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OH, WHAT A NIGHT!

Girls basketball team pulls off amazing comeback victory on "Jen Bolduc Day" after false fire alarm forces partial evacuation of gym in fourth quarter

THE FALSE ALARM: Timeline

- **8:22:30** — Fire alarm "crickets" and screeching sirens begin sounding and alarm lights begin flashing all around the gymnasium.
- **8:22:36** — Officials halt the game with 4:10 remaining and Bristol Central leading, 39-29.
- **8:23:00** — The crowd, dumbfounded for about half a minute, begins getting up to leave, heeding the recorded message which tells them to evacuate. The coaches and players stay on the court.
- **8:24:49** — Announcer Stephen Ludlow, having received the word from Assistant Principal Donald King, states that "Everyone may remain in the gymnasium. It appears we have had a false alarm."
- **8:25:36** — Word that it was a false alarm reaches the people who have already evacuated outside of the building, and they begin returning inside.
- **8:29:25** — All fire alarms and lights shut off.
- **8:30:03** — Play resumes.

The saga which played itself out in the Richard E. Rogalski gymnasium Tuesday night could well have been the plot of a Hollywood movie.

It was certainly filled with enough changeable elements to create a dynamic story: an emotional, heartwarming beginning; a bizarre, chaotic middle; and a stunning, breathtaking end.

But few Hollywood writers would be creative enough to dream up the unpredictable sequence of events which created an unforgettable night of basketball Tuesday at Newington High School.



Above: Senior tri-captain Jen Bolduc, left, who played her first game of the season Tuesday, congratulates junior Carolyn Harrington after Harrington hit a crucial 3-pointer with 0:54 left.

Authorities pinpoint cause of false alarm



The false fire alarm that interrupted Tuesday's basketball game for more than seven minutes and which caused the partial evacuation of the gymnasium was caused by someone, most likely a student

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"Overall, it was a wild night."

—Coach Jim DiNello

"Was there a full moon tonight?"

—Kathleen Burdelski

The teams which took the floor at the Rogalski gym Tuesday were CCC South foes Newington (3-4 entering the game) and Bristol Central (0-7, but described by Indians coach Jim DiNello as "one of the best 0-7 teams you'll ever see").

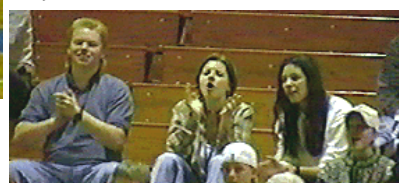
It didn't take long for the packed plot of the evening to start winding and weaving. First came the much-anticipated return of

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Below: Among those cheering for Jen Bolduc were, from left, Sean Vivier, Joanna Kornafel, Natalie Chavez, and Tara Boisvert.



Above: The very first alarm flash disrupts the game. Play was halted moments later. Far Above: Ticket seller Mrs. Guerin reacts as the crowd evacuates.



THE COMEBACK: 4th Quarter Timeline

- **8:00** — Newington trails, 29-27.
- **7:29** — Bristol Central increases lead to 31-27.
- **6:53** — BC increases lead to 33-27.
- **6:39** — BC increases lead to 35-27.
- **6:24** — Colleen Duggan scores 2; Newington cuts deficit to 35-29.
- **6:04** — BC increases lead to 37-29.
- **4:52** — BC increases lead to 39-29.
- **4:10** — Game paused by fire alarm; both teams get 7½-minute break.
- **3:40** — Duggan scores another 2; Newington cuts deficit to 39-31.
- **1:50** — Kathleen Burdelski hits a 3; Newington cuts deficit to 39-34.
- **1:13** — Carolyn Harrington and Veronique Fort pressure BC point guard into traveling near midcourt
- **0:54** — Harrington hits 3-pointer; Newington cuts deficit to 39-37.
- **0:45** — BC increases lead to 41-37.
- **0:18** — Burdelski fouled while scoring 2, gets old-fashioned 3-pt. play; Newington cuts deficit to 41-40.
- **0:16** — Sandy Ramos steals BC in-bounds pass, hits 2-pt. jumpshot; Newington goes ahead 42-41.
- **0:06** — Newington defense forces 5-second violation on BC in-bounds.
- **0:04** — Burdelski hits 1 of 2 FT's; Newington increases lead to 43-41.
- **0:00** — Newington wins, 43-41.

Girls basketball team wins on “wild night”

After Jen Bolduc’s return, fire alarm triggers amazing Newington comeback



Above: Manager Dennis Chow puts up a “Jen Bolduc Day” sign created by fan Tara Boisvert. The sign at top right was made by Chow himself, and the sign at top left was made by fellow manager Brendan Loy.

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tri-captain Jen Bolduc, who had been sidelined for the entire pre-season and the first seven games of the regular season while she recovered from Nov. 25 knee surgery.

Bolduc, a popular senior who was elected the school’s Homecoming Queen in October, received a very warm welcome from fans—she was cheered loudly when she came onto the floor for the first time 3:25 into the game, and again when she was first taken out near the end of the opening quarter—and was greeted by three “welcome back” posters which gave the unofficially named “Jen Bolduc Day” something of a mini-Senior Night feel. By all accounts, her return to the lineup and the resulting fan support gave the whole team an emotional boost.



Above: Jen Bolduc plays point guard during the first half of her first game back from knee surgery Tuesday night.

“It was great to have Jen back, and I think that helped us a lot,” teammate and fellow tri-captain Kathleen Burdelski said after the game. “It helped us contribute to the game, the whole game.”

“Jen Bolduc coming back obviously was a big lift,” stated coach Jim DiNello, who praised the “senior leadership” Bolduc provides.

When she was initially brought in with 4:35 left in the first quarter, Bolduc was substituted into the game along with Veronique Fort and Colleen Duggan. Announcer Stephen Ludlow stated that Fort and Duggan were coming in, and then added, “...and welcome back, Jen Bolduc.”

As the game progressed, Bolduc came in and out often, as Coach DiNello obviously sought to avoid overexerting her in her first sustained athletic event since field hockey season. Bolduc fell down a few times and made a few mistakes, but overall, her performance was rated by teammate Sandy Ramos as “outstanding.”

Bolduc herself stated that considering she has not played all year, “I think I did okay.” The senior tri-captain was less understated in her expression of how happy she is to be playing again: “It’s so good to be back and playing with them,” she said. “I feel like I’ve missed so much.”

Her teammates and fans were equally happy to see her back on the floor. “I’m so happy that Jen came back,” said junior Carolyn Harrington. “It was great to see Jen playing again,” stated fan Jim Fallia. “Jen played a hell of a game,” exclaimed fellow fan Derek MacDonald. “Welcome back, Jen.”

Athletic director Gerald McGrath echoed those sentiments. “It was great to see Jen back,” he said. “I have a deep respect for her, and I was happy to see them win with her in there. It’s going to take her a while to get back in top physical shape, but she’s definitely going to make a difference with this team.”

Perhaps the happiest spectator of all was Jen’s father, Rich Bolduc, who is also the cameraman for Channel 14 town access television. “I was very happy for her,” Mr. Bolduc said of his daughter. “I was excited. I couldn’t wait for tonight to get started.”

“I was concerned. I didn’t know how well she’d do on her knee,” he continued. “She fell down a few times, but she’s working really hard to come back, and I was really happy for her.”

“I’m not in full force, but I will be soon,” affirmed the younger Bolduc. “And when I start flying, you’ll know,” she added with a smile.

While Bolduc may not be “flying” on the court just yet, her heart was soaring Tuesday when she saw all the support from her loyal fans. “It was such a good feeling to know that so many people cared,” she said. “I came back, and they were all cheering for me and making signs and stuff. It was really cool.”



Above: A game official stops play as a fire alarm interrupts the fourth quarter.

All that emotion would certainly be enough to make for a compelling story. Coupled with a well-played game between two conference rivals, a game which was competitive throughout the first 3½ quarters, it would make for more than enough drama on any typical night of basketball.

But this was no typical night of basketball.

After playing well for the first half, then suffering a defensive lapse in the third quarter, Newington had pulled within two points by the start of the fourth. As the final quarter began, however, Bristol Central began to pull away, taking a ten-point lead with under five minutes to go.

Then things really got interesting.

With 4 minutes and 16 seconds remaining on the clock, a competitive game capped by an emotional tribute turned suddenly into something bizarre.

Bristol Central’s point guard had just passed the ball to her teammate on the wing when sirens started blaring and bright strobe-like lights began flashing throughout the

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Gym partially evacuated by false fire alarm

Many fans leave during 2½ minutes of chaos; players stay in gym

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gym. In the background, the grating alarm sounds which are often described by students as “crickets” could be heard emanating from alarm boxes throughout the building. The initial screech of the gym sirens was followed by a recorded announcement: “May I have your attention. May I have your attention. An alarm has been activated in the building. Please proceed to the stairways and exit the building. Do not use the elevators.” The announcement was followed again by the screeching sirens, and the cycle repeated itself. All the while, the “crickets” could still be heard chirping throughout Newington High School. The Rogalski gym suddenly sounded less like a basketball arena and more like a war zone.

It was a fire alarm.

One of the game officials halted play six seconds after the first sounding of the sirens, with 4:10 remaining. Players confusedly walked off the court and returned to their respective benches.

“I’m getting outta here. It’s a fire,” stated Newington team manager Dennis Chow.



Above: Sean Vivier grabs his coat and waits while fellow fans remain motionless as they try to decide what to do after fire alarms sounded throughout the gymnasium.



Above: As an alarm light flashes, fans leave the stands and slowly evacuate the Richard E. Rogalski gymnasium Tuesday.

“I’m outta here. You don’t have to tell me twice,” said fellow manager Mark Santos as the recorded announcer began to repeat her evacuation message. “No school tomorrow,” Santos added.

Just over thirty seconds after the alarms first sounded, as the recorded announcement completed its first repetition of the evacuation notice, the crowd—previously dumbfounded—began to get up and leave en masse. Players, coaches, and officials did not budge.

Down the hall a few dozen yards, members of a swim club were evacuating the pool and walking, wrapped in towels and dressed only in swim suits, into the hallway just outside the gym. They were joined by evacuees from the game, some of whom headed out the door toward their cars. Newington athletic director Gerry McGrath stood steadfast in the middle of the hallway,

presiding over the chaos.

A few hundred yards away in the building’s music wing, band members were leaving their rehearsal and heading outside into the cold. Near the front door of the school, two curious students and the school’s head custodian were racing to a security monitor, seeking to discover the source of the alarm.

All the while, the players stubbornly remained in the gym. A minute after play was halted, the Newington Indians were huddling together, apparently finding some way to block out the overwhelming screech of the sirens and to focus on the task still at hand—their game with Bristol Central, in which they now trailed 39-29. Amid the boisterous chaos of the fire alarm, tri-captain Sandy Ramos loudly exhorted her teammates not to give up on the game—a game which, for all they knew, might have to be cancelled because of an actual fire in the building.

Still, Ramos gave her pep talk: “We fought so hard to stay in it. Now c’mon! Get angry with everything. C’mon! We have 4:10! 4:10!”

As Ramos yelled, the sirens screamed. The scene was truly surreal.

Two minutes into the alarm, the stands were nearly empty as the crowd slowly filtered out of the gym. The NCTV-14 crew which televises the games had shut its equipment off and was ready to evacuate. No word yet on the cause of the alarm. Players, coaches, and officials still remained inside, waiting.

Then, two minutes and nineteen seconds after the first siren started blaring, the word finally came from



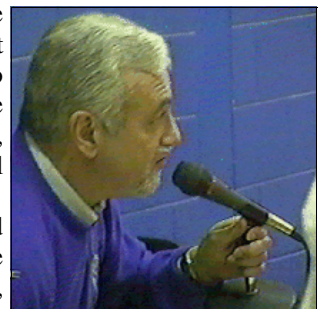
Above: Surrounded by the chaos of alarm-triggered strobe lights, sirens, and “crickets,” Sandy Ramos gives her team a pep talk. Newington trailed by 10 points at the time, with 4:10 remaining.

public address announcer Stephen Ludlow: “Everyone may remain in the gymnasium. It appears we have had a false alarm. Thank you all very much for your cooperation.”

Fans in line to evacuate turned around immediately and began returning to the stands. Within less than a minute, Ludlow’s news had begun to reach those already outside, and they started coming back as well. After 2½ minutes of chaos, normality began to return to the Rogalski gym.



Above: Newington’s players huddle together while all around them, fire alarm lights flash.



Above: Mr. Ludlow announces that it was just a false alarm.

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Fire alarm break proves a crucial momentum change as Indians mount stunning comeback

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It took an additional five minutes, however, before the alarms were shut off and play could resume.

Less than twenty seconds after the sirens finally stopped screaming, Mr. Ludlow took to the microphone again. "Okay, we're ready to go," he announced. "I'd like to commend the fans here... It was apparently a damaged smoke detector. No fire, no smoke. And we're ready to finish the final 4 minutes and 10 seconds, Rams and Indians."



Above: Veronique Fort, Kathleen Burdelski, and Colleen Duggan turn the heat up on defense.

By the time a game official blew the whistle and Bristol Central inbounded the ball at last, both teams had waited through a 7½-minute break.

That break would prove to be the turning point in a stunning Newington comeback. The drama of this evening was far from over.

With 3:40 on the clock—exactly thirty seconds after play resumed—Colleen Duggan scored to cut Bristol Central's lead to 39-31.

Newington's offense would not be heard from again for nearly two minutes. But the Indians' defense was heard from—loudly. Proving Coach DiNello's "defense wins" motto, Newington laid the foundation for its comeback by holding Central scoreless during that time period thanks to a steal, a forced jump ball, a defensive rebound, and a Colleen Duggan block.

Then the offense kicked in. Taking possession of the ball after Duggan's block and a subsequent 20-second timeout, the Indians got the ball to Burdelski, who nailed a three-pointer to cut the Rams' lead

to 39-34 with 1:50 remaining.

After more than thirty seconds of back-and-forth play with each team missing a scoring opportunity, Carolyn Harrington and Veronique Fort made one of the biggest defensive plays of the game—double-teaming Central's point guard just past midcourt and forcing her to travel. Coach DiNello leaped joyfully into the air as Newington's defense gave its offense another chance with 1:13 to go.

Right: Ryan Vicino and Stephanie Toohy look at the clock while Coach DiNello yells "hands up!" and Jen Bolduc cheers after Carolyn Harrington's 3-pointer.



Again, the offense delivered. Harrington, fresh off her defensive gem, now turned in perhaps the biggest shot of her high-school career to date: a three-pointer with 54 seconds remaining which pulled Newington to within 39-37.

Down by all of ten points when the alarm went off, the Indians were suddenly within two—and they still had time to work with.



Above: Carolyn Harrington gets nothin' but net on this three-pointer with 0:54 remaining.

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False alarm caused by prankster in music wing

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prankster, who hit a smoke detector in the north wing and knocked it out of alignment, according to information gathered Tuesday night from various sources including head custodian Rob Chmielorz and athletic director Gerry McGrath.

"Somebody down in the music area jumped up and broke a smoke detector," McGrath stated.

"Some 'genius' went by, smacked it, the top popped off," explained Jim Fallia, one of the first students to see the smoke detector after the alarm sounded.

Asked if the action was believed to be intentional, McGrath replied, "Definitely. Vandalism."

"We have no idea who did it," stated Chmielorz. "No witnesses, no nothing."

The only clue came from custodian Jerry Aubin, who, when asked why anyone would have been in the music wing during the game, said, "There's band rehearsal this evening also."

"It's a sticky situation," Chmielorz added, "because you don't know if it's real or not until you find out what's going on. It's nerve-wracking."



Above: Josh Visone (top) and Jim Fallia (bottom) watch the end of the game Tuesday. The two left the gym during the fire alarm and helped discover the source of the false alarm.

The process of determining what was going on occurred very quickly. It began with students Fallia and Josh Visone, who were watching the game through the glass windows of the gym doors when the sirens started blaring and the lights started flashing.

"We heard it, and all [Visone] said to me was, 'Let's go!'" Fallia said. "So I followed him."

"As soon as the alarm went off, I knew exactly where to go," said Visone, a sophomore who is quite knowledgeable of behind-the-scenes technologies and mechanisms at the school. Fallia, a junior, estimates they waited only about "five seconds" after hearing the alarm before zooming down the hallway to investigate.

Visone and Fallia raced to the "LCD readout" near the south front door, a panel which displays the location of any alarms in the building.

Not far behind them was Chmielorz, who had been inside the gym when the alarm went off. He immediately headed for the LCD alarm monitor as well.

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Indians win with defense, key shots

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Fresh off what was now an 8-0 run, Newington called timeout with 0:53 on the clock.

Coming out of that timeout, Newington's defense suffered a momentary lapse as it allowed Central to score an easy layup and build its lead back to 41-37. The Indians' offense then threw the ball away, and suddenly, with 40 seconds left and the ball in Central's hands, things looked bleak again. The Rams called a 20-second timeout to plot strategy.



Above: One of Bristol Central's stars laughs off a big mistake in the final minute, apparently thinking that her team had the victory well in hand.

Facing the same exact deficit—41-37—which they had faced before completing a comeback win earlier in the season against Windham, the never-say-die Indians did not give up. With 32 seconds to go, Burdelski fouled Central's star shooter and sent her to the line for a 1-and-1 free throw opportunity.

The first free throw rattled out, Fort grabbed the rebound, and Newington had life again. Then, Central's free-throw shooter committed the cardinal sin—fouling Fort, thus stopping the clock despite the fact that her team had the lead in the final minute. But she laughed off her mistake, perhaps figuring that her team had the game well in hand.

It was only a possession foul, and Newington inbounded from near midcourt. After a few seconds of dribbling, Burdelski drove to the hoop from the top of the key. As a whistle blew, indicating she had been fouled, Burdelski nailed a seemingly impossible line-drive shot over her shoulder. The basket and foul



Above: Kathleen Burdelski completes the first part of her three-point play, hitting a two-point shot as she is fouled.

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Cause of fire alarm quickly determined

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As the curious students and the dutiful head custodian raced to determine the cause of the alarm, players inside the gym huddled on the sidelines—apparently assuming the alarm was most likely false. Fans, however, began to slowly evacuate. They would be joined in the hallway outside the gym by members of a swim club, who had been forced to evacuate the pool because of the alarm.

As chaos overtook the gym and the nearby hall, Visone, Fallia, and Chmielorz continued to approach the LCD monitor. Afforded a head start by their initial location outside of the gym, the students got there first, whereupon they “checked where [the source of the alarm] was,” according to Visone, and “found out it was in the north end, east hall. So we went down there.”

En route, Visone and Fallia encountered Aubin, who was evidently in the north wing when the alarm sounded but unaware that the source of the problem was nearby. Aubin told the students which side of the building the “east hall” is on, and following his directions, they moved toward the location of the source of the alarm. There, they met Chmielorz, who had himself raced down from the LCD monitor.

Chmielorz “was looking around,” Visone related, when “I looked up and noticed that one of the smoke detectors was crooked.”

“What someone had done was, [they] actually pulled the casing off the filter, and that had set the alarm off,” Visone explained.

“It was tampered with, basically,” added Fallia.

“I found it, I pointed it out,” Visone continued. “The fire marshal showed up like five minutes later, and everything got straightened out.”

Part of that “straightening out” occurred even faster than the fire marshal's arrival. While Visone and Chmielorz were figuring out the details of what had happened, assistant principal Donald King was working his way down to the scene as well. Upon becoming aware, apparently thanks to Visone, of the cause of the alarm,

Chmielorz relayed the information to King. King quickly returned to the gym and gave Ludlow the message that the interruption had merely been a false alarm. Two minutes and 19 seconds after the alarm first sounded, Ludlow made the announcement: “Everyone may remain in the gymnasium. It appears we have had a false alarm.”

That announcement, Chmielorz said later, was designed to “let everybody know it was a false alarm, so everybody would be calmed down.”

Fans on their way out the door quickly turned around, and those who had already left the building soon got the word and began returning to the gym. The players remained in their huddles waiting for the alarm to stop.

More than 4½ minutes later—nearly 7 minutes after the false alarm initially sounded—the sirens and flashing lights finally shut off. Play resumed 38 seconds after that.

“Pretty funny,” Visone concluded. He then added whimsically, “I think it tainted the game. I think we won because of it.”

McGrath stated that he believes the prank alarm was unrelated to the basketball game. “No way. I don't think, down in that end of the building, [that] they knew what was going on here.”

Still, Newington's comeback victory—helped along by a momentum change which seemed to coincide with the 7½-minute break caused by the alarm—was the perfect finish to a frenetic evening for Visone and Fallia.

After returning to the gym while the alarms were still sounding, the two students then “went back down to see what had happened, and they were turning everything off.” Visone and Fallia came back to the gym again with about 1:20 left—just in time for them to see the Indians' comeback kick into high gear and give Newington the win. “It was just great,” said Fallia.

Visone concurred. “I couldn't believe it,” he said. “I was so excited. It was great.”

Indians win on “wild night” at NHS gym

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earned Burdelski a kiss on the cheek from Sandy Ramos, and a chance for a three-point play—which she nonchalantly converted. The basket and free throw cut Central’s lead to just one—41-40—with 18 seconds left.

Up stepped Ramos for the play of the game—the play which could make her a poster girl for “defense wins.” As the whole team pressured Central’s in-bounds play, Ramos picked off the pass and immediately converted a layup. With 16 seconds remaining, Newington—which had trailed 39-29 before the fire alarm—now led 42-41.

Bristol Central, stunned by what amounted to a five-point possession for the Indians, slowly moved the ball toward half-court as the seconds ticked away. The Rams finally called timeout with six seconds remaining.

After the timeout, “defense wins” prevailed again as the Indians, led by Ramos on the ball, pressured the in-bounds play so much that Central was called for a five-second violation. Newington had the ball back.

After a timeout, the Rams were forced to foul immediately. With four seconds on the clock, Burdelski went to the line for a 1-and-1. Her first free throw hit the back of the rim, bounced high up into the air, and back down into the hoop with a swish. With fate seemingly in their corner, the Indians now led 43-41.

Burdelski’s second foul shot missed and Central got the rebound, then



Above: An ecstatic Coach Jim DiNello yells “Yes!!!” at the moment of Newington’s win.

called a quick timeout with two seconds left. But the Rams’ efforts in those final seconds proved futile, thanks again to a stiff Newington defense, and the Indians walked away with a 43-41 win. A remarkable comeback was complete.

And it all started with the fire alarm.

“Maybe that fire alarm was a good thing for us,” Coach DiNello mused, almost laughing as he spoke. “It was like a real long timeout, which is what we needed!”

“I think, actually, it helped us, because it gave us a break,” Burdelski said of the 7½-minute “timeout” caused by the alarm. “They had a couple of baskets, and their momentum was building. And after that break, the momentum was back on our side again.”

So how *does* one sum up a night that featured the emotional return of an injured player, the bizarre interruption of a false fire alarm, and the stunning comeback of a determined, never-say-die Newington team?

“Was there a full moon tonight?” Burdelski quipped.

“It makes an interesting story to tell my dad,” stated fan Sean Vivier.

Asked if she will ever forget Tuesday’s game, Bolduc replied, “No, I won’t. Not at all. Not at all.”

“Overall,” said Coach DiNello, “it was a wild night.”



Above: After stealing Bristol Central’s in-bounds pass with 18 seconds left in the game, Sandy Ramos scores the go-ahead basket for Newington Tuesday night.

Right: Jen Bolduc, who returned to action Tuesday for the first time all season and who had the game unofficially dedicated to her, hugs an overwhelmed Ramos after the go-ahead shot. Bolduc ran out onto the court to congratulate Ramos after Central called timeout with six seconds remaining.

