

# Owls Copy Bulkeley Style With Slowdown Strategy

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BOSTON — "We played slowdown when we had to," remarked a smiling, delighted Coach Joe Kubachka after his Hartford High quintet had conquered in a dramatic final of the New England Interscholastic Basketball Tournament.

Slowdown is the cunning weapon which the game, underdog Maroons employed with success in amazing fashion several times this season. But Saturday night, once the Owls had finally caught the tricky Maroons in the fourth quarter, the worm turned.

Then it was Hartford's chance to play cat and mouse with their city rivals and they did it in championship fashion.

Kubachka said his Owls made a couple of changes in strategy as they trailed at the half, 22-18, against the possession - playing Southenders. "Offensively we were breaking too slowly," said Kubachka.

"We were getting that ball down court too slowly. As a result Bulkeley set up their zone and forced us to take long shots. So we told our kids to break faster and they did. We wanted to move our offense inside."

Defensively, the former Springfield college cager ordered his players to double-team the man with the ball more, and thus tie up Bulkeley's attempts to play slowdown.

Reserve Cliff Thornton, a junior, drew high praise from the Owl mentor. "Thornton kept us in the game in the second period with those fine shots from the outside," explained Kubachka.

Did this victory mean more to the Hartford coach than last year's New England championship final game triumph over Wilbur Cross, a reported asked?

"Well," said Kubachka, "we were the favorites this year. Last year we were the underdogs. But this time we took both the state and New England titles—a clean sweep. And I think we became only the third team to win two consecutive New England championships."

"No, we didn't quite expect the slowdown from them," the Hartford mentor admitted. "And we didn't adjust too well in the first half."

This was the 8th straight victory, regular season and otherwise, for Hartford over its big rival, and Hartford's coach admitted that he was confident of victory going into the all-important contest.

What was the turning point, a scribe asked the cooperative Hartford coach?

"That was when we tied the score early in the fourth period, went ahead and switched to a zone defense," Kubachka explained. "Then we made them play our game, forced them to shoot from the outside and grabbed the rebounds."

Eddie Griffin, the chief main-spring in Hartford's victory, felt all the time that the Owls would pull it out in the uphill struggle.

"I knew we wouldn't be shooting as bad as that all the time," Griffin explained. "I knew we were going to get better. We had spells like that before."

The talented Hartford guard, who played with the coolness of a professional under great pressure, admitted that he didn't believe that Hartford had clinched its prized victory until he made those two foul shots in the waning moments of the ball game.

Griffin, who must have made everybody's all-tournament team said, "In a way this victory was as big a thrill as last year's conquest of Cross in the finale here. He added, "I had a feeling Bulkeley would play slowdown against us. It didn't bother me to much but our team isn't used to playing against that type of basketball."

Eddie hopes to continue his

schooling upon graduation in June.

Lou Bazzano, Bulkeley's talented master strategist of a coach, somehow managed to greet inquisitive reporters with a smile.

"Yes, the kids look it hard," said Lou. "They took it very hard. They're certainly a great bunch of kids. I'm very proud of them and I know that everyone from Bulkeley is."

"This is the best team, and you can underline team, I've ever had at Bulkeley in nine years of coaching."

This, of course, was Bulkeley's first voyage into the final round of the New England—a goal for which the hard-working Bazzano aimed years ago.

In Lou's opinion, the turning point of the Maroons downfall came late in the third period as the Southenders missed a couple of shots from underneath amidst the Hartford comeback.

The kids are only human and made a couple of mistakes," conceded Lou. "They just couldn't be perfect all the time."

Bazzano had high hopes his charges would upset Hartford, which had beaten them three times previously in this long strenuous campaign.

"I thought our deliberate offense would upset them," continued Lou, "and it worked for a while. Thornton's outside shooting certainly kept them in the ball game. I certainly can't find any fault with my boys on that score because on several occasions he made those long ones although he was closely guarded."

One statistician offered the information that Thornton had connected on his first five shots from the field.

Bulkeley strategy called for a zone defense which Bazzano hoped would surprise his rivals. "It was effective until we lost the lead," admitted the disappointed Maroon tutor.

Billy Hannon, former Hartford High star giving scribes a hand in the overhanging press box, credited Hartford with just one rebound in the first half as against seven for Bulkeley — which helps tell the story why the underdogs dominated the first two periods.

Griffin made a pretty attempt to score as time ran out in the first half but missed on a driving layup as the possession playing Owls played for one shot after killing the clock for almost 35 seconds.

Hartford fans grew concerned when Griffin committed his third personal foul at the outset of the second half. Bruce Maddox worried Owl backers more when he drew his fourth about half way through the third period.

It was truly Hartford's night in what was apparently Connecticut's swan song in the colorful New England here. Appropriate home made banners, "Beat Bulkeley," "Trim Hartford" were draped conspicuously about the huge amphitheater. At least two radio stations were broadcasting the classic back home to folks in Northern New England.

The rival cheerleaders sat on the same end of the court, separated by a wide aisle as they took turns doing their stuff at timeouts.