

Sweet redemption: Fortuna tops Mack, wins Niclai

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They've known all along they could do it.

On Saturday, in front of a packed house at College of the Redwoods, the Fortuna Lady Huskies finally proved it.

Fortuna's Kelsey Jacobs scored a team-high 16 points to go with 12 rebounds and four steals, and for the first time in their last four meetings, the Huskies beat the Panthers 69-55 to win the Dick Niclai championship, stopping McKinleyville from getting its fourth

consecutive title. “I am just so happy that we finally beat Mack,” said Jain Tuey, who scored 13 points, including a 3-pointer. “We knew we could, and we finally showed everybody.”

What was the difference between this game and their last three? “There wasn’t as much pressure on us,” Tuey said. “We knew what we had to do and we had a positive attitude and never gave up.” It helped, of course, that five McKinleyville players fouled out, including four starters, and the Huskies, who got to the foul line 35 times, made 28 of them.

McKinleyville’s leading scorer Sage Romberg, who finished with a game-high 22 points, fouled out with 7:13 remaining in the fourth quarter and her team trailing by 10.

There were more than 50 fouls called in the game. “We don’t want to take anything away from what Fortuna accomplished today,” said McKinleyville head coach Dustin Dutra. “They deserved the win.”

The Huskies outscored the Panthers 21-11 in the second quarter, jumping out to a 35-28 lead at the break, and extended their lead to as much as 16 points in the fourth quarter. Fortuna racked up a combined 15 steals in the contest and post player Gwendolyn Ozard pulled down five offensive rebounds. “This was just a huge team win for us, I’m so proud of the girls because they believed it,” said Fortuna head coach Mike Benbow. “I thought our defensive intensity really limited their shots and we did everything we talked about.”

With the win, Fortuna improved to 24-4 overall (with three of those losses coming against McKinleyville), while the Panthers dropped to 20-6. McKinleyville, which won the Big Five championship, has an automatic berth into the North Coast Section playoffs,

which start Tuesday, and will host in the first round. Fortuna is also a lock for the playoffs and will possibly host its first game.

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