

# Home-court pivotal in Albany's win over UM

BY PETE WARNER  
BDN STAFF

ALBANY, New York — The stands weren't exactly jammed with fans, but the University at Albany took **WOMEN'S BASKETBALL** a divan-tage of familiar surroundings during Friday's America East women's basketball championship game.

As they had in each of the previous four seasons, the Great Danes enjoyed the luxury of playing on their home court at SEFCU Arena.

And for the fourth year in a row, they won in their own building.

Albany earned the right to host the title contest by virtue of their regular-season performance — and their strength of schedule. The Great Danes (27-4) and the Black Bears (26-8) split their regular-season meetings and finished with identical 15-1 conference records to share the America East regular-season title.

However, Albany was awarded the No. 1 seed over UMaine by virtue of their higher standing in the Rat-

ing Percentage Index (RPI). And with a largely partisan crowd of 1,519 on hand and the schools' bands dueling back and forth, it was an atmosphere worthy of a championship game.

Albany coach Katie Abrahamson-Henderson, when asked about who her team might draw in the first round of the NCAA tournament, pointed to how important the home court can be.

"Hopefully, we don't have to play somebody on their home court, because as you see tonight that's hard to do, especially in the tourna-

ment," she said.

Despite falling well short of capacity as spring break began at UAlbany, there was tremendous postseason intensity, passion and competition both on and off the court.

The Albany pep band duelled with the contingent from UMaine, which helped spur on the gathering of some 75-100 Black Bear fans who made the trip to the New York state capital in the hope of seeing UMaine win its first conference championship since 2004.

"Our band and our fans

are here. You don't see that at every school, so I'm really proud to be a proud of Maine and have that support of the community and my girls here at Maine," said UMaine senior captain Liz Wood.

Even though the Black Bear players are accustomed to playing in front of larger crowds at the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor, the environment at SEFCU Arena provided some challenges.

"I think maybe a little bit of the atmosphere, maybe with the communication, we lost just a little bit off of our

timing," UMaine coach Richard Barron said of trying to operate over the din of the crowd. "It may have affected some of our shooting, but we felt like we executed well."

Ironically, Albany star forward Shereesha Richards alluded to the fact that her subpar, eight-point performance during the Great Danes' 65-53 loss to UMaine in Bangor last month may have had something to do with the Black Bears' vociferous fans.

"The atmosphere is totally different from here," said Richards.

## Brewer, Morse seniors honored

BANGOR — Brewer High School's Jamison Rhoads-Doyle and Morse of Bath's Emma Harrington each received the 2016 Maine All-State Academic Scholarships during the Maine Association of Basketball Coaches awards banquet Friday night at the Anah Shrine Hall.

They both received a \$2,000 scholarship.

Harrington is in the top 10 of her class, a member of the National Honor Society, the Interact Club and the Journalism Club, and she volunteers as a middle school mentor and at her local library. She has logged more than 65 hours of community service.

A four-year varsity starter at Morse, she has been the team captain for the past three years. The past season she led the team in scoring and rebounds and was second in steals.

She was the recipient of the basketball Coaches Award during her career, and has also led her teams to success in field hockey, lacrosse and tennis. She plans to study psychology at Fordham University.

Rhoads-Doyle was a two-year starter and a senior captain for Brewer. Academically, he ranks in the top 10 of his class, and has participated in Dirigo Boys' State and the Maine Youth Leadership Seminar.

He averaged four points and five rebounds as a senior, playing guard and forward while being a leader and a hard worker on the court and in the classroom. His college plans are undecided, but he has interest in studying political science or international relations.

The Maine All-State Academic Scholarship was created to recognize two members — one girl and one boy — selected from the Maine McDonald's All-State Academic Team.

Joining Harrington on the girls team are: Boothbay's Hannah Morley, Camden Hills' Madelyn Bowman, Cape Elizabeth's Madeline Bowe, McAuley's Jessica Willerson, Messalonskee's Dakota Bragg, South Portland's Madeline Hasson, Thornton Academy's Ashley Howe, Waynflete's Arianna Giguere, and Westbrook's Madeline Mullett.

Joining Rhoads-Doyle on the boys team are: Brewer's Carter Smith, Brunswick's Owen Rudalevige, Cape Elizabeth's James Bottomley, Caribou's Donovan Savage, Cheverus' Andrew Roberts, Gorham's Sam Kilborn, Medomak Valley's Jackson Vail, Messalonskee's Jackson Bernatchez, and Mount Ararat's Harper Moutal.

The Maine McDonald's Spirit of the Game Award was presented to Brewer's Meg Davis and Winthrop's Nate Jewel. The recipients each received a trophy and a \$500 Spirit Scholarship to assist with their higher education needs.

Since 2009, the annual Spirit of the Game Award has honored two high school seniors who embody the spirit of the sport of basketball, exemplify sportsmanship, and support and inspire their teammates and coaching staff.

The MABC also honored the Bangor Daily News' Ernie Clark with its media award for his outstanding coverage of high school basketball during the past season.

## UMaine

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bounds to complement her offensive production on the way to her third tournament Most Outstanding Player award. She was joined on the all-tournament team by Tate, Liz Wood and Sigi Koizar of UMaine and Stony Brook's Brittany Snow.

"She just does so much for us and she's so selfless and she's fearless and she's intense. She willed us to win, pretty much," said Abrahamson-Henderson.

UMaine, which had bottled up Richards in its Feb. 14 win at the Cross Insurance Center by combining a 1-2-2 matchup zone and player-to-player defenses, this time opted to play straight up.

Barron again let the players decide what the defensive approach would be. Wood (10 points, 6 rebounds) picked up two early fouls and wound up playing only 28 minutes before fouling out with 2:37 left.

The Great Danes scored 28 points in the paint.

"I think they were just looking for her more," Wood said of Richards' offensive success.

"You let up for one second or you let her get one inch on you, then she's going to get position," she added.

Tate finished with 15 points, nine rebounds, five assists and two steals for the Great Danes, who shot 48 percent (12-for-25) in the second half and 46 percent for the game.

UMaine was paced by junior guard Koizar, who posted 15 points on 5-for-12 shooting. Senior Mikaela Gustafsson contributed 11 points, six rebounds and four assists.

Seniors Bella Swan (six re-



STEVE MCLAUGHLIN PHOTOGRAPHY

bounds) and Chantel Charles added eight points each for the Black Bears, who connected at 39 percent but went 10-for-29 (35 percent) in the second half and were 12-for-18 from the foul line.

"We should have shot free throws better," Barron said.

"We certainly respect Albany's defense," he added. "We didn't shoot the ball well in the second half."

Friday's game went down to the wire after Richards converted four straight foul shots to make it 57-52 with 1:52 to play. However, Lauren Bodine and Koizar sandwiched 3-pointers around a close-range bucket by Richards to cut Albany's lead to 59-58 with 45.9 seconds left.

Tate missed a midrange jumper and Bodine rebounded, giving UMaine the ball with 21.3 seconds left and a chance to win it. After a timeout, the Black Bears set up but settled for Koizar's

off-balance scoop shot from the lane, which came up short.

With 2.6 seconds left, Charles was whistled for an intentional foul against Cassandra Edwards, who proceeded to miss both free throws. Then, when Albany inbounded from near the UMaine bench, players from both teams got tangled up near midcourt and fell to the court. The ball bounced out of bounds.

With new life, the Black Bears inbounded in front of their bench. It went to Gustafsson, who was bottled up

near the 3-point arc and threw up an off-balance heave that missed as the final horn sounded.

"I think it goes a lot faster," an emotional Gustafsson said of the limited time on the clock. "I think I was trying to look more toward the basket (rather than pass)."

"The last play wasn't what decided the game," Wood interjected. "We lost by one. I missed two free throws. You can't judge the game by the last play. There's a lot of places that we could have made up one or two points."

The Great Danes seized the momentum after trailing 47-43 at the 7:50 mark. Tate drove in and scored, then Zakiya Saunders made a 14-footer to tie it.

Charles hit a turnaround shot from the foul line for UMaine, but Richards scored from down low and Tate snipped a 10-footer after one of only nine Black Bear turnovers to make it 51-49 and give Albany the lead for good with 5:25 to play.

"We've just got to make one or two more shots. That was it," Barron said.

## Awards

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lot of things that helped me throughout my career."

Gilpin, a first-team Bangor Daily News All-Maine choice last year, averaged 17.6 points, 7.2 rebounds and 7.4 assists per game this winter and was named the Kennebec Valley Athletic Conference Class A player of the year. He finished his career with 1,093 points, 519 assists and 461 rebounds in joining Christian McCue (2012) as a Mr. Basketball selection from Hampden Academy.

Gilpin will continue his basketball career at Bates College in Lewiston next season.

Other Mr. Basketball finalists were Andrew Fleming of Oxford Hills of South Paris and Thomas Coyne of Falmouth.

Irving bested Maddie Hasson of South Portland and Shannon Todd of York to become the first Lawrence girls player named Miss Basketball since Cindy Blodgett in 1994.

"I've been just taking it one step at a time," said Irving. "It was incredible just being named a semifinalist and a finalist for the award, and to win it is just that much more incredible."

The 6-foot-1 Irving was a dominant inside presence throughout her career who helped resurrect the Lawrence program under veteran coach John Donato. She led the Bulldogs to the 2015 Class A state championship and a return trip to this year's state final.

A four-time KVAC Class A player of the year, two-time Maine Gatorade Player of the Year and a member of the Bangor Daily News All-Maine first team, Irving averaged 25.6 points and 21.1 rebounds per game while

shooting 57 percent from inside the arc this past season.

The Boston University-bound Irving totaled 1,761 points and 1,206 rebounds during her high school career.

Irving gave special recognition during her acceptance speech to long-time teammate and friend Dominique Lewis, Lawrence's senior point guard.

"It is definitely mixed emotions," said Irving. "It's sadness and happiness. We're both going to be moving on to play at the next level, but it's sadness because I'm going to miss playing with her so much. I've been playing with her since the third grade and it's just been great having her as the point guard. I couldn't have asked for a better one."

Among other awards presented Friday night, recently retired York High School girls basketball coach Rick Clark was named recipient of the MABC Contributor Award. Clark coached York to more than 500 victories over a three-decade career, capping off that run with an undefeated season and the 2016 Class A state championship.

Clark also has been active for many years in MABC leadership. Maine McDonald's-MABC activities continue Saturday with a full schedule of events at Newman Gymnasium on the campus of Husson University in Bangor.

The state free-throw shooting championship will be held at 8:30 a.m., followed at 9:15 by the girls Classes AA-A-B senior all-star game and at 10:45 by the boys AA-A-B game.

A 3-point shooting competition follows at 12:15 p.m., followed by a slam dunk competition at 12:30, with the boys Classes C-D senior all-star game at 1 p.m. and the girls C-D game at 2:30.

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Maine's Liz Wood (from left), Anna Heise and Sophie Weckstrom react during their loss to Albany in the America East championship on Friday at SEFCU Arena in Albany, New York. Albany won 59-58.