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## HIGH SCHOOLS: STATE BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT: CLASS AAAA GIRLS: SOUTHWEST DEKALB 90, WESTLAKE 63: Panthers pass expectations

By **Glenn Lafollette**  
 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
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Westlake had plenty of talent to face top-ranked Southwest DeKalb on Wednesday in the Class AAAA semifinals at Gwinnett Arena. Experience, though, proved to be an issue.

Southwest DeKalb cruised past the Lions 90-63. The victory puts the Panthers (29-2) into the championship game at 3 p.m. on Friday.

"I wasn't expecting 90 points," Panthers coach Kathy Richey-Walton said. "We try to shoot for 60."

Southwest DeKalb met its coach's expectations by the first basket of the fourth quarter. The Panthers built a 59-39 lead after a 20-11 scoring edge in the third period.

Westlake (22-5) couldn't control the butterflies. Coach Hilda Hankerson's team starts one junior and four sophomores. Against Southwest DeKalb's pressure, the youth showed.

"I look at it as a great accomplishment for a team so young to be one of the top four teams in the state of Georgia," Hankerson said. "I don't know of another team in the final four [in any classification] starting four sophomores and a junior. This was a learning experience for us."

It was never close in the second half, but no one told that to the Panthers.

"They weren't satisfied with a 10- or 15-point lead," Richey-Walton said. "They kept playing and playing hard. I don't know if they knew the score."

None played harder than Panthers point guard Eboni Mitchell. The senior led all scorers with 32 points. Eighteen came before the half, when Southwest DeKalb built a 39-28 advantage after leading just 21-20 three minutes into the second period.

"It was our first time in the final four, so I think we had jitters," said Mitchell, who is being recruited by a handful of Big Ten schools. "Everybody had to settle down. Once we did that, we took control of the game."

Sharnea Boykin led Westlake with 22 points, and junior center Tamika Willis added 19. Charenee Stephens had 20 for the Panthers.

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