

Press Clippings 2/26/2022 to 2/28/2022

Daily Herald

This is a woman's world, at least during Women's History Month --- 2/27/2022

By Madhu Krishnamurthy

Tuesday is the start of Women's History Month and I'll be highlighting programs happening across our suburbs throughout March.

For starters, I am going to be featured as part of Gail Borden Public Library's exhibit about women, past and present.

"Elgin: A Women's City" celebrates the accomplishments of Elgin women, including scientist Mildred A. Engelbrecht, baseball player Charlene Barnett and ballerina Lisa Boehm. The exhibit is based on the book "Elgin: A Women's City" by E.C. "Mike" Alft.

It will include video interviews with local journalists that will be played during the exhibit and posted on the library's website, gailborden.info/womenhistory.

I'm honored to be interviewed by a student from **Elgin Area School District U-46**, which I covered for many years as the Daily Herald's education writer.

Gail Borden will host a conversation with award-winning Latina author Denise Padín Collazo for International Women's Day Thursday.

"It's going to be the first time that it will be in English and Spanish," said Jo Ann Armenta, a Gail Borden Library Foundation board member. "In the past, the library has celebrated International Women's Day, but it was always in English. We were concerned that monolingual Spanish speakers were missing out."

A Harvard University graduate and social justice activist, Collazo will discuss her book, "Thriving in the Fight -- A Survival Manual for Latinas on the Front Lines of Change," at 6:30 p.m. in person at the main library, 270 N. Grove Ave. The program will be livestreamed on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com).

Collazo's book centers on Latina and women of color leadership.

Register to attend the program in person or online via Zoom video conferencing at attend.gailborden.info/event/6070585.

Daily Herald

Larkin tops Dundee-Crown for regional title --- 2/25/2022

By Craig Brueske, Daily Herald Correspondent

Playing on its homecourt for one final time, Larkin's seniors were not going to be denied Friday night.

Led by senior guard Damari Wheeler-Thomas' game-high 26 points, the top-seeded Royals (29-3) jumped out to a fast start and pulled away in the fourth quarter on their way to a 58-42 Class 4A regional championship victory over 4th-seeded Dundee-Crown (20-10) in Elgin.

With the game tied at 4-4, Wheeler-Thomas ignited a 9-0 run with a 3-pointer from the corner on his way to an 11-point opening quarter, as the Royals grabbed a 16-10 lead.

"It was very important for us to start off strong and keep the pace going the whole game," said Wheeler-Thomas, who added 5 rebounds, 4 assists and 3 steals as the Royals captured their first regional title since 2018.

Wheeler-Thomas canned his second 3-pointer of the game and hit a jumper at the elbow before senior Fernando Perez (10 points, 4 rebounds) added a basket to extend the Royals' lead to 25-12 midway through the second quarter.

Larkin led 28-19 at the half.

Dundee-Crown, fueled by senior guard Jason Huber's 7-point third quarter, stayed within striking distance, trailing 44-33 entering the final 8 minutes.

However, the Royals put the game away with a 10-0 surge in the first 3 1/2 minutes of the fourth quarter -- a run that featured a 3-pointer from sophomore Jakob "Cheese" Blakley (12 points, 4 rebounds) and back-to-back steals and layups from North Dakota State-bound Wheeler-Thomas.

"Defense -- that's a priority for us," said Wheeler-Thomas. "Everybody sees the points that we score and think it's our offense but it's not really that. We pride ourselves on defense."

Larkin was forced to alter its defensive strategy early in the game, according to Royals coach Deryn Carter.

"We had two defensive plans," said Carter, who guided Larkin to its fifth regional crown since taking over as head coach in 2010-2011.

"They started big, which kind of adjusted what we were going to do. We put Damari on 23 (Kennon Cook) and J-Mo (Jamarion Stubbs) on 10 (Huber). Holy cow was J-Mo special on the defensive end. That kid (Huber) is a good player and J-Mo just gave him fits."

"I just tried to make it hard for him (Huber) all the way around," said Stubbs, who added 6 points and 3 assists.

Larkin led by as many as 22 points at 58-36 before Carter took out Wheeler-Thomas and Perez to a thunderous ovation with 2:19 remaining.

"Four-year guys on the varsity (team) are rare," said Carter. "To have two guys on varsity for four years -- you just to come to know those guys. They come to know you maybe more than they want. You share in their elation because of how they work."

Huber paced the Chargers with 12 points, while Cook finished with 2 points and 7 rebounds before fouling out late.

"Whenever they needed a basket, he was there," Chargers coach Lance Huber said of Wheeler-Thomas. "He was the best player on the floor -- I don't think there's any question about that."

The win was special for Larkin's seniors.

"We've been talking about this since eighth grade," said Stubbs.

"It means a lot because last time we were in the playoffs was sophomore year against Cary-Grove and we got knocked out in the first game," added Wheeler-Thomas.

Daily Herald

WW South offense makes all the right decisions against Bartlett --- 2/25/2022

By D.J. Wanberg, Daily Herald Correspondent

Did somebody get the license plate on that offense?

The Wheaton Warrenville South boys' basketball team's offense had all the subtlety of a Mack Truck, putting a vice-like grip on Friday's Class 4A regional final game at home, cruising to a 64-43 win over Bartlett.

Next for the 31-2 Tigers is a Wednesday Bartlett sectional semifinal against Benet. WW South beat the Redwings 45-38 in January.

"They've played their rear ends off all season. The players are so unselfish. They don't care who scores. They're just happy to win," said WW South coach Mike Healy.

The Tigers led 18-16 after the first quarter but outscored the Hawks 21-7 in the second period to lead 39-23 at halftime. The team finished the first half shooting 17 of 24 from the field and completely controlled the paint while keeping the game at a very brisk pace.

"We try to be like that every night. Most of the time we are on a quick pace and try to stay on top," said Tyler Fawcett, who led WW South with 17 points. Fawcett scored six points during his team's 10-2 run in the second quarter, which gave the Tigers a double-digit advantage they never gave back.

A basket by Matt Sommerdyke put WW South up by 21 for the second time in the third quarter. Sommerdyke finished with 12 points.

Bartlett (24-7) did whittle the WW South lead to 17 points courtesy of a bucket by Kelton McEwen. The Tigers, though, led 51-30 at the end of three quarters.

"I thought our offense was pretty good. When (the Hawks) went zone, we seemed to do the right thing. When they went to man-to-man, we seemed to make the right decisions," Healy said.

Braylen Meredith was WW South's third player scoring in double digits with 15.

"We're 31-2. We've beaten four or five teams in the top 25. We've put in a lot of work. A lot of people doubted us in conference and we went undefeated. We have a regional title and will face Benet or Glenbard North," Meredith said after taking his turn with his teammates in cutting down a net.

Bartlett was led by 7-foot-3-inch Conrad Luczynski, who scored a game-high 22 points and pulled down a game-high 11 rebounds.

"I think a factor in our success this season was we didn't give up. We hustled and the team was dedicated on and off the court," Luczynski said.

Chicago Tribune/The Courier-News

Damari does it again: Wheeler-Thomas powers Larkin past Dundee-Crown for first regional title since 2017-18 ---

2/25/2022

By Paul Johnson for Beacon-News



Larkin's Damari Wheeler-Thomas (10) goes in for a basket in front Dundee-Crown's Kennon Cook during the Class 4A Larkin Regional championship game in Elgin on Friday, Feb. 25, 2022. (Michael Schmidt / The Beacon-News)

Larkin's Damari Wheeler-Thomas treated Friday night just like any other game.

“The same thing as always,” he said. “Controlling the game on both sides of the ball, doing everything for my team.”

There aren't many players around who pull that off as regularly as Wheeler-Thomas.

The senior guard burst out of the gates with 11 points in the first quarter, setting the tone for a 58-42 victory over Dundee-Crown in the Class 4A Larkin Regional championship game.

Wheeler-Thomas scored a game-high 26 points for the Royals (29-3), who won their first regional title since reaching the state finals in 2017-18.



Larkin's Damari Wheeler-Thomas (10) leans in for a shot in front of Dundee-Crown's Gabriel Rivera during the Class 4A Larkin Regional championship game in Elgin on Friday, Feb. 25, 2022. (Michael Schmidt / The Beacon-News)

“He was the best player on the floor, I don’t think there’s any question about that,” Dundee-Crown coach Lance Huber said of Wheeler-Thomas. “He wasn’t going to be denied.

“We just didn’t have an answer for him. He’s just a special player.”

Larkin will face Rockford East (24-9) at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Huntley Sectional semifinals.

Dundee-Crown (20-10) grabbed a 4-2 lead Friday night, but Wheeler-Thomas quickly took control. He hit a 3-pointer in the corner to give Larkin a 7-4 lead.

The Royals never trailed again.

Wheeler-Thomas followed that with a putback and a layup off a steal. He also ignited a 7-0 run in the second quarter with a 3-pointer and a midrange jumper to push the lead to 25-12.

“Whenever they needed a basket, he was there,” Huber said. “He controlled the game all day long.”

Larkin coach Deryn Carter was quick to point out how his team’s defense, led by Wheeler-Thomas and Jamarion Stubbs, fueled that success.

“It was fundamentally sound,” Carter said. “It just wears you down. We did a heck of a job. I’m so proud of these guys.

“(Damari) was special, but it all started on the other end. Without five guys busting their butt, it just doesn’t work.”



Larkin's Andre Jakob Blakley, left, shoots a 3-pointer in front of Dundee-Crown's Zachary Randl during the Class 4A Larkin Regional championship game in Elgin on Friday, Feb. 25, 2022. (Michael Schmidt / The Beacon-News)

Wheeler-Thomas realizes all starts on that end of the court, even if that isn’t what grabs the headlines for the Royals.

“That’s a priority for us,” Wheeler-Thomas said. “Everybody sees the points we score. They think it’s all about offense. It’s not really that. We pride ourselves on defense.”

Dundee-Crown trailed 44-33 going into the fourth quarter, and the Chargers still felt they were within striking distance.

The Royals, however, started the fourth on a 10-0 run, capped by two layups from Wheeler-Thomas in a wild, frenetic sequence that iced the win.

“They were the aggressor the whole game,” Huber said. “We needed to keep it close to make it a ballgame, put some pressure on them. They’re good — kudos to them. They have a nice group of guys.”

Jason Huber led Dundee-Crown with 12 points. Jakob Blakley also scored 12 for Larkin, while Fernando Perez Jr. added 10.

Perez and Wheeler-Thomas are four-year starters for the Royals. They shared a hug with Carter late in the fourth when they came out of their last home game.



Larkin's Fernando Perez Jr. (1) takes a jump shot in front of Dundee-Crown's Jason Huber during the Class 4A Larkin Regional championship game in Elgin on Friday, Feb. 25, 2022. (Michael Schmidt / The Beacon-News)

“To have two guys on the varsity team for four years, you just come to know those guys,” Carter said. “They come to know you maybe more than they want to. You share in their elation because of how hard they work.”

After losing in the regional opener as sophomores and having the state series canceled last season due to the coronavirus pandemic, Wheeler-Thomas was happy to finally collect some hardware.

“It’s definitely big,” Wheeler-Thomas said. “It means a lot, but we know we have to keep going. This wasn’t the final destination. We have to keep pushing.”

The Royals get another crack at Rockford East, which handed Larkin one of its three losses this season.

“We’ll enjoy this one for sure,” Carter said. “We’ll get back in the lab and try to scout and see if we can get a couple more points than we had at Thanksgiving.”