

Press Clippings 3/2/2022

The Examiner of Bartlett

U-46 Board approves tax abatement, expenses --- 3/2/2022

By Seth Hancock; Note – This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

The Board of Education in **School District U-46** unanimously approved, via 7-0 votes, of a property tax abatement as well as \$3 million in expenditure items, all operations and maintenance, at its Monday, Feb. 7 meeting.

The tax levy abatement totaled \$9.6 million which will pay for the debt service of a \$66 million bond from 2003. Since 2015, the district has abated about \$48.3 million.

“This abatement is the same as the prior year,” said Dale Burnidge, director of financial operations. “Since 2015, we have abated a portion of the operating funds to help cover some of the debt service. And this payment that we’re abating tonight for those 2003 bonds will be the last payment on that bond series.”

The largest expenditure item approved was \$1.1 million with Evans and Son Blacktop for track improvements at Streamwood High School.

“The recommendation is to replace the track,” the proposal states. “The drainage at both the home and visitor bleachers are also considered insufficient. Thus, administration is recommending adding drainage swales and dry wells by the home bleachers and a trench drain under the visitor bleachers to alleviate the ponding issues.”

Two fire alarm replacement projects were approved, \$761,000 with KelsoBurnett Co. for Streamwood’s Tefft Middle School and 339,880 with iWire Technologies for Wayne Elementary School.

Auditorium lights will be replaced at Bartlett High School costing \$446,900 with Associated Electrical Contractors and a parking lot project at Elgin’s Larsen Middle School costing \$395,649 with Schroeder Asphalt Services after those projects were also approved.

Also unanimously approved was \$10.2 million in itemized bills.

The Examiner of Bartlett

Masks deemed optional by School District U-46 --- 3/2/2022

By Seth Hancock; Note – This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

Despite inconsistent messaging, **School District U-46** is now mask optional for students although the district is signaling it believes it has authority to dictate them in the future.

The district had continued to mandate masks even after a Feb. 4 temporary restraining order (TRO) ruled by a judicial circuit court judge before a Feb. 17 appellate court ruling upheld that TRO.

In a Feb. 18 message from Superintendent Tony Sanders, he claimed the “court affirmed the ability of local school districts to make decisions” for you but announced school would now be mask optional starting Wednesday, Feb. 23.

However, the message left confusion as Sanders wrote that if “a teacher or other staff member asks students to use a mask, we ask that families honor that request.”

In a Feb. 22 message, Sanders wrote that masking is “strongly encourage(d)” and added: “Importantly, the District reserves the right to re-institute mandatory mask wearing if local COVID-19 metrics warrant it or if masking is required by law or upon a decision by the Illinois Supreme Court that may impact a recent appellate court ruling.”

The metrics U-46 will use are a seven-day rolling positive test average of 8 percent, if “confirmed” cases are above 3 percent and if there are over 10 percent in absences for COVID-related reasons.

Masks are still required on buses, the district stating because of federal rules. Social distancing and voluntary testing will remain in place, and the district will continue requiring staff to submit to shots or test weekly.

The district will still demand quarantine for positive tests.

Visitors to schools and board meetings “will be required to wear masks... in connection with current Executive Orders and our local plan.” Gov. JB Pritzker’s indoor mask mandate was lifted on Feb. 28.

The Examiner of Bartlett

Hawks season ends with loss in regional final --- 3/2/2022

By Seth Hancock

The **Bartlett** boys' basketball team came up short in the Wheaton Warrenville South Regional finals as the No. 7 Hawks fell 64-43 to No. 2 host Wheaton Warrenville South on Friday, Feb. 25.

After a tight first quarter, the host holding a slim 18-16 lead, the game got away in the second when the Hawks were outscored 21-7 for a 39-23 deficit at the break. Bartlett was chasing a double-digit disadvantage the rest of the night.

Bartlett's 7-foot-3 senior Conrad Luczynski had a big game with 22 points and 11 rebounds.

In the semifinals, the Hawks avenged a 57-51 loss in November by defeating No. 10 Geneva 47-42 on Wednesday, Feb. 23.

Geneva kept Luczynski heavily guarded in the first half, but he went on to score 12 of his 14 points in the second half as Geneva picked up its pressure as it was chasing the lead all night. Luczynski added 19 rebounds and six blocks.

"When you extend pressure like that, you don't have as many bodies around the big guy down low," said Bartlett coach Jim Wolfsmith. "That's the risk you take."

Bartlett scored the game's first six points and led for good. It maintained a cushion most of the night while the Hawks largest lead was 39-28 after a Luczynski dunk early in the fourth quarter.

Sophomore Kelton McEwen scored 11 of his teamhigh 16 points in the first half and finished with three three-pointers. Senior Ian Smith scored eight points and junior Keegan Kunzer six.

"We finished strong," Luczynski said. "Kelton hit some big shots. Everyone played well. We all played our hearts out."

The Hawks finished the season 24-7 overall and also had three all-conference recipients in the Upstate Eight: Luczynski, McEwen and Smith.

Bartlett will also lose seniors Bryce Kim, Jacob Magnanao and Jesse Singh.

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

The Examiner of Bartlett

Storm girls' hoops downed in sectional title contest ---

3/2/2022

By Seth Hancock; Note: This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin

The **South Elgin** girls' basketball team battled in the program's first sectional title appearance, but the Storm came up short in a 58-51 loss to Barrington in the DeKalb Sectional finals on Thursday, Feb. 24.

It was a game of runs, the Storm throwing the first punch leading most of the first half with as large as an eight-point advantage and 24-23 at halftime. Barrington, which defeated South Elgin 62-44 earlier this year, won the third quarter 14-3 for a 37-27 lead.

South Elgin rallied to pull to 47-45 with 1:43 left to play, but that was the closest it came.

"Our girls absolutely battled their hearts out," said South Elgin coach Dan Mandernack whose team finished the year 27-6 overall. "They will remember for the rest of their lives of how hard they fought."

Juniors Raina Yang (14 points) and Zoie Lewis (10 points) reached double digits, and seniors Caroline Croft and Ella Winterhalder each had eight points.

The Storm defeated Hononegah 57- 48 in the semifinals on Tuesday, Feb. 22. South Elgin also beat Hononegah 50-46 earlier this season.

Trailing 48-44 midway through the final period, junior Chloe Kmiec (11 points) hit her third three-pointer of the night and had a steal for a layup, and junior Caitlyn Tolentino (11 points) added a bucket for a 51-48 lead which began a 13-0 finish to the game. Winterhalder scored 15 points to lead the effort.

Along with their sectional appearance, the Storm went 18-0 to win the Upstate Eight Conference with four all-conference recipients: Croft, Tolentino, Winterhalder and Yang.

The Storm also lose seniors Tianna Bongiovanni, Sophia Stinsa and Loreal Wilson.

The Examiner of Bartlett

Season ends at regional for South Elgin boys' hoops ---

3/2/2022

By Seth Hancock; Note – This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin

The **South Elgin** boys' basketball team saw its season end in the Hampshire Regional semifinals on Wednesday, Feb. 23.

The No. 5 Storm trailed most of the night, but South Elgin coach Brett Johnson was happy with his team's effort in the 72-57 loss to No. 3 St. Charles North. It was the second contest between the two teams this year, South Elgin falling 60-47 at St. Charles North in December.

"There was no quit in this group all year," Johnson said. "That's what I'm so proud of. Our kids fought to the end and that's all you can ask out of these kids every day with what they've been through for the past couple years."

Elias Cole Williams, a junior, led the Storm with 12 points. Seniors Brian Vesta (10 points, four rebounds) and Drew Cwik (eight points), both Upstate Eight all-conference recipients, contributed.

South Elgin ends the season 17-15 overall and will lose nine graduating seniors including Jadin Ashby, Josh Genz, Jalen Jones, Keith Wiley, Rocco Marzullo, Kendis Wiley and Michael Hankins.

"This group, I think is a special group for South Elgin because I think they're changing the culture of the South Elgin program because of the fight, determination and grit that they have," Johnson said. "They work their butts off and get the most out of what they have."

The Examiner of Streamwood Sabres boys' hoops beaten in regional semi-final ---

3/2/2022

By Seth Hancock

The **Streamwood** boys' basketball team saw its season end in the Larkin Regional semifinals as the No. 8 Sabres fell 91-46 to top-seeded host Larkin on Wednesday, Feb. 23.

The Sabres knew its opponent well as an Upstate Eight Conference rival, Larkin defeating Streamwood 65-29 and 94-53 in league play.

In the third contest, Larkin bolted out to a 27-8 lead after one quarter to take the lead for good. Larkin led 51-23 at halftime and 76-36 entering the fourth.

"It was going to take a super effort," said Streamwood coach Kent Payne. "We needed to take care of the ball, shoot well and keep them in front of us on defense."

Senior Richard Santiago led the effort with 12 points.

The Sabres faced another familiar UEC foe in the quarterfinals against No. 9 Elgin. Streamwood, which earned 68-47 and 58-55 wins in UEC play, defeated Elgin for a third time with a 71-40 victory on Saturday, Feb. 19 at Streamwood.

Senior Cris Calderon (20 points), junior Dakota White (14 points, 11 rebounds), senior Nick Trybulec (13 points, five steals) and Santiago (12 points, six assists) led the effort.

“We had a really nice second and third quarter, and we played great pressure defense,” Payne said. “The difference was we shot the ball well and forced turnovers.”

Streamwood ends the season 5-28 overall. It will lose five seniors including Jacob Rubino and Winston Edemni.

Daily Herald

Larkin puts away Rockford East in 2nd half --- 3/1/2022

By Craig Brueske, Daily Herald Correspondent



Larkin's Damari Wheeler-Thomas takes the ball to the basket past Rockford East's Latrell Kyles (23) during Tuesday's Class 4A Huntley sectional semifinal. *Paul Valade | Staff Photographer*

There's an old saying that revenge is a dish best served cold.

Cold was the word that best described Rockford East's offense during the first 12 ½ minutes of the second half, as **Larkin** (30-3) used a 29-9 surge to build a commanding 59-35 lead on its way to a convincing 75-59 Class 4A sectional semifinal victory over the E-Rabs (24-10) Tuesday night in Huntley.

Relying on a swarming man-to-man defense, the Royals limited the E-Rabs to 3-of-13 shooting in the third quarter while outscoring them 18-6, turning a 30-26 halftime advantage into a more comfortable 48-32 bulge.

"I thought our defense broke down and they took advantage of it a couple times," said Royals coach Deryn Carter, whose team suffered a 59-56 loss to Rockford East last November. "They hit six threes in the first half. It was uncharacteristic of our team to give up that many threes in a game -- yet alone in a half.

"We told our guys to be more fundamental defensively. You have to give it to the kids -- they're still hungry. You can feel it in practice."

After Rockford East closed the deficit to 30-28 early in the third quarter, the Royals went on a 16-2 run that featured 6 points from Jamarion Stubbs (11 points, 4 rebounds), and 4 points apiece from Damari Wheeler-Thomas (game-high 30 points, 3 steals) and Dontrell Maxie (10 points, game-high 16 rebounds).

"We just knew by bringing the energy and enthusiasm and locking up on defense, we were going to be fine," said Wheeler-Thomas.

Fernando Perez chipped in with 20 points, 10 rebounds, 4 assists and 3 blocked shots, joining fellow seniors Maxie, Stubbs, and Wheeler-Thomas for the Royals' first 69 points of the contest.

"Usually, it's Damari (Wheeler-Thomas) scoring in the fourth quarter, or I'm scoring in the fourth quarter, but since it was all of us -- I felt like we just didn't want to lose," said Perez.

"It's not 1 on 5 or 2 on 5 -- it's all of us. We all feel a responsibility to try and contribute at a high level."

"They didn't get the chance last year," Carter said. "None of these seniors got it last year. It was unfortunate but they're making up for lost time."

With the win, the Royals advance to Friday's 7 p.m. sectional championship against the winner of Wednesday night's Rockford Auburn-DeKalb sectional semifinal.

"We get to practice tomorrow," said Carter. "We're in the Sweet 16. There haven't been many teams in Larkin history that have made it this far so we're proud of them."

"It will be a big opportunity for us," said Wheeler-Thomas.

Jemere Jefferson and Matthew Hoarde paced Rockford East with 22 and 18 points, respectively.

Chicago Tribune/The Courier-News

Fernando Perez Jr., in his fourth varsity season, powers Larkin to sectional final with win over Rockford East. 'I feel like we're special.' --- 3/2/2022

By Paul Johnson for the Aurora Beacon-News



Larkin's Fernando Perez Jr. (1) races to the basket past Rockford East's Jeremiah Crawford (0) and Jemere Jefferson (13) during the Class 4A Huntley Sectional semifinals on Tuesday, March 1, 2022. (H. Rick Bamman / The Beacon-News)

Fernando Perez Jr., one of four senior starters for **Larkin**, has gone through all kinds of growing pains in his four seasons on the varsity. And it really is quite a list.

It includes a quick postseason exit as a sophomore and the cancellation of the state tournament by the Illinois High School Association due to the pandemic as a junior.

The 6-foot-3 forward has been around enough to know what he's seeing.

"I feel like we're special," Perez said. "I feel like we're one of the best teams (ever) at Larkin. We feel like we're one of the best teams in the area."

That showed Tuesday night, with Perez scoring 20 points to go with eight rebounds and three assists as the Royals rolled to a 75-59 victory over Rockford East in the Class 4A Huntley Sectional semifinals.



Larkin's Fernando Perez Jr. (1) wins the rebound from Rockford East's Jemere Jefferson (13) during the Class 4A Huntley Sectional semifinals on Tuesday, March 1, 2022. (H. Rick Bamman / The Beacon-News)

Perez also was tasked with slowing down star junior guard Matthew Hoarde, who scored 18 points for E-Rabs (24-10). Nine of them came in the fourth quarter.

“He was awesome,” Larkin coach Deryn Carter said of Perez. “He played phenomenal defense. He’s been playing at such a high level.

“(Hoard) was a huge part of our scouting report. We thought we had a natural matchup for him. He made some buckets still, but (Perez) made him work.”

The work will continue at 7 p.m. Friday for Larkin (29-3) in the sectional championship game. The Royals will face Wednesday’s semifinal winner between DeKalb and Rockford Auburn.

For the Royals, Tuesday was almost like senior night as Perez, Damari Wheeler-Thomas, Dontrell Maxie and Jamarion Stubbs combined to score the first 69 points.

“They didn’t get it last year,” Carter said. “None of these seniors got it last year. It’s unfortunate, but they’re making up for lost time, for sure.”

“It’s not just one-on-five or two-on-five, it’s all of us,” Perez said. “We all feel a responsibility to contribute at a high level, and that’s what we did.”



Larkin's Dontrell Maxie (22) scores a basket in front of Rockford East's J'Siah Jefferson (15) in the third quarter during the Class 4A Huntley Sectional semifinals on Tuesday, March 1, 2022. (H. Rick Bamman / The Beacon-News)

Rockford East cut Larkin's lead to 30-28 with the first basket of the third quarter, but the Royals' seniors fueled a 16-2 burst to build a substantial lead.

Wheeler-Thomas, the North Dakota State signee, scored a game-high 30 points but only had four in the run. Stubbs contributed six, Maxie had four and Perez had two.

"Usually it's 'Mari' or I'm scoring, but since it was all of us, we just didn't want to lose," Perez said. "That stuck with all of us. We just went out and played hard."

Rockford East hit six 3-pointers in the first half, but the Royals tightened up their perimeter defense. After shooting 6-of-10 from the arc, the E-Rabs hit only three 3-pointers in the second half, all coming with the game out of reach.

"It's uncharacteristic of our defense to give up that many threes in a game, let alone in a half," Carter said.

Perez felt that was where the game turned.

"We just had to rotate better, talk better," Perez said. "I felt like we did that at a higher level than they did against us."



Larkin's Damari Wheeler-Thomas (10) sails past Rockford East's Latrell Kyles (23) in the Class 4A Huntley Sectional semifinals on Tuesday, March 1, 2022. (H. Rick Bamman / The Beacon-News)

For the second straight game, Wheeler-Thomas scored 11 points in the first quarter to set the tone. He shot 8-for-13 from the floor and 13-for-14 from the free-throw line.

“Hopefully, we can get him for another game,” Carter said. “He’s a special player.”

Stubbs added 11 points for Larkin. Maxie had 10 points and 16 rebounds.

The Royals are searching for the sixth sectional title in program history and first since earning their first state trophy five seasons ago.

“All our guys have earned this right,” Carter said. “They’re going to be in the Sweet 16. There haven’t been many teams in Larkin history that have made it this far, so we’re proud of them.”