

For HPHS, it has never been better

A 27-0 title run sets standard

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NEW BRITAIN — After the jubilant Hartford Public basketball players sprayed coach Stan Piorkowski with soda in the locker room, Tyrone White was asked to assess the 83-68 CIAC Class LL championship victory over Danbury Saturday.

"It means — we made history," White said. "We went 27-0. We won the City Series, our league [CCC East] and now we're state champions."

A crowd of 4,146 squeezed into Detrick Gymnasium at Central Connecticut State University to watch second-seeded Hartford Public cap a perfect season in perfect fashion.

The victory ended a 31-year championship drought and made the Owls the first boys team to go 27-0 (Harding-Bridgeport and Thomaston were 26-0 in 1987 and 1991, respectively). The Owls won the Class A title in 1962 and had gone 0-for-6 in

Class LL boys basketball

HPHS	83
Danbury	68

state championship games since, losing by a total of 34 points.

Led by tournament most valuable player and All-American Marcus Camby and his splendid supporting cast of Kendrick Moore, Courtney Dunstan, Michael Thompson and White, the Owls achieved their lofty goal.

"We all agreed it was an easy set of goals because all high school teams do it," Piorkowski said. "The players realized, from the beginning,

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Camby & Co. start quickly, end perfectly

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that if they allowed their egos to come in with their ability, it was going to take away from their goal."

The Owls, ranked No. 1 in The Courant's coaches poll all season, combined for 19 assists in their patented, unselfish style.

"That's a very, very good team," Danbury coach Walt Richard said. "They were better than us, and deserve their ranking. I have an awful lot of respect for them."

Said Piorkowski: "In my 25 years, I don't think I've seen a team pass the ball on the break as well as we did. Once on a break, they didn't think whether they should or shouldn't pass. They just did it. They saw the open guy. That passing starts with the players. As a coach, you try to help and encourage it in practice, but if the kid doesn't have it in his heart, he won't make those passes you saw today."

Camby, the 6-foot-11 University of Massachusetts-bound senior center, had 32 points (13 of 18 from the field), 14 rebounds, four assists, three blocks and four steals. Moore, a 6-2 junior forward, finished with 21 points (8-for-11), six rebounds and five assists. White, a 5-9 senior guard, contributed nine points on three three-pointers, had three assists and one steal.

Eighth-seeded Danbury (22-5) was led by 6-3 junior forward Anthony Scott (19 points, six rebounds, two steals); 6-4 senior forward D'Quill Osbey (18 points, eight rebounds, two assists and two steals); and 6-5 junior center Marcus McCollough (17 points, 12 rebounds, one assist, three blocks, four steals).

It was Danbury's third appearance in a state title game since 1989 and marked the second time the Hatters have lost to a Hartford team. Weaver beat Danbury 79-76 in the 1991 final.

The game was fast-paced from the start, and the teams matched basket for basket the first four minutes. With the score 13-13, Dunstan's basket with 4½ minutes gone sent Hartford Public on a 10-2 run for a 23-15 lead after one quarter.

Hartford Public never trailed again.

The Owls started with man-to-man defense, but Piorkowski switched to a 2-3 zone — with Camby on one of the wings — after four minutes. "When we went up three, I turned to [assistant coach] Steve Waterman, and said, 'let's try the zone and see how Danbury reacts.' Danbury is a slashing, driving team, and they were having problems getting structured against the zone, so we stayed with it."

In the second quarter, another 10-point run helped HPHS to a 33-19 lead with 2 minutes, 5 seconds remaining. It was capped with a nifty White-to-Moore-to Camby passing combination which resulted in Camby's two-handed slam. Danbury went scoreless for nearly 4½ minutes, but cut the HPHS lead to 34-25 at halftime after a rebound basket by McCollough and a Travis Coates-to-Osbey alley-oop play.

By halftime, Camby had 14 points and five rebounds; Moore 11 points on 5 of 6 field goals.

In the third quarter, White hit two three-pointers and Moore and Camby combined for 17 of Hartford Public's 25 points as the Owls started the fourth quarter with a 59-44 lead. Danbury could get no closer than 14 the rest of the way.

Hartford Public made 33 of 61 field goals (54.1 percent) and 14 of 20 free throws. Danbury was 29-for-80 (36.3 percent) from the field, 3-for-19 from three-point range and made 7 of 10 free throws. Hartford Public outrebounded Danbury, 46-38.

Camby, who sat out his junior year after transferring from Conard-West Hartford, left the game with 1:39 remaining. He cracked a wide smile and hugged Piorkowski. "Yes, those were tears," Camby said.