

By Randy Whalen

Veronica Bafia will always remember this season.

Perhaps it didn't turn out with the best record as the Lockport Township girls' basketball team had a second straight losing season. But as the only senior on the team, there were many memorable moments for the 3-year varsity player.

One of those was to be the leading scorer in the Porters' final game this season. Bafia banged in 12 points in a tough, defensive game. But the effort by the guard/forward wasn't enough as Lockport lost 38-30 to Stagg on Tuesday, February 13 in a semifinal matchup at the Class 4A Andrew Regional.

Three days later, Stagg (19-13) lost 36-33 to Lincoln-Way Central in another defensive matchup in the regional final. The Knights (19-12), who had won their third straight regional title, then lost 43-32 on Tuesday, February 20 to Homewood-Flossmoor (22-7) in the opening semifinal of the Joliet West Sectional.

In the regional semifinal, things didn't start well for the Porters (12-19), as they fell behind 19-7 after the first quarter. But their defense clamped down and only allowed 19 more points the rest of the way. It was 26-16 at halftime and 31-23 after three.

"We all worked hard trying to push through," Bafia said of the regional game against Stagg. "We tried our best. It didn't end the way we wanted but we ended strong."

Laura Arstikaitis, who made a name for herself as a sharp shooting sophomore guard, finished with six points for the Porters. But some scoring woes hurt them.

"We missed 10 free throws (going 7-of-17) and wide-open layups," Lockport coach Darien Jacobs said. "The effort wasn't the concern but it was the lack of scoring. The effort was there all year. We had some ups-and-downs and the goal is to get to a steady place for next season."

As the only senior, Bafia was the lone player honored on Senior Night, which took place on Thursday, February 1, in Lockport's last home game against Sandburg. That ended up being a 49-34 loss in a SouthWest Suburban Conference Blue Division game. But every team in the SWSC Blue, except the Porters, won a regional championship.

Fittingly, Bafia led the team with 14 points, and freshman forward Evelyn Ingram added 12 points for Lockport.

"Being the only senior was kinda sad," Bafia said. "I would have liked to have had other seniors but I felt appreciated as the only senior. My team made my night special as the only senior."

Jacobs, who completed his second season as Lockport's head coach, certainly appreciated Bafia.

"I'm very appreciative of the effort that she's given," he said. "She was the big sister of the team and I saw a lot of growth from her in basketball and leadership."

In the Porters' final regular season game, on Tuesday, February 6, they lost 49-34 in an SWSC Blue game at Homewood-Flossmoor. Arstikaitis led the way with 13 points, while Bafia had 10 points, and sophomore guard Makenna Klacko added eight points.

H-F (22-7, 6-2) which had won 13-of-14 going into the sectional title game, played Lincoln-Way East on Thursday, February 22 for the championship of the Joliet West Sectional. It was the fifth straight sectional title game appearance for the Vikings.

"What sticks out the most is that we could compete with the teams we played," Jacobs said. "We got second at the Willowbrook Thanksgiving Tournament, second at the Oak Lawn Holiday Tournament, and beat Providence and Joliet West, who had winning records."

"Our record doesn't describe the effort our players put in. It was a great season for our younger players."

While Bafia won't be around next season, she will be keeping up with the Porters and expects them to do good things.

"I'm going to continue my basketball playing career at St. Xavier University," Bafia said. "They have a great nursing program and I love it and the good connections."

"I will remember playing with my teammates and the strong bond we had here at Lockport. It was fun playing with all of them. Next season they have a big chance to step up and do what they can do."