

By Pastor Vince Carrig

Sports Writer

Jenni Sis morphed into a monster on the boards and at the foul line to help her Lady Plainsmen advance to their fifth-consecutive district championship game with their third win this season over North Platte St. Patrick's, 44-35, Thursday night in McCook.

Sis ripped down 11 boards and led the game with 16 points, succeeding at a seven-for-nine clip from the foul line.

"I love the big atmosphere, so when it's intense and loud, I kind of just live off of that; it was fun," said Sis after the game. "We did work on rebounding and it's important for all five of us girls to rebound. I think that's what won us the game."

Experienced seniors Sis, Mackenzie Hite, Brooke Poppe and Leslie Burge did not panic when the Lady Irish carried a 23-20 lead into halftime; their team has ended its season in Lincoln every year.

Instead, Perkins County blitzed North Platte St. Pat's for a 15-3, third quarter run. Sis' relentless runs to the basket tipped the score in the champions' favor for good; she got to the rack for foul shots, then crashed the glass for a put-back and a 28-26 lead.

"I definitely believe that experience helps," Sis said. "We have experience knowing what's on the line and what's at stake. I never really had a nervous feeling because I knew we had it."

The senior mates took it from there, as Poppe deposited a breakaway layup and Hite struck from the shadow of the arc. After Sis picked Candace Shelton's pocket and traded passes with

Hite, Perkins County cruised comfortably at 36-29.

Hite and Sis both drained three pointers as the Lady Plainsmen came out firing to a 15-6 start. Freshman reserve Matisyn Humphrey knocked down two shots off the glass as well.

But Lady Irish leading scorer Megan Mayfield scored the last of her 10 points in the second quarter, and Shelton reached with a "three" to bury Perkins County under a three-point, halftime deficit.

Hite tallied from underneath and outside in the pivotal third quarter, and Jessi Day worked free for a short jumper and a foul shot to set the Lady Plainsmen up with a 37-29 lead with one quarter to play.

"It's never easy to beat a team more than once," said Mackenzie Hite. "It's hard playing a team multiple times. Eventually you pick up on each other and you know what the other's going to do. They swept us in volleyball but we swept them in basketball—it's a great feeling!"

The Lady Plainsmen played tough enough defense and patient offense in the fourth quarter to allow them to ride free throws to the win.

Brianna Wiesler made Perkins County scratch their head with two mid-range jumpers and the Lady Irish behind by just 37-34, but Poppe stepped into an eight-foot baseline jump shot to ease their minds.

"This team has had to battle all year being in close games over and over all season long and I think that experience really shows at this point," said Head Coach Chris Mestl of the win. "We're fairly calm at the end of a game—we know what it takes: it takes a lot of hard work. I'm really pleased with our girls, we fought hard against a great ball team in St. Pat's."

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Perkins Co. 44, NPSP 35

N. P. St. Pat's 6 17 6 6—35

Perkins Co. 15 5 17 7—44

Plainsmen scoring: Sis 3/8 (1/3) 7/9—16; Hite 2/4 (1/3) 3/6—10; Poppe 3/4 (0/1) 1/2—7; Humphrey 2/4 1/2—5; Day 1/5 (0/1) 1/4—3; Metcalf, T. 1/5 1/2—3. Rebounds: Sis 11, Day 6, Hite, Day, Metcalf, Burge 2.

Steals: Hite 5, Sis and Day 2.

North Platte St. Pat's scoring: Mayfield 10; Shelton and Wiesler 7, O'Malley 6, Pieper 5.