just hoping to be able to come up here and play a close game and we were able to do that.”

Tyler Bilinsky scored 13 points to pace Norwin. He hit three 3-pointers in the first two minutes of the third quarter to briefly give the Knights the lead.

Might scored 13, Mason Bush 12 and Zajacs 9 to lead Seneca Valley.

While Norwin's season is over, the Raiders' second one is about to begin.

Trost is pleased with how his team is playing entering the postseason.

The Raiders have won two straight and played well in a loss to Butler.

“Our goal was to get the last two,” Trost said. “It gave us a winning record at 11-10.

“Marcus is playing the best he's played all year,” Trost added. “He's finally in shape and he's a handful. I think our guys were pretty inexperienced at the beginning of the year with a new coach and all of that. That stuff is behind us now and I do think we're playing our best right now.”

Seneca Valley will find out Tuesday night who it plays in the opening round of the WPIAL 6A playoffs and where.

“We'll be seeded where we are, but we're going to prepare like crazy,” Trost said. “I think we're going to be a tough out.”

NORWIN 50

Logan Liebdezinski 2-6 7-10 11, Owen Sabol 4-6 0-0 10, Gianni Rizzo 4-10 0-0 10, Tyler Bilinsky 5-13 0-2 13, Jayden Walker 1-10 0-0 2, Nick Fleming 2-6 0-0 4, Tanner Queen 0-0 0-0 0, Josh Govannucci 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 18-51 7-12 50.

SENECA VALLEY 52

Gabe Lawson 2-2 0-0 4, Trey Berringer 2-5 2-4 6, Marcus Might 6-10 0-0 13, Mason Bush 5-12 0-0 12, Zac Zajacs 4-11 0-0 9, Tre Rosell 3-5 0-0 8, Connor Lyczek 0-1 0-0 0. Totals: 22-46 2-4 52.

Norwin 13 15 16 6 – 50

Seneca Valley 16 17 8 11 – 52

3-point goals: Norwin 7 (Sabol 2, Rizzo 2, Bilinsky 3); Seneca Valley 6 (Might, Bush 2, Zajacs, Rosell 2)

TBD: Seneca Valley in WPIAL 6A playoffs

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I joined the Butler Eagle in January of 2000 after spending five years at the Steubenville Herald-Star and Weirton Daily Times, where I did everything from editing the sports section to knocking snow and ice off the Associated Press satellite dish. I graduated from Kent State University in 1994 with a degree in magazine journalism and a minor in skipping class. My honors include a 2007 Associated Press award for feature writing, a 2005 and 2007

Keystone award for column writing and a 2003 Golden Quill award for feature writing. I have a high game of 255 at Wii Bowling.
