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Girls Basketball

One goal reached: Syracuse Academy of Science earns spot in girls basketball playoffs

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Members of the Syracuse Academy of Science girls basketball team hears a pregame message from coach Reggie Pickard before a Dec. 19 home game against Tully. The Atoms, now 8-6, are in the sectional Class C playoffs for the first time in four seasons. (Mike Greenlar | mgreenlar@syracuse.com)

By Nolan Weidner | nweidner@syracuse.com
on January 28, 2014 3:20 p.m.

Four years, and a ton of losses, after girls basketball began at the Syracuse Academy of Science, the Atoms are about to make their first appearance in the Section III playoffs.

The Atoms, who won one game in their first two seasons, are 8-6 after a [win over Onondaga](#) on Monday night. The team clinched a playoff berth last Thursday with a 72-70 victory at Weedsport.

"They're very excited," head coach Reggie Pickard said. "They're really looking forward to the experience."

SAS has already won more than 40 percent of its 16 [Patriot League games](#) and 40 percent of its 18-game overall schedule, so the Atoms are in the playoffs on two counts.

The Atoms, who finished 6-10 last season and missed a playoff berth by one game, were 3-5 at one point this season but have won five of their last six games. SAS is tied with Tully (8-4) for third in the Patriot League.

SAS, which saw its home game against Pulaski tonight canceled because the North Country district didn't have school today, has had to make big strides at the free throw line and overcome the recent loss of starting sophomore guard Love Nicholson.



Nicholson injured the ACL in her left knee in a Jan. 16 game against Cato-Meridian and is out for the season. Pickard said another sophomore, Mercedes Smith, stepped into the starting role and has played well.

In the team's last five games, Smith has averaged more than 17 points.

"She's been playing really, really well," Pickard said.

Others who have raised their level of play include senior point guard Dominique Coker and freshman Taj Huddleston, Pickard said.

They've all combined to take pressure off of the team's scoring leader, eighth-grader Azariah Wade, who averages more than 20 points per game.

One of the big improvements the team has made is at the free throw line.

"We were terrible," Pickard said. "We've worked very hard in practice. We've been hitting our free throws."

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