

During the 2011-12 season the Eastern girls' basketball team let an opportunity to win a sectional championship slip through their fingers in a double over-time loss to Paoli. Then last year, another match-up against Paoli in the sectional championship was won by the Lady Rams.

On Saturday night, in the Class 2A Sectional 46 title game, the third time was a charm for this year's group of Lady Musketeers as they pulled out a 40-38 win over Paoli.

Eastern finally grabbed a slight advantage with three minutes remaining in the game when senior Katie Ernstsberger drove through the lane for two points, putting her team up 38-36.

The Lady Musketeers stretched the lead to four and got what turned out to be the winning points of the game when freshman Taylor Drury nailed two free throws with 2:40 left in regulation.

Paoli made things interesting when they got a two from Olivia Brewster, that trimmed the EHS advantage to two points, 40-38.

Eastern was trying to run out the clock when the Lady Rams' Kelsey Smith got a steal and drove the length of the floor. She was fouled with 7.7 seconds remaining on the clock.

Smith missed the first free throw, then was forced to try to miss the second on purpose. The ball never hit the rim and possession should have been given to Eastern with an in-bound play.

Instead, the refs allowed play to continue and the rebound was grabbed by Brooke Rodewig, who quickly got the ball to Ernstberger who was fouled with two-tenths of a second on the clock.

Ernstberger missed the free throw attempt and Paoli never got a shot to win the game.

It is the schools first girls' basketball sectional title since 1996 and their first win over Paoli in seven tries.

"It was a great ball game," said EHS Head Coach Mike McBride. "It took everything we had to pull this one out. We knew it was going to come down to the last possession and we just happened to get 40 before they did.

"One of the radio stations said this has been a great rivalry and I told them the games have been close, but we had lost seven in a row to Paoli. A rivalry needs both teams to win and maybe this is the start of evening things out."

Besides hitting two big free throws, Drury had a stat line in the fourth quarter that included two rebounds, a steal and four points.

In addition to Drury, a sophomore Morgan Martin played big minutes, especially early in the game when Ernstberger picked up her second foul.

Martin said she was nervous when McBride called on her but she fought through and it paid off.

“I was very nervous,” Martin said. “I fought through the nerves and I am glad I did because it paid off. This is a great feeling and I love it!”

Ernstberger and the teams other seniors, Rodewig and Rachel Hamilton, praised the play of the team’s underclassmen all season long.

“We are a team and that means everyone in the program,” Erntsberger said. “Those underclassmen are as important as us seniors and we wouldn’t be celebrating a championship without them.”

Rodewig agreed, saying, “I am so proud of our younger players. I think this has really helped them for next year and beyond to know they can do this!”

McBride wouldn’t point to the play of any one individual, but said champions are made with everyone stepping up.

“We’ve got good depth,” he said. “Paoli went to a four guard lineup and presented some match-up problems for us. We had Rachel Hamilton guarding a guard. I told them during a timeout that there is not much we can do except just do it. We stepped up and did it and made shots and got rebounds when we needed to!”

Early in the contest it looked as if Eastern would run away with the title.

Bailey England, Rebekah Feist and Hamilton all hit threes helping EHS bolt out to a 89-2 lead.

The lead grew to 11-2 off a made basket by Rodewig.

Paoli ended the run by hitting one of two free throws, but more than the point was the fact that Ernstberger picked up her second foul with nearly three minutes remaining in the first quarter.

With the Lady Musketeers’ floor general on the bench, the Lady Rams began to climb back in the game.

A 9-0 run tied the score at 11-all, and the game with back and forth from there with both teams clinging to small leads.

Ernstberger re-entered the game midway through the second quarter and played the rest of the game without picking up any more fouls.

From that point on, neither team was able to get more than a four-point lead at any one time.

Ernstberger said she was glad her team was in front when time expired.

“It means a lot,” Erntsberger said. “For us to go through the heartbreak two years ago and for us to battle tonight and get it done is a great feeling. The team played great and the fan support was awesome. I am not sure we could have done this without their support tonight.

“It’s the greatest feeling I’ve had in my high school career.”

That career includes a Mid Southern Conference championship, a win in the Floyd Central Holiday Shootout and numerous individual shinning moments.

McBride said he can’t say enough about the type of player Ernstberger has developed into.

“Katie is guarding the best player on the other team, she takes care of the ball most of the time for us and she is getting hounded defensively,” McBride said. “While she may not have huge scoring games for us all the time, she does pick her spots, like the three she hit in the first half. She got to the rim and scored late.

“She has been through a lot with me over the years. She has worked hard and all the credit goes to her for sticking with it.”

McBride will now try to guide the Lady Musketeers to their first ever win in the regional semi-finals at Paoli High School.

The Lady Musketeers will play North Posey in the 10:00 a.m. game. The winner of that game will play the winner of the Eastern Greene [11-12] or North Knox [16-5] vs. Austin [11-11] or Southwestern (Hanover) [11-11] game in the championship.

Paoli
9 12 11 4—36

Eastern
11 11 10 8—40

Paoli (16-8): Olivia Brewster 9, Kelsey Smith 5, Morgan Kingston 13, Katherine Hamilton 2, Shelby Rice 7, Shania Bennett 2.

Eastern (12-9): Katie Ernstberger 7, Taylor Drury 10, Rebekah Feist 5, Bailey England 3, Morgan Martin 4, Brooke Rodewig 4, Rachel Hamilton 7.

3-point field goals: Paoli 2 (Brewster, Smith); Eastern 3 (England, Hamilton, Feist).

Crawford Co. 2 4 4 11—21

Eastern 7 6 8 14—35

Crawford County (8-14): Cheyenne Vanlandingham 2, Tylynn Allen 2, Kaitlin Tincher 1, Mandi McLain 10, Mikayla Bowman 4, Carley Allen 1, Jeannine Jellison 1.

Eastern (11-9): Ernstberger 12, Drury 2, Feist 2, Laken Heavner 1, England 3, Martin 3, Rodewig 9, Hamilton 3.

3-point field goals: Crawford County 0; Eastern 1 (Martin).

Turnovers: Crawford County 22, Eastern 20.

Free throws: Crawford County 11-24, Eastern 15-25.

Team fouls: Crawford County 15, Eastern 16.

Fouled out: Crawford County — McLain.

Technical fouls: None.