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Sperka, Schell provided Lions' roar

Eisenhower players named All-Suburban

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Overall balance helped the Eisenhower girls basketball team this season, but junior guard Kelsey Sperka and senior guard Stephanie Schell spearheaded the effort.

Sperka led the Lions in scoring with 350 points (an average of 14.6 per game) while Schell scored 285 points (11.9) and was at or near the top of the team charts for rebounds, assists, steals and blocked shots.

With those two joined by a number of other players who made major contributions in all those areas, it is little wonder the Lions compiled a 20-4 overall mark and won the Woodland Conference North Division at 14-2.

"It was a great year," Sperka said. "All our goals were accomplished, except for going to state. We just got better as the year went on."

Schell echoed those sentiments, adding, "Aside from going to state, I couldn't have asked for a better season."

For their part in the Lions' success, Sperka and Schell are both part of the 2006-07 Community Newspapers Inc. All-Suburban Girls Basketball Team.

Sperka was one of many outside threats for the Lions, connecting on 44 percent from 3-point range this season, but she was also dangerous driving the lane, either for baskets or to set up teammates for layups. "I would penetrate and score inside, and that opened things up for the outside shooters," she said.

Schell had an accurate outside shot for her entire Eisenhower career, but this year, she developed other facets of her game. "When Kelsey came in at point, I went to the wing, and that gave me more offensive options," she said. "Also, I grew six or seven inches since my freshman year."

Both Sperka and Schell come from close, sports-oriented families and have spent years on the basketball court. Schell said she has played competitive ball since second grade and Sperka said she started in fifth grade, being coached by her mother, Christi, for three years.

The two came up with several reasons for Eisenhower's success this year. "We had good chemistry,"

Sperka said. "We supported and helped each other. It seemed like there was always somebody else stepping up each night."

Schell added, "We kept our focus. We went into the season with specific goals and we were reminded of those goals. We had great unity. I haven't ever played on a team that was this close."

Although the overall season was memorable, the Lions ended it in an agonizing fashion, seeing Grafton rally from an 11-point deficit with 4 minutes left in a WIAA sectional final.

"That was so hard," Sperka said. "To go from being so high - we thought we were going to state - and to lose it like that..."

Schell said, "We went to Madison (for the girls state tournament), and the Greendale-Grafton game was extremely difficult to watch."

Both felt a little better after seeing those same Blackhawks score the last 13 points of the game to force overtime in the state final against New London, then win it in the extra session.

"I was watching that game (New London) with my dad and I said, 'This is just like watching our game (against Grafton),' " Schell recalled. "I'm just glad I'm not New London. I guess it was just meant to be for Grafton. I'm happy for them (the Blackhawks); they deserved to win, the way they played. Also, it's nice to say you lost to the champion."

Now Sperka and Schell will get on with the next phases of their lives. After graduation this spring, Schell will attend the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and play basketball on a full scholarship for the Panthers.

Sperka will return for her senior year at Eisenhower, hoping to take the Lions one step further next winter. "Sarah (Potochich) and I are back, and we have a lot of other girls coming up," she said. "We hope to be right back there (sectional final) next year."

SPERKA, SCHELL STATS

Career highlights for Eisenhower standouts Kelsey Sperka and Stephanie Schell:

SPERKA: scored 350 points (14.6 average) in 2006-07 ... pulled down 137 rebounds (5.7) ... totaled 78 assists, 25 steals and 13 blocked shots, all among club's leaders.

SCHELL: scored 285 points (11.9) in 2006-07 ... pulled down 141 rebounds (5.9) ... totaled 95 assists, 55 steals and 17 blocked shots.

SCHELL CAREER

870 points (ninth all-time at Eisenhower) ... 399 rebounds (ninth) ... 453 assists (first) ... 187 steals (fourth) ... 43 blocked shots (seventh) ... holds school records for assists in season (143) and game (14) ... made all-Woodland Conference four times, this year first-team ... two-time All-Waukesha County selection ... honorable-mention Street and Smith's All-American ... McDonald's All-American nominee ... selected to Wisconsin Basketball Coaches Association All-Star team for June game.

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