

*by Pastor Vince Carrig*

**Sports Writer**

Kye Kurkowski returned from the banishment of foul trouble to post four points down the stretch and slip his Plainsmen past the North Platte St. Patrick's Irish in the SPVA tournament's semi-final round Friday night at North Platte Community College's south campus.

Returning with 6:12 left after the Irish made a 27-11 Perkins County lead vanish into a 32-32 tie largely in his absence, Kurkowski dropped a jumper after four pivots and a spin, and put back a stray rebound to move his Plainsmen ahead 37-32 with 2:02 remaining.

He added a blocked and tipped shot to swing the game in favor of the team.

"I think our total team defense got to NPSP. When you have constant pressure and you have to play so hard not to turn the ball over, it takes its toll on players," Head Coach Shawn Cole said after the game.

Mates Jeremy Hagan, Max Jones and Josh Sexson connected on five of six free throws as game time passed to give the Plainsmen 42-39 win and a punched ticket to a final game matchup with Maxwell.

Perkins County guard Nick Turner splashed one three-pointer down from behind the college distance line and swirled in another to help build the 16-point lead.

Senior reserve forward Erik Hagan put away the dishes, receiving passes while open under the basket from both Jones and Sexson. Hagan also washed the window with an attempt from the left baseline, and Perkins County strapped into the driver's seat at 23-11.

Michael York then added a steal-at-the-wheel breakaway basket and a line-drive three-pointer and 8-5 Perkins County called it “all good.”

But referees clamped down on Kurkowski for a fourth foul, forcing him to either sit or avoid contact for the final 14:40. In fact, the officials slapped the 6-foot-10 center with the first two in “bang, bang” fashion, with just five bucks and changed ticked off the clock.

Call it coincidence, but St. Pat’s rumbled to a 17-2 run after Kurkowski took a seat. Adding salt to the wound, Jones and York both carried three fouls as well.

So slow-starting Irish star Shane O’Connor then went berserk, bagging 14 of his 16 points in the second half. Impressive among them, the spin and lunge form the right block earned him a three-point play and sped the Irish to within one of the lead at 32-31.

Reserve guard Matthew Jensen also entered in the second half to play a major role for St. Pat’s, getting two shots to go over outstretched arms and hitting a “three.”

Andrew Vinton staged his own six-point spree, hitting two jumpers and a double-pump move to pull the Irish back into contention.

Kurkowski’s fourth quarter points, however, forced St. Pat’s to play the “fouling game;” the Plainsmen won the challenge by hitting five of six critical free throws.

The boys atoned for a 43-34 loss on Jan. 8 in North Platte.

NP St. Pat’s 7 4 17 11—39

Perkins Co.            12 15    5 10—42

### SPVA First Round

#### Perkins County vs. Sutherland

In an opening-round SPVA tournament game highlighted by Kye Kurkowski's two-handed breakaway dunk and Michael York's three-pointer from the tall weeds, the Plainsmen overmatched Sutherland 41-28 Tuesday night (Jan. 19) in North Platte.

Kurkowski thundered the stuff down after releasing on a missed Sailors free throw late in the game.

York hit a "wish" shot with the first half expiring from between the volleyball sideline and the North Platte Community College shield logo, about 30 feet away from the net. The shot hit the front rim, backboard, and rim again before taking a net nap.

Sutherland forward Travis Chandler led all scorers with 14 points; he scored all of the Sailors' eight first half points, and the other six in the "foregone conclusion" fourth quarter.

Chandler pulled the Sailors to within two at 10-8 with free throws, but Perkins County then rowed away with an 11-0 run.

Kurkowski swished a kick-out, fall away jumper off the right block as part of his team-leading 12 points.

Both Kurkowski and York blocked shots and changed shots on defense.

Josh Sexson put back a rebound with authority and flew and twisted before anchoring a mid-lane jumper on his way to eight Plainsmen points.

The two teams chewed up 4:30 of the second quarter with passing, defense, and a missed shot or two before a Chandler jumper went down the hatch.

Neither team turned in their best shooting performance of the season in this game.

### **Perkins County**

### **vs. Sutherland**

Sutherland      4   4   6   14—28

Perkins County 10   9   8   14—41