

Elyria Catholic's James Tirbaso, left, blocks the shot of Lakewood's Desmond Rollins during a loss to the Rangers on Friday.



DAVID RICHARD / CHRONICLE

## Different story for EC in a loss to WSC rival

**Bob Daniels**  
The Chronicle-Telegram

ELYRIA — What a difference a month makes. After scoring 35 first-quarter points, Elyria Catholic breezed past Lakewood, 103-73, in West Shore Conference play on the Rangers' court Jan. 13.

It was a different story in the rematch Friday night in EC's Coliseum.

With senior guard Nick Porter scoring a career-high 33 points, the Rangers pulled away for a 77-63 victory in a WSC game that was closer than the score might suggest.

Elyria Catholic trailed for chunks of time throughout, including by 10 points in the second quarter and again with just over five minutes left in the game. But the Panthers wouldn't go away. They went on a late 13-5 tear, during which junior guard Jacob Kuchta nailed three straight 3-point baskets in just under two minutes.

By the time he'd hit his third in a row, the Panthers had closed the gap to 63-61 and there were still nearly three minutes to play. Unfortunately, from an EC point of view, Lakewood (12-7, 7-6 WSC) responded with a 14-2 tear from then to the end.

Even with the loss, Elyria Catholic (14-6, 8-5) is still in the conference championship picture, a game behind Bay. The league-leading Rockets suffered a 58-56 loss to Avon on Friday.

"Elyria Catholic really put it to us the last time we played," Lakewood coach Phil Argento said. "They shot the lights out and we have a lot of respect for their team. We knew we were going to have to come in here and play much better defensively. I thought we had a much better effort in the first half and shot the ball really well. EC has a nice club and we wish them all the best."

The Rangers' Porter said his team felt it had

something to prove after the drubbing it suffered in the Jan. 13 game.

"We know we don't have a shot at the conference any more, but we want to keep getting better every game," Porter said.

The Panthers' outlook was darkest after Porter's free throw put the Rangers up, 58-48, with 5:26 to go in the game. But they went to work. Senior point guard D.J. Graham drove for a basket with 5:10 to go and added two foul shots 16 seconds later.

At 4:32 Kuchta nailed the first of his three 3-pointers, cutting the deficit to 59-55. He nailed his second three with 3:50 to go and when he buried the third at 2:56, the Lakewood lead had been cut to 63-61.

But even with the Panthers' refusal to fold, coach Phil Kuchta said EC never really got it together as a team.

"For whatever reason, we just didn't play well tonight," Kuchta said. "I didn't like the way we started, but I give my guys credit. They made some runs and certainly made a game of it. Lakewood's a good team, a typical West Shore Conference opponent. But I just didn't like the way we played."

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### Lakewood 77, Elyria Catholic 63

**LAKEWOOD (77):** Joe Malone 2-0-4, Justin McDonald 3-0-8, Wes Gerhardt 5-3-13, Malik Leisinger 2-6-10, Desmond Rollins 0-1-1, Logan Swift 3-0-6, Jack Witri 0-0-0, Nick Porter 13-4-33, Brenden Horinger 0-0-0, Ozemenay Taylor 0-2-2, Jacob Sala 0-0-0. **Totals 28-16-77.**

**ELYRIA CATHOLIC (63):** D.J. Graham 8-5-21, Kevin Kelley 1-0-3, Ceeven Shelton 5-0-10, Darin Guice 0-2-2, Cole Virgin 2-0-4, Jacob Kuchta 5-0-13, James Tirbaso 4-0-8, Brian Duffield 1-0-2. **Totals 26-7-63.**

Lakewood	15	13	22	27	—	77
Elyria Catholic	12	16	18	17	—	63

**Three-point goals:** Lakewood 5-13 (Porter 3, McDonald 2); Elyria Catholic 4-17 (Kuchta 3, Kelley). **Field goals:** Lakewood 28-60 (46.7 percent); Elyria Catholic 26-70 (37.1 percent). **Free throws:** Lakewood 16-23; Elyria Catholic 7-9. **Rebounds:** Lakewood 31; Elyria Catholic 32. **Turnovers:** Lakewood 16; Elyria Catholic 17. **Junior varsity:** Elyria Catholic, 56-54.

## AVON

From D1

He hung on the rim to avoid an Avon player and was whistled for a technical, which drew an emotional response from the 6-foot-6 center and another technical — his fifth foul. D'Amonte Thornton drained three of the four free throws for Avon.

"Our kids responded the way they're supposed to," Bay coach Jared Schetzer said. "They're champions and they responded the way they're supposed to. We love our kids and we're proud of them. I think if you go back and watch the film you'll clearly see somebody was underneath him (Sunahara) on the first technical. But that's all I have to say about that."

Bay bounced back with a 7-3 run, sparked by two quick field goals from Brandon Morriss, who also finished with a double-double — 13 points and tied for a game-high 14 rebounds.

The Rockets looked like they were going to use the ejection as fire to propel them to victory, but the offense fell flat after it took a 56-51 lead. Torbert connected on a jumper and Orr followed with a huge three at the 1:42 mark to tie the game at 56.

Avon (12-8, 8-5) left the door open down the stretch when it only converted 2-of-6 from the line in the final two minutes — one by Torbert and the other by Orr. But it turned out to be enough.

Avon's Will Ybarra missed two of those free throws with 19.3 left, but Alec White's final 3-point attempt with 3.3 seconds left hit off the rim.

"Our goal was to get Alec White the ball and swing it back to John Koz in the corner to either get a shot or get something going at the rim," Morriss said. "They defended it well. Credit to them."

Ybarra was one of four Avon players in double figures with 13 points, tying Torbert for the team high. He also grabbed a team-high 14 rebounds with one blocked shot.

Orr — a freshman — and Thornton were huge off the bench, adding 11 each and combining to score 10 in the third quarter, including Thornton's strong drive for an old-fashioned three-point play to close the third quarter with a 44-43 lead.

"Orr and Thornton are huge for us," Ybarra said. "They hit clutch shots in the right moments and they pass the ball when they need to. They're good, they're just good."

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### Avon 58, Bay 56

**AVON (58):** John Koz 3-2-10, Brandon Morriss 5-2-13, Rex Sunahara 10-0-20, Danny Heideloff 0-1-1, Jonathon Brajdic 1-0-2, Jack Jelen 2-0-5, Alec White 2-0-5, Jack Kyle 0-0-0, Scott Durham 0-0-0, Cole Geryge 0-0-0. **Totals 23-5-56.**

**AVON (58):** Chris Maxwell 0-0-0, Zack Torbert 4-4-13, Will Ybarra 5-0-13, Michael Smigel 3-0-8, Johnny Paganoff 0-0-0, D'Amonte Thornton 3-5-11, DelShawn Orr 3-4-11, Michael Nose 1-0-2, Jeffrey Laraway 0-0-0. **Totals 19-13-58.**

Bay	17	12	14	13	—	56
Avon	15	11	18	14	—	58

**Three-point goals:** Bay 5-22 (Koz 2, Brajdic 2, Morriss), Avon 7-19 (Ybarra 3, Smigel 2, Torbert, Orr). **Field goals:** Bay 23-63 (37 percent), Avon 19-52 (31 percent). **Free throws:** Bay 5-13 (39 percent), Avon 13-24 (54 percent). **Rebounds:** Bay 38 (Morriss 14, Sunahara 11), Avon 36 (Ybarra 14). **Total fouls:** Bay 19, Avon 13. **Technical fouls:** Sunahara 2. **Fouled out:** Sunahara, Heideloff. **Turnovers:** Bay 9, Avon 8. **Junior varsity:** Avon, 77-41.

## NORTH OLMSTED 47, WESTLAKE 45

# Eagles hold onto win

**Joel Hammond**  
The Chronicle-Telegram

**NORTH OLMSTED** — How do we put this politely? Things have not been ... aesthetically pleasing lately for North Olmsted.

Just as certain, though: The Eagles aren't about to apologize.

North Olmsted won its fourth in five games Friday night, beating Southwestern Conference foe Westlake 47-45. Those four wins have come by a combined 10 points, and for the second straight victory, the Eagles nearly coughed up a double-digit fourth-quarter lead.

Now, the pretty stuff: After winning one game two years ago, and eight last year, the Eagles are 14-6 and 9-2 in the SWC, and will play Berea-Midpark on Friday for a share of the conference crown. The Titans are 10-1 in the league after a methodical 41-29 win over Brecksville on Friday.

And North Olmsted is in this position despite losing starter Tommy Sullivan likely for the year with a knee injury; playing with injuries to 6-foot-6 Andy Lucien (knee injury in practice this week) and sixth man Josh Hufstetler (hand injury); and losing another contributor to academic ineligibility.

The Eagles will take it. "When you have injuries like that, you have to stay together and play together, and this is

### North Olmsted 47, Westlake 45

**WESTLAKE (45):** Noah Meek 2-0-5, Andris Balodis 4-2-12, Scott Leonard 4-0-9, Rico Tate 5-3-13, Cameron Brown 3-2-5. **Totals 20-4-47.**

**NORTH OLMSTED (47):** Josh Hufstetler 1-0-2, Ryan Coleman 4-0-8, Matt Starcovic 9-1-22, Jimmy Clark 1-0-3, Andy Lucien 4-3-12. **Totals 20-4-47.**

**Westlake** 13 9 8 15 — 45  
**North Olmsted** 16 16 6 9 — 47

**Three-point goals:** Westlake 4-15 (Meek, Balodis 2, Leonard), North Olmsted 5-16 (Starcovic 3, Clark, Lucien). **Field goals:** Westlake 18-42 (43 percent), North Olmsted 20-46 (43 percent). **Free throws:** Westlake 5-11 (45 percent), North Olmsted 4-7 (57 percent). **Rebounds:** Westlake 26 (Tate, Brown 7), North Olmsted 28 (Lucien 8). **Total fouls:** Westlake 11, North Olmsted 9. **Turnovers:** Westlake 13, North Olmsted 12. **Fouled out:** None. **Junior varsity:** Westlake, 49-41.

what happens when you do," said N.O. senior Matt Starcovic, who led all scorers with 20.

North Olmsted scored the first 10 points of the game, including five from Lucien and Starcovic. Westlake fought back, but still trailed by 10 at halftime, 32-22.

The game slowed in the third quarter, but the Eagles extended their lead to 14 by scoring the first two buckets of the second half. The Demons (5-13, 3-8), though, again rallied, scoring eight of the final 10 of the quarter to cut it to eight; they also missed two layups that could have further cut the lead.

Starcovic scored the Eagles' first eight points of the fourth, and North Olmsted held a comfortable nine-point lead, 46-37, with three minutes left. But Scott Leonard hit a three, and Andris Balodis hit one of his own off a turnover. Talented

sophomore point guard Rico Tate scored off another turnover with 40 seconds left to make it 46-45.

The Eagles missed the front end of a one-and-one, but the ensuing loose ball bounced off Westlake. Lucien made one of two, and the Eagles gave their last foul with 12 seconds left. Off a timeout, Westlake coach Shawn Hood drew up a play for the win, with Balodis coming off a double screen on the baseline for a three — but the Eagles blocked the shot as time expired.

"We've let leads slip and evaporate; we're just not making those plays that we should to put teams away," North Olmsted coach Jason Frolo said. "It's a little bit of a concern, but this time of the year you take wins where you can."

Lucien had 12 points to back Starcovic, but only one in the second half, as the injury seemed to slow him. He took a couple hard hits. Tate scored 13 and Balodis had 12 for the Demons, who lamented another game where a slow start cost them.

"We lost the game in the first half — we just didn't come out with the right defensive mentality," Hood said. "We were too worried about how we were going to play offensively and that doesn't work."

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## ROCKY RIVER 59, NORTH RIDGEVILLE 41

# Rough night for Rangers

**Todd Shapiro**  
The Chronicle-Telegram

**ROCKY RIVER** — North Ridgeville coach Bryan Morgan was seeing red after Friday's 59-41 West Shore Conference loss to Rocky River, and it had nothing to do with it being Valentine's Day weekend.

It was the Rangers' performance that clouded Morgan's vision. His team turned the ball over 22 times, shot a paltry 38 percent (9-of-24) from the free throw line and only scored 15 points in the second and third periods, while falling to 9-11 and 5-8 in the WSC with two regular-season games remaining.

"We weren't able to execute at all," Morgan said. "Rocky River sent us to the line quite a few times but we were just awful. I don't think I've been part of a team performance that has been that poor from the free throw line."

"We made stops on defense and got them to turn the ball over, but we could not capitalize. Instead, we're firing one-handed, no-look passes or throwing cross-court passes

### Rocky River 59, North Ridgeville 41

**NORTH RIDGEVILLE (41):** Alex Overy 1-3, Jordan Montgomery 1-1-3, Dario McColl 2-1-5, Brian Flanagan 2-0-5, Isa Abdul-Alim 0-1-1, Greg Draft 3-1-7, Jack Lesniak 1-0-2, M.J. Smith 1-3-5, Guac Buchko 1-0-3, Tyler Arnold 2-1-7. **Totals 14-9-41.**

**ROCKY RIVER (59):** Eric Jones 3-2-8, Patrick Connors 6-0-14, Corey Zucker 1-0-2, Jack Corrigan 1-5-7, Justin Monte 1-0-2, Evan Nugent 3-2-8, Zach Waite 0-1-1, Jimmy Kinsley 3-0-5, Nathan Sefferick 5-1-11. **Totals 23-11-59.**

**North Ridgeville** 11 6 9 15-41  
**Rocky River** 13 11 12 23-59

**Three-point goals:** North Ridgeville (Arnold 2, Buchko, Flanagan), Rocky River (Connors 2). **Field goals:** North Ridgeville 14-34 (41 percent), Rocky River 23-41 (56 percent). **Free throws:** North Ridgeville 9-24 (38 percent), Rocky River 11-19 (58 percent). **Rebounds:** North Ridgeville 40, Rocky River 29. **Turnovers:** North Ridgeville 22, Rocky River 21. **Total fouls:** North Ridgeville 15, Rocky River 19. **Fouled out:** Waite. **Junior Varsity:** North Ridgeville, 53-33.

out of bounds." After watching his team go through a 16-minute stretch where they only scored 15 points, Morgan pulled all of his starters with 5:45 remaining and allowed his bench players to finish the game. The Rangers' reserves briefly provided a spark, cutting the deficit to 12, but Morgan was also hoping they would ignite a fire in the locker room and on

the practice court. "We've had a lot of injuries over the course of the season and therefore there really has been no competition for spots in the lineup," he said. "Tonight, we saw that maybe there is some competition waiting in the wings. That's what has to happen. Guys can't get comfortable."

Rocky River (8-12, 3-10) played solid defense and forced the Rangers into numerous mistakes in their half-court game but Pirates coach Michael Murray was left wishing that his team, which committed 21 turnovers of its own, could to a better job turning turnovers into points.

"We defended and rebounded well but we got careless at times and wound up with over 20 turnovers," Murray said. Rocky River never trailed and the score was only tied once, 11-11, after an Arnold 3-pointer with 40 seconds left in the first period.

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## OLMSTED FALLS 72, AMHERST 38

# Bulldogs bag big victory

**Fred Steiner**  
The Chronicle-Telegram

**OLMSTED FALLS** — For Olmsted Falls it was a Senior Night to remember. For Amherst it was a forgettable experience.

The Bulldogs could do little wrong in a 72-38 victory over their Southwestern Conference rival Friday night.

"Maybe one of the last times playing on this court, we just wanted to come out and appreciate it and take it all in and play our best, and I think we did that tonight," Olmsted Falls senior forward Ryan Sosic said. "To come out with a victory like that was great. It starts in practice really, where everyone works really hard in practice and that leads to trust in the game."

Olmsted Falls coach Chris DeLisio opened the game with an all senior lineup and it responded with a rugged and gritty performance against an Amherst team which came out trading punch-for-punch with the Bulldogs. When the first quarter ended, the Comets trailed by only one at 17-16.

That concluded the Amherst highlights for the evening.

### Olmsted Falls 72, Amherst 38

**AMHERST (38):** Adam Srnis 2-0-6, Antonio Serrano 2-1-5, Rees Rua 9-3-21, Matt Kniessel 1-1-4, Dylan Johnson 0-0-0, Rocky Melendez 0-0-0, John Woodridge 0-0-0, Marshall Bussey 1-0-2, Tino Laboy 0-0-0. **Totals 15-5-38.**

**OLMSTED FALLS (72):** Tony Kleem 0-2-2, Ryan Hanna 2-0-4, Troy Hurrell 2-0-5, Ryan Sosic 3-0-8, Nick Fritz 3-1-8, Kevin Meehan 2-3-17, Eric Taylor 4-0-9, Anthony Trujillo 2-1-5, Ryan Stroutbeck 1-0-2, Victor Hitterman 1-2-4, Frank Harr 0-0-0, Brian Candow 1-0-2, Ryan Glover 1-0-3, Josh Goodwin 2-0-5. **Totals 29-9-72.**

**Amherst** 16 6 8 8 — 38  
**Olmsted Falls** 17 21 18 16 — 72

**Three-point goals:** Amherst 3-10 (Srnis-2, Kniessel), Olmsted Falls 5-11 (Hurrell, Fritz, Taylor, Glover, Goodwin). **Field goals:** Amherst 15-47 (34 percent), Olmsted Falls 29-45 (64 percent). **Free throws:** Amherst 5-9 (55 percent), Olmsted Falls 9-14 (64 percent). **Rebounds:** Amherst 15 (Kniessel 6), Olmsted Falls 27 (Meehan 4). **Total fouls:** Amherst 12, Olmsted Falls 14. **Turnovers:** Amherst 14, Olmsted Falls 13. **Junior varsity:** Olmsted Falls, 56-53.

Starting in the second quarter, it was all Olmsted Falls. For the rest of the game, Amherst failed to reach double digits in a quarter, while Olmsted Falls (11-8, 7-4 SWC) shot 70 percent in the first half, and 64 percent for the game. Falls' pressure defense and hot shooting wore down the Comets progressively as the night progressed.

"We mentally just broke down and it was over. I'm not sure that we lost composure, but we lost all our purpose of

what we wanted to do," said Comets coach John Srnis of the fateful second period. "We didn't catch ourselves and one thing led to another and before you knew it we were in trouble."

Trouble to the tune of a 21-6 second quarter and a 16-point halftime deficit. While Amherst's Rees Rua was the game-high scorer with 21 points, all on traditional two point baskets and free throws on 9-of-14 shooting, his fellow Comets shot 3-of-19 from inside the arc.

"We just didn't play very well and then we helped their runs by turning the ball over in the middle of the court," Coach Srnis said. "They already had enough success on offense. We didn't have to add to it."

Olmsted Falls got 14 players into action and 13 into the score book, led by Kevin Meehan's 17 points.

"It was a great Senior Night, just happy that we could get everybody some quality minutes. We have some great seniors," DeLisio said.

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