

The Eastern High School girls' basketball team's season came to an end, 41-40, in the Class 2A Sectional championship in Pekin Saturday.

Lady Musketeer senior Jocelyn Mousty converted an old-fashioned three-point play with 26 seconds remaining, but Paoli milked the clock and Sophia Sears was fouled with four seconds remaining.

She converted the free throws and Eastern never got another good look.

After the game, EHS Head Coach Mike McBride tipped his hat to the Lady Rams for making plays down the stretch.

"I give (Sears) a lot of credit for making those shots," McBride said. "It's the kind of ball game you want, you hope for – you loving watching it but you hate to be part of it when you come out on the short end. To Paoli's credit they have a good team.

"It was disappointing to lose a game like this. Our senior group has been great. I've had a great time coaching them. It has been a lot of fun."

This group of seniors, which consists of Courtney Ames, Sam Cusick, Emily Newcomb, Kaylyn Rodewig and Mousty is McBride's first group to go through all four years.

They have won 70 games since joining the team as freshman. They won the Floyd Central Shootout and gave the school its first-ever Mid Southern Conference team championship.

The one hurdle they were unable to clear, however, was Paoli. After beating them their freshman year, Eastern lost five consecutive games to the Lady Rams.

McBride said the five losses doesn't diminish what the group accomplished.

"(In the locker room after the game) I thanked them," he said. "I thanked them for letting me be a part of it and taking me along for the ride. We've accomplished a lot, we had 21 wins this season, 60 over the last four years, we wanted a sectional to go with all of that, but we came up short."

In her final high school game before taking her talents to Muncie, Indiana and Ball State University, Mousty played like a D-1 product.

She scored 23 points and grabbed 20 rebounds in her final high school game.

"Our senior class left it on the floor," McBride said. "That's what we talked about, win or lose, giving it everything you have and they did that."

Eastern looked determined to avenge the early season loss to Paoli early in Saturday's contest.

They took a lead for the first time in the opening quarter, 7-6, when Mousty converted an and-one opportunity after grabbing two of her six offensive rebounds.

Mousty's play sparked a run. She scored another basket, Donelle Rogers hit one and Katie Ernstberger hit a three, putting her team up by four, 14-10 after the first quarter.

In the second, the Lady Musketeers cranked up the defensive pressure, allowing the Lady Rams just one field goal and one free throw over the eight-minute stretch.

With Paoli struggling to score, Eastern continued to attack on the offensive end.

Krista Roberts scored off an assist by Emily Newcomb and Mousty scored again, stretching their lead to eight, 18-10.

Mousty hit three of four free throws and Roberts made one of two, for a nine-point halftime cushion, 22-13.

The halftime break was not a welcome sight as Eastern struggled to match the Lady Rams intensity in the opening minutes of the third quarter.

EHS missed their first nine shots and Paoli opened the quarter on an 8-0 run that trimmed the Eastern lead to one, 22-21 when Karson Stands drilled a three.

The Lady Musketeers stretched the lead back to five, 25-25, heading into the fourth quarter thanks to a free throw and two baskets by Mousty.

Eastern remained in front when another basket by Mousty put them up three, 30-27. For every Lady Musketeer basket, Paoli had an answer.

The Lady Rams took a lead 33-32 when Sears collected an offensive rebound and got the ball to Kennedy Nelson, who scored in the lane.

EHS tied the score with 1:22 remaining in regulation when Newcomb hit one of two free throws.

There was a lot of action in the first over-time, but little scoring.

Eastern took the lead off a basket by Roberts.

Paoli tied it when Sears hit two free throws.

Mousty knocked down two more free throws that put the Lady Musketeers up two, 37-35. Just like they had done all game, Paoli had an answer. Sears drove to the basket, drew three EHS players and dished the ball to Nelson for the tying basket with 8.9 seconds.

Eastern couldn't convert a shot at the buzzer and the game went into the second over-time.

Both teams were content to let the air out of the ball and kill clock in the second over time.

Paoli's Morgan Kingston hit her only basket of the night with 43.6 seconds, which set up the ending.

". . . We weren't patient enough on offense," McBride said. "There were some possessions where we held the ball for 30 seconds and then acted as if there was a shot clock. We didn't have to. When Jocelyn converted the and 1 in the second over-time it happened because we were patient enough to let Jocelyn get open and it turned into three points.

"When Paoli outscored us 8-0 to start the third quarter we just rushed too many things."

With the win Paoli moves on this Saturday's regional, which they will host.

The Lady Rams take on 21-2 South Ripley in the noon game. The first game will feature Sullivan at 21-3 taking on Evansville Mater Dei.

The cost is \$6 per session or \$9 for both morning and the evening sessions.

The regional championship will begin at 8 p.m.