**HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS BASKETBALL: Knights stay focused, edge out JM in final**

Kortni Simmons came out of the locker room and sat on the bench by herself.

The Spotsylvania junior opted not to join the rest of her team as they started their second half warm-ups.

Instead she sat with her head in her hands, looking straight down at the court.

“I just sit and reflect on the first half,” Simmons said. “What I did and what I should have done better as far as rebounding or how I should have given the ball to certain people.

“I just thought about the first half so I could start off better in the second half.”

Thirty seconds into the second half, Simmons dished out an assist to Shatia Johnson for the easy layup.

It seemed as though her reflecting paid off.

Simmons finished with 33 points in the Knights’ 52–46 victory over James Monroe in the Conference 27 final Thursday night.

But it wasn’t easy.

Several missed calls throughout the game frustrated both teams, and Spotsylvania assistant coach Claude Tyler told his team to stay focused on what their goals were.

“If we allow other teams or anybody to start messing with what we need to do as far as in our mind, we’re going to struggle and it started happening at certain points in the game,” he said. “We just had to stay focused and work on what we know we can do.”

Tempers flared with 1:54 left in the game and James Monroe, down by 10 points, was called for a technical foul.

Simmons stepped to the line and calmly hit her free throws.

“You just have to play through it,” she said. “I think I showed it physically too much tonight and I shouldn’t have done that. That was bad on my part. I just have to learn from it.”

Spotsylvania wasn’t the only team frustrated with the lack of calls. “It’s been that way all year for us,” said James Monroe head coach Don Joy. “We’ve gotten accustomed to it. Today they didn’t react like they normally do, so I was actually proud of them.

“This is the proudest game I’ve had all year with them.”

After receiving the technical foul, Joy had some time to talk with his team and regroup.

“Keep playing,” he said. “We have nothing to lose. We’re here to play basketball.”

Joy was absolutely right.

Despite the loss, James Monroe still clinched a spot in the 3A–East tournament.

The Yellow Jackets will travel to either Loudoun Valley or Central (Woodstock) for the first game of the tournament.

With their win, Spotsylvania claimed the Conference 27 title and clinched home-court advantage for the first game of the tournament.

Simmons and Tyler also won player and coach of the year, respectively, for Conference 27.

“To this team? Home court advantage is very important,” Tyler said. “But at the same time, if we go on the road and do what we’re capable of doing, I think we can compete and that’s all we can ask. Once you get to this level, everybody’s good. It’s not like you’re going to walk in and surprise somebody. It’s just not happening.”

When the final buzzer sounded, Spotsylvania huddled together before being presented with the Conference 27 trophy.

And in a seemingly perfect ending, Kortni Simmons stood on the bench and held the trophy up high.

At that very moment, she stopped reflecting and did something she hadn’t done all game.

She looked up in the stands and smiled.