



TJ RHODES/THE NEWS

Pathway Christian in Kalona hosted a two-day tournament for teams all around Iowa with three teams visiting from Illinois. The Panthers won their first game on Friday night against the Tri-State Panthers in a back-and-forth contest led by junior, Blayde Lybarger. This guaranteed a spot in the top four. Unfortunately, Pathway lost both of their Saturday matchups against the Des Moines Warriors and Quad City Eagles to drop to fourth place at home. Their game against the Warriors was not close but the Panthers almost made a heroic fourth quarter comeback against the Eagles, falling just shy of the task. The Faith Falcons (Dixon, Illinois) took on the Des Moines Warriors in the final round with the Falcons taking the matchup to get first place.

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Abbi said. "That's kind of what got me a little bit."

It had been nearly a full year since Stransky fell to the floor with a severe knee injury on the same court at Highland High. Scoring a team-high 21 points and rescuing the Huskies on a night when things weren't going so well in a Class 1A Regional game against Lisbon, Stransky crashed to the ground while chasing after a loose ball. The damage to her knee was immediate. She couldn't get up as tearful teammates surrounded her.

Even after she was helped to the locker room, Stransky somehow managed to hobble back across the floor and grab a seat on the team bench, burying her head in a towel to hide the pain as the Huskies pulled out a win in overtime.

Surgery followed and months of physical therapy.

When Stransky had recovered enough to return to an

athletic field in early fall, she twisted and tore her meniscus while throwing out a runner at third base in a club softball game. It took more than 10 stitches to close the wound. More surgery. More rehab.

"One of the biggest (meniscus) tears I've ever heard of," Fink said.

"I was looking forward to basketball and being on the court again," Stransky said.

Poof. Just like that, the dream was gone.

"That's her whole senior year," Fink said.

But that's not how Abbi Stransky rolls. After playing as a quarterback in football for Highland as a freshman, she knows how to take a hit. A couple of knee injuries won't knock her out, either. Even though she hasn't been able to play, she has been there just the same. She spent all of last summer helping out with the Huskie softball team, chasing

foul balls and carrying equipment. She has done the same during basketball season, running the scoreboard clock during practices and doing other varied tasks.

"I just have to be there," she said. "Even though I'm not on the court or on the field playing with them. Coaching-wise, I guess, it's a little bit harder to speak up when you're on the sidelines."

But she does. And it's noticed.

"She's been the ultimate teammate, classmate, leader," said Fink, who is the school's athletics and activities director. "She's been in that practice every day when she's not doing PT. She was there for softball, every day, every game."

"She puts her mind to stuff, she can do anything. I think she's just the epitome of what you would want to be the face of a lot of the female programs at Highland, which she was."

And all of that emotion erupted in the opening minute of the Huskies' Senior Night game. The plan was thought out and rehearsed. Wait for a pass from Waters, the senior point guard who took Stransky's place all season long, and go down the court and score a layup.

For this one senior, the entire season was packed into a few seconds.

"I don't think she realized how emotional it would be until it actually happened," Fink said. "I don't think anybody really imagined how emotional it would be. I think she was just, 'Hey, I'm going to get on the floor, I'm going to do this.' And it was like, 'I'm here, I scored.' Her senior year."

Oh, she made the layup. One-for-one. Perfect season, really.

"It meant a lot, actually" Stransky said. "It makes me happy that there's a lot of peo-

ple behind me. Even like the other team was OK with doing all that and everything. It was special. Last time being on the court with jersey."

But there is still softball. A varsity starter as an eighth-grader in 2019, she hopes to be back out there playing this summer, wearing a brace on her knee and playing at third base instead of at catcher. It'll be one final act after graduating this spring and heading off to Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids in the fall.

"I'm just looking forward to softball now," Stransky said, "just hoping that I'll make it back to the season."

The Huskies will welcome her return. No question.

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