

# 'Team' effort sparks Dakota past Romeo

**By Chuck Klonke**

Special to The Macomb Daily

When a basketball team starts playing well, it seems like everyone is contributing.

Dakota got help all the way down the bench Tuesday night

---

## **Boys Basketball**

---

in its 65-61  
Macomb  
Area Con-  
ference  
Red Divi-  
sion victo-

ry against Romeo.

"It was a nice team win," said Cougars coach Bill Snyder. "For long stretches in the second half we had three starters sitting out with foul trouble."

That's when Brian Coppola and Agron Nicaaj came to the rescue.

Romeo had scored 12 straight points and Dakota's 17-point lead early in the third quarter had dwindled to five with a minute and a half to play in the quarter.

"Brian Coppola came in and did a great job," Snyder said. "The toughest job in basketball is to be a backup guard. He sat for a long time, came in and handled the ball without turning it over. He made a nice pass inside (to

Evan Walker) for an assist and hit a short pull-up jumper that was his shot to take. He gave us a huge lift and calmed things down."

Dakota finished the third quarter with two baskets by Walker sandwiched around Coppola's and the Cougars' lead was back to 11 points, 50-39, heading into the final quarter.

Nicaaj, an excellent soccer player who is just learning the fine points of basketball, provided some strength on the boards and good defense down low.

"He did some great rebounding for us," Snyder said. "He's a great energy guy and he gave us some good minutes, too. We needed all that lift. We got some kids to step up tonight."

Although Dakota's lead was back in double figures at the start of the fourth quarter, the Bulldogs kept chipping away at it, and when Ryan Thomas converted a three-point play with 1:49 to go, the Cougars' lead was 63-58.

Will Stone and Mark Morris each split a pair of free throws on Dakota's next two

# TEAM: Effort keys Dakota win over the Bulldogs

Continued from Page 2C

possessions to stretch the margin to seven points. Romeo's Spencer Szejwk hit his second three-point basket of the quarter with 12.3 seconds remaining to make it 65-61, but that was as close as the Bulldogs would get.

Szejwk finished with a game-high 20 points, eight coming in the fourth quarter.

Walker led Dakota with 17 points and 10 rebounds. Stone contributed 14 points to the balanced attack, Morris had 12 and Deandre Smith added 10 points.

Smith also did a lot of good things that didn't show up on the statistical sheets.

"He played great defensively, and rebounding," Snyder said. "He's one of our athletes who can get after it defensively. He was a huge factor for us. He doesn't show up on the stat sheet in a lot of possessions but he kept the ball alive under the boards and he kept his man from getting the rebound. He's a great team player."

Morris also received praise from his coach.

"He ran the floor well and spent a lot of time at the point, which is not his natural position," Snyder said.

Dakota got a three-point basket from Morris in the waning seconds of the first half to take a 34-24 lead to the locker room.

The Cougars came out strong to start the second half, outscoring Romeo 10-3 to take a 44-27 lead.

"From our standpoint, the third quarter is the most important quarter," Snyder said. "We've felt each other out for 16 minutes. Now we come in and we're going to do something different. We're going to improve on something we've done. The first four minutes of the third quarter are the most important minutes of the game. Our kids value that third quarter a lot. It hasn't been that way the whole season, but it has developed into that."

Snyder liked the way the Cougars responded to their second straight emotional game. The last time Romeo and Dakota played, the Bulldogs won in overtime after a controversial end to regulation. Dakota received a technical foul for excessive celebrating after the Cougars thought they won on a last-second shot. The Bulldogs tied the game with the free throws after time had expired.

"Last Friday we played a rivalry game with Chippewa -- a huge emotional game for us -- and then to come into tonight and play well again," Snyder said. "I think we're starting to establish ourselves as a good team that's ready for the state tournament. We're excited about the next month or so."

Romeo	18	6	15	22	-	61
Dakota	20	14	16	15	-	65

**ROMEO (44, 7-7):** Ryan Thomas 6, Spencer Szejwk 20, Jason Schirmer 9, Ryan Grzegorzewski 11, Steven Saliga 4, Taylor Brynaert 4, Nathan Fraeyman 7. Totals: 20 (7) 14-20-61.

**DAKOTA (44, 8-7):** Mark Morris 12, Deandre Smith 10, Will Stone 14, Alec Tortamasi 8, Evan Walker 17, Brian Coppola 2, Deontae Rex 2. Totals: 25 (6) 9-12-65.