

Klingelhoefers return sparks O'Fallon against Belleville West

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BELLEVILLE • After missing the last three games with a strained right Achilles tendon, O'Fallon point guard Taylor Klingelhoefer returned with a bang Monday night.

Klingelhoefer, a 5-foot-7 junior, netted a team-best 21 points, including six in the final quarter, as the visiting Panthers rallied to beat Belleville West 64-62 in a Southwestern Conference girls basketball game.

O'Fallon, which beat the Maroons 66-63 on Jan. 4, upped its record to 15-11 overall and 6-6 in the conference. Kaitlin Kendall scored 17 points and Taylor Underwood added 10 for the Panthers.

West fell to 16-11, 5-7. Eastern Michigan signee Erika McCaster paced the Maroons with a game-high 24 points, and Emily Becker added 11.

"It was my first game back (she last played on Jan. 29), and I was kind of shaky out there," said Klingelhoefer, who missed the team's three games (all losses) in the Webster Groves tournament Thursday, Friday and Saturday. "I never gave up on my team. I knew we could get it even when we were down by 11. I never even looked at the clock. I told my team to keep playing hard, and they did."

O'Fallon, which jumped out to a 13-2 advantage after a Klingelhoefer bucket with 2 minutes 55 seconds left in the first quarter, let West off the hook as the Maroons led 42-31 in the third quarter when Kiarra Daniels (5 points) scored on a perfect pass from Becker at the 5:20 mark of the quarter.

But the Panthers clawed their way back and were down 53-47 with 6:43 remaining in the contest when Klingelhoefer triggered a 13-2 blitz with a conventional three-point play. During a 3:22 span, O'Fallon went on top 59-53 after an Underwood basket with 3:21 left in the game.

West, which made only one of 10 shots from the field during that run, knotted the score at 61 when McCaster swished a 17-footer on the left wing with 47 seconds to go.

However, Underwood converted a pass from Flager for a 63-61 lead with 35 seconds remaining and Flager made the front end of a one-and-one free throw (she missed the second attempt) for a 64-61 lead with 13.5 seconds left.

The Maroons' Ashley Wilson (6 points) was fouled 6 seconds later, and she made the first of a one-and-bonus. Coach Clayton Fisher then told Wilson to miss her second try, which she she did, but during a scramble, a jump ball was called and the arrow favored O'Fallon.

Katie Roustio tried to inbound the ball under the West basket with 2.6 seconds to go, but Wilson stole the pass and fed to a wide open McCaster, whose 3-point shot on the left wing bounded off the rim as time expired.

"It's a big win for us to get back on the right track," said Panthers coach Ryan Massey, whose team hosts conference leader Edwardsville on Tuesday. "We've had some things

not go our way over the last week, and it's a telling stretch of the season. We've got to be playing our basketball at this time. To beat West for the second time this year, it's a testament to our girls. They played hard. They executed down at the end when they needed to."

The Maroons were their own worst enemy in the fourth quarter as they finished five of 18 shooting from the field for the quarter (0 for 6 from 3-point territory) and 22 of 60 for the night, including just six of 21 from the 3-point line.

"Like I told the girls after the game, defense. ... we weren't guarding anybody," Fisher said. "They were just scoring at will. We're not a good defensive team. We just don't guard people good enough to win big ballgames. Give O'Fallon credit. We didn't make shots. End of story. Had our chance. Give them all the credit in the world. They beat us."