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Webster has quick recovery

Berkeley stalwart back in action after injury in hit-and-run accident

By Steve Herendeen, STAFF WRITER

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AS IF Berkeley High's girls basketball team wasn't steaming along already, the Yellowjackets — winners of 10 straight games, one more North Coast Section Division I title and the owners of the top seed in this week's NorCal tournament — just got another boost.

Senior guard-forward Erica Webster returned to the lineup Saturday night and scored five points in about 12 minutes in Berkeley's 61-42 NCS title win over Monte Vista.

Not an outstanding effort, but a significant one for the

5-foot-7 Webster and for the Yellowjackets, who are now seeking to give retiring coach Gene Nakamura an eighth NorCal title and perhaps a third state crown this year.

Webster missed Berkeley's semifinal game against Foothill after being injured in a hit-and-run accident in Oakland. She was taken to the hospital and treated for back and hip bruises.

Nakamura said it could have been a lot worse.

"I think she came out of it better than somebody else might have because she's an athlete," said the coach, who noted Webster is still being treated for her injuries. "She's in really good shape."

Webster practiced a couple of days before Saturday's game, and Nakamura said he "knew she was ready."

"She started a little slow, but she picked it up later," said Nakamura. "She's a critical part of our lineup ... probably the most improved player on the team. She started the year as a reserve, and now she's a starter. She's become a smarter ballplayer, she

listens well, shoots well, and she's attacking the bucket.

"Plus, she's tough as nails."

No doubt about that.

THE GAMES ARE WHERE? WHEN? WHAT? There were more than a few miffed Monte Vista High basketball fans on Saturday. Both the boys and girls teams made it to the NCS Division I finals, but the boys played at 8 p.m. at Saint Mary's College while the girls faced top-seeded Berkeley at 8 at Berkeley High.

Obviously, Mustangs fans wanted to see both teams play and questioned why NCS couldn't package the games at one same site, or stagger the game times so it would be possible to attend both contests.

And why did Berkeley get to host that championship game instead of moving it to a neutral site?

NCS associate commissioner Gil Lemmon said the organization did consider a few ideas regarding the two Monte Vista games, but in the end, they weren't possible. NCS was locked into five different venues — including

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Berkeley High — and game-site determinations were based on geography and the right to host.

"That (situation) is always a hard one for us," Lemmon said. "We like to keep schools together, but we won't take away a school's right to host (in this case, No.1 Berkeley's girls)."

Lemmon also pointed out that the Division II Montgomery's girls and boys teams were in the same boat as Monte Vista. The girls played Pinole Valley at 6 p.m. at Cal State East Bay, while the boys took on Richmond at Santa Rosa Junior College at 7.

"We had arranged for Berkeley High (which holds 2,800 people), and we didn't have access to (Haas Pavilion at) Cal or Oracle Arena in Oakland," Lemmon said. "When Berkeley ended up being the No.1 seed and went all the way to the final, we had to play it there. We didn't have a choice."

Since finals matchups weren't known until the semifinal games were complete late Wednesday night, it left NCS with little or no wiggle room.

"It's hard to schedule when you have a lot of different factors," Lemmon said. "We (were under contract) to play three games at Saint Mary's and two at Cal State East Bay. We couldn't cancel any of them, because if you make a commitment and then cancel, they don't invite you back."

NCS FINALS DRAW BIG: According to Lemmon, attendance at championship games Saturday was almost double that of last year's games at the Oakland Arena.

In 2006, championship games drew a total of 3,800 people. The De La Salle-Monte Vista Division I boys game Saturday at Saint Mary's College drew 3,500 alone. The crowds were also enormous for two games at Cal State East Bay and the

Richmond-Montgomery Division II boys game at Santa Rosa Junior College.

"We don't know if it was the caliber of teams, the matchups or going to a two-week (playoff) format this year," Lemmon said. "We're thinking the two-week format might have a lot to do with it. Maybe people had more time to look at the schedule and make plans to attend, rather than seeing results Saturday morning in the newspapers and deciding that day to go."

Staff writer Steve Herendeen can be reached by e-mail at

sherendeen@angnewspapers.com or by calling (925) 416-4832.

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