

SPORTS > LOCAL:

Russell coming to the rescue

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Rock Falls lost its game against Rock Island on Saturday, but the Rockets left Tabor Gym smiling from ear to ear.

The loss was Rock Falls' sixth straight after starting the season 20-3, but Jamie Russell played her first game since late December. The junior standout scored 17 points and played many more minutes than expected in her first game back from a right knee injury.

"It's so nice to have her back, because she makes us so much better," Rock Falls guard Molly Anderson said. "She gets so many steals on defense that leads to a lot of easy baskets. She just gives us a nice boost all around."



No Published Caption

Russell was leading the Sauk Valley in points and steals before spraining cartilage in her knee in practice. The Rockets went 8-1 in their first nine games without the Wisconsin-bound player, but they hit a wall starting with a Jan. 23 loss against IVC. Losses to Peoria Richwoods, Sterling, Hall, United Township and the Rocks followed. The Rockets hope Russell's return is right on time, with regionals starting this week. Dixon, Huntley and Rockford East travel to Tabor Gym for the tournament, with the winner advancing to the Rochelle Sectional.

Dixon takes on the Rockets on Tuesday, with the winner most likely playing fourth-seeded Huntley for the title on Thursday. Duchesses coach Bob Venier took his team to Tabor to watch the Rock Falls-Rock Island game Saturday.

"She is that team," Venier said of Russell. "She's such a great player, and they're just a completely different team with her. She makes it very tough to plan for them, and obviously they're a lot tougher to play with her back."

Russell takes some of the scoring load off Anderson and Jordan Chappell, who will return to their complementary roles. If the Rockets advance to play Huntley (23-5), Russell's presence will allow them to match up better with the quick Red Raiders.

"It's kind of like starting all over again, which is good," Anderson said. "That's something we kind of need to do right now anyway."

Scouting the Class AA regionals

Rock Falls Regional

When: Monday, Tuesday and Thursday

Teams: No. 4 Huntley, No. 5 Rock Falls, No. 14 Dixon, No. 17 Rockford East

Favorite: Huntley

Dark horse: Dixon

Who will win: A healthy Jamie Russell and homecourt advantage should be enough to propel Rock Falls to the title.

Winner advances to: Rochelle Sectional

Rockford Auburn Regional

When: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday

Teams: No. 2 DeKalb, No. 7 Sterling, No. 12 Rochelle, No. 15 Rockford Auburn, No. 18 Rockford Jefferson

Favorite: DeKalb

Dark horse: Rochelle

Who will win: Sterling's last two seasons have been ended by DeKalb, but the Golden Warriors are playing well enough to give the Barbs some payback.

Winner advances to: Rochelle Sectional

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