



2018 Long Island Class AA Championship Game

A Regional Final Of The NYSPHSAA State Championship Tournament

As big and boisterous as the crowd was for the Class A Championship Game, it was even bigger for the Class AA game, with hundreds of fans turned away from the much anticipated matchup between 21-3 Suffolk County Class AA Champion Hills East and 22-1 Nassau AA Champion Uniondale. Leading most of the way, the Thunderbirds fought off a fourth quarter Uniondale rally and pulled away to claim the schools first Class AA Long Island Championship and the right to represent Long Island at the NYSPHSAA New York State Final Four next weekend in Binghamton.

The game began like a three round boxing match, with the teams trading blows right from the start, but Hills began to build a lead on three straight baskets - a Kenny Mathurin reverse layup out of the low post, a steal and fast break basket by Kendall Nero-Clark, and a putback by Savion Lewis. Craig Brown interrupted with two free throws, but a three point play by Julien Crittendon made it 17-9 Thunderbirds and it was a 7 point game with one quarter complete.

Crittendon opened the second quarter scoring with a drive and looping shot from the lane, but fellow All-Tournament Team selection Danny Ashley answered with a nice drive of his own. A textbook pull-up jumper by Lewis from the right baseline, then his right wing three in transition and a beautiful assist to a soaring Nero-Clark on the break pushed the Hills East lead to 13, and it went back and forth from there to the 1:15 mark, when Uniondale's Justin Evelyn knocked down two free throws and Ashley found Brown on the break to cut it to 32-24 at the half.

Lewis opened the third quarter with a steal and fast break basket - he had 6 steals on the day - and Shane Dean kept it going, following him with a right wing three pointer for a 37-26 Hills lead. Nero-Clark added two free throws and Crittendon a steal and fast break basket for a 15 point advantage, but Muyawe Adesina's jump hook and Brown's two free throws kept the Knights within striking distance. The Thunderbirds renewed their attack, with Mathurin scoring from close range with defenders hanging all over him, Dean knocking down another three, this one from outside the right elbow, and Shamar Moore-Hough spotting up on the break and knocking down a three, all while the Knights struggled to find the basket. Dean finished the run with a putback, giving Hills an imposing 51-33 lead at the third quarter buzzer.

The Thunderbirds were in command as the fourth quarter got underway, but the Nassau County Champions still had some fight in them. Zion Styles, who had been quiet up to this point, converted a three point play to get things started and then Ashley quickly scored back to back, first from right around the basket and then after a steal, and the margin was down to 12, but Crittendon slowed their momentum with a big left wing three pointer. Styles kept at it, knocking down a right baseline jumper, but Lewis got the points back with two free throws and Mathurin rebounded and scored to make it 60-43 with 3:50 to play. Styles would not relent, going coast to coast with 3:21 left and Brown did his part too, scoring from underneath to make it a 13 point game with 2:50 to play, but there was no margin for error and Mathurin's spinning drive from the left wing was a big one and then Dean's two free throws at the 2:09 mark gave Hills a commanding 64-47 lead. Game over. 3/10/18