

Clarkston keeps Cushingberry under wraps

By Keith Dunlap

Journal Register News Service

LAKE ORION— There might not have been a team in the history of high school basketball happier to hold an opposing player to 21 points.

Romeo stud senior Blake Cushingberry managed to hit that number on Tuesday, but given he was averaging over 25 points per game this season,

Boys Basketball Class A Regionals

Clarkston looked at the 21 he scored with glee.

What made the Wolves

even happier was a win. Largely because of the defensive job they did on the Oakland University-bound Cushingberry, Clarkston moved on in the Class A boys basketball state tournament thanks to a 67-57 win over Romeo in a regional semifinal.

Next up for Clarkston is a regional final date with Flint Southwestern at 7 p.m. on Wednesday at Lake Orion High School.

The winner more than likely would then be rewarded with a quarterfinal game against No. 1-ranked and defending state champion Saginaw next Tuesday at Davison High School.

"It all comes down to rebounding and defense for me," Clarkston head coach Dan Fife said. "Everybody is going to score points. I thought our kids did a good job defensively."

Nobody did a better job than the Clarkston player who shadowed Cushingberry the entire game, senior Oliver Kupe, who used his quickness and wingspan to slow down the multi-dimensional Cushingberry.

"He's probably the strongest kid I've guarded, ever," said the 6-foot-2 Kupe, who also chipped in offensively by scoring 13 points. "I just tried to front him when he was inside and when he was outside, I just tried to put a hand in his face because he can shoot from anywhere."

For Fife, giving Kupe the primary defensive assignment on Cushingberry was an obvious decision.

"Oliver is long and he's deceptively strong," Fife said. "That kind of length on you all the time forces you out farther (from the



Journal Register News Service photo by Charlie Cortez

Romeo's Blake Cushingberry, left, guards Clarkston's Brandon Pokley during the Wolves' 67-57 win.

basket) than you'd like."

Ranked No. 5 in the state, Clarkston (24-2) controlled the game in the first half, then had to fight back from a furious Romeo rally in the third quarter before taking control of the game late.

Trailing at halftime, 28-23, Romeo came out strong in the third quarter, going on a 12-4 run to take a 35-32 lead with 5:26 left in the third and then taking a 40-36 lead with 3:24 remaining in the third on a 3-point play by Cushingberry.

However, Clarkston responded, ending the third quarter with a 9-1 run to grab a 45-41 lead going into the fourth.

The teams went back and forth for the first part of the fourth quarter until Clarkston used a 6-0 run to take a 58-50 lead with 3:17 remaining.

Romeo senior Nick Kosovich answered with two baskets to cut Clarkston's lead to 58-54 with 2:20 left, but two baskets by junior

Matt Kamieniecki and another by junior Tom Staton gave Clarkston a 62-54 lead with 1:13 remaining.

Cushingberry then hit a long 3-pointer to bring Romeo to within seven at 64-57 with 57 seconds remaining, but the Wolves salted the game away with three free throws and solid defense in the final minute.

Junior Brandon Pokley scored 20 points and senior Julius Porter joined Kupe by scoring 13 points for the Wolves, who will be a heavy favorite against Southwestern (16-9).

Kosovich flanked Cushingberry by scoring 17 points for the Bulldogs, who finished 19-4.

Romeo head coach Dale Teller said turnovers were the obvious culprit for the loss, saying he counted one stretch in the third quarter where his team "went seven straight possessions without getting off a shot."

"I really don't have any an-

Boys Basketball Regionals

CLASS A
(Host Grosse Pointe South)
March 3: De La Salle 50, L'Anse Creuse North 49; Detroit Finney 44, Eisenhower 36
March 5: Championship - De La Salle vs. Detroit Finney, 7 p.m.

(Host Lake Orion)
March 3: Flint Southwestern 66, Pontiac Northern 61; Clarkston 67, Romeo 57
March 5: Championship - Flint Southwestern vs. Clarkston, 7 p.m.

CLASS D
(Host Roper)
March 3: Detroit City 72, Plymouth Christian 60; Parkway Christian 67, Agape Christian 53
March 5: Championship - Detroit City vs. Parkway Christian, 7 p.m.

swers," Teller said. "The turnovers really weren't anything they did. We just didn't play smart. It's been kind of a problem all year, but I thought we had it taken care of it. It wasn't like they were pressing us."