

Published March 11th, 2015

## Two in a Row

By Karl Buscheck



Photos Gint Federas

what she did today doesn't surprise me. She's a warrior."

Steele gave all the credit to her teammates: "It was a team effort and we played (great). We played as a team and we won as a team."

Early on, it was almost too easy for Miramonte. The Mats ripped off a 16-4 run to start the game and took a commanding 44-24 lead into the half. Once the teams emerged from the locker rooms, O'Dowd immediately began to climb back into the contest, reeling off a 10-0 run after the break.

As Sopak explained, his team didn't know whether to keep its foot on the gas or to play it safe after opening up a 20-point advantage.

"It's just a tough thing against a team like that because you don't want to play too aggressive and give them the ammunition to come back, but you don't want to play passive," said Sopak. "And I think we got caught not really understanding what we wanted to do."

The Dragons continued to bridge the gap, getting the score to 58-57 late in the fourth before Steele drained the game-changing three pointer. After the final buzzer went off and the fans stormed the court, Steele was at a loss for words.

"I can't really describe it. It's just great. I've never felt like this before. It's the greatest feeling."

According to Sopak, it was extra special to win the title against O'Dowd.

"We wanted to play last year, and circumstances were that we couldn't," said Sopak. After winning five consecutive NCS trophies, O'Dowd was disqualified from the 2014 postseason for playing an extra regular season game. "So, our kids wanted it last year. We wanted it this year. Now that we won, I'm kind of glad that it ended the way it did."

Miramonte held off a furious charge from Bishop O'Dowd to claim the squad's second consecutive NCS Division III crown on March 7. After building up a 22-point lead early, the Mats emerged with a 72-66 win over the Dragons in Moraga at a packed McKeon Pavilion, the home of the Saint Mary's Gaels.

Junior Sabrina Ionescu snagged the Player of the Game honors as she rained in 26 points, but it was her freshman teammate Clair Steele who saved the day. Steele racked up 20 points and hit a critical second-half three pointer, which gave the Mats some much needed breathing room after O'Dowd had cut the lead to a single point with just under three minutes to go.

"She's one of the toughest kids on our team," said head coach Kelly Sopak. "I've been fortunate to coach her since she was in the first grade so



Sabrina Ionescu had 26 points in the game.



Clair Steele had a key three pointer to help the Mats win.

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA