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Make that six: Panthers win record-setting 6th Dick Niclai championship

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The Times-Standard

Sage Romberg didn't quite like the energy the McKinleyville High girls basketball team came out with against Eureka during the Dick Niclai Tournament championship game on Friday night.

So, in front of a sizable crowd in Humboldt State's Lumberjack Arena, the Washington State-bound Romberg created her own.

From a dazzling no-look, bounce pass to a teammate for two points, to a deep 3-pointer and a Kareem-esque sky hook, Romberg unleashed her whole repertoire to score 14 points in the first quarter alone (she finished with a game-high 18) and the Panthers dropped the Loggers 72-49 to defend and win another Niclai title.

"She's amazing, she's fantastic," said teammate Kaila Johnson of Romberg. "One play, she has two people on her and she tosses it back to an open player. I swear, she's got eyes on the back of her head."

It's all in a days work for Romberg.

"I was just trying to get the team going," she said. "We didn't come out as hard as we wanted to. But then, the crowd got into it and we did what we do best."

That would be winning.

The championship marks the team's sixth overall and Mack leapfrogs Arcata for the most all-time Niclai titles in Humboldt-Del Norte Conference history.

"All the credit goes to the girls," McKinleyville head coach Dustin Dutra said. "They all put in the work and are buying into it. But I have to

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also give credit to the work done before I was here with coach Brad Warze. He laid a solid foundation and I was fortunate to be able to work with that."

Eureka won the opening tip-off and scored the first basket when Jazmyne Younkin worked the ball down low for two. Romberg answered with a bucket of her own and No. 3 found teammate Kaylee David for two with a fantastic, no-look bounce pass to give Mack a 5-2 lead.

The Loggers didn't back down as Emily Johnson drained a 3-pointer to tie the game at five. But like Eureka, Romberg answered the trey with a 3-pointer of her own from deep behind the line and McKinleyville took a lead they would never relinquish.

Fans were treated to the Romberg show as she showed a nice sky hook, a fall away jumper, and rebounds for easy put backs. She was at the forefront of a 12-0 run by McKinleyville and at the

end of one quarter, the Panthers held a commanding 25-10 lead.

If it couldn't get worse for Eureka, stalwart Nikki Powell left the game early in the second quarter with a left-knee injury she suffered while shooting a free throw.

And if playing without one of their marquee players wasn't bad enough, the Mack offense was in cruise control doing whatever it wanted against the Loggers' man-to-man defense.

With Romberg taking a seat due to two personal fouls, Heather Lovelace (finished with 15 points) and Johnson (15 points) took the spotlight.

Lovelace provided the rebounding and interior presence while Johnson used her speed and intelligence. Johnson snaked her way past defenders to find soft spots in the paint for easy buckets.

"I try to read the defense the best I can," she said. "Sometimes, when they had their backs turned, I would find gaps. And I found those shots and so did everyone else."

McKinleyville laid waste to the Eureka defense for 43-19 and 57-29 leads in the second and third quarters.

The Loggers did too much standing and watching and it might have been because of their previous game with Hoopa Valley on Thursday night.

"Maybe a little," said head coach Joel Thornburgh. "But they're (Mack) just really good."

Eureka did make a nice run behind sharpshooter Karli Dunaway (team-high 14 points), however, it was against the



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Panthers' reserves and it was too little, too late.

Mack has now completed two goals they set in the preseason: Win the Big 5 and the Dick Niclai. But the team is far from content.

What more do the Panthers want?

A North Coast Section playoff title.

"No way, we want more," Romberg said. "That's why we practiced so hard. We don't want to be done yet."

Dick Niclai Tournament

Prep girls championship game

McKinleyville 72, Eureka 49

at Lumberjack Arena, HSU

Eureka 10 9 5 25 -- 49

Mack 25 18 14 15 -- 72

Scoring --

(Eureka) Armstrong 5; Dunaway 14; Johnson 12; Ludtke 2; Reynolds 2; Powell 3; Younkin 11

(Mack) Romberg 18; Johnson 15; David 4; Miller 3; Ford 6; Chown 2; Sasser 2; Lovelace 15; Kunst 4

3-pointers --

(Eureka) Dunaway 2; Johnson 2

(Mack) Romberg 2; Johnson 1

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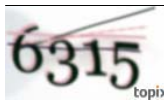
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