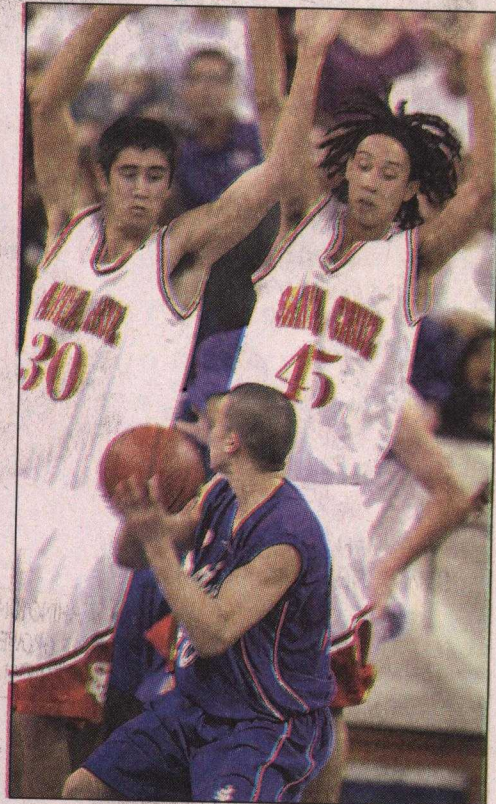


# Cards No. 1

## Dream season complete: Santa Cruz wins state

Basketball

3-20-05



Cliff Sammet and Jesse LoBue stand tall in the face of a St. Augustine shooter.

## Junior's 27 leads way for Santa Cruz

By STEVE NELSON  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SACRAMENTO — It was a game of ups and downs that ended on the ultimate high for Santa Cruz High's boys basketball team, and it ended with the ball in the hands of senior point guard Junior Russell.

Russell scored a game-high 27 points despite playing on a tender left ankle and injuring his left knee late in the first quarter, and the Cardinals beat previously undefeated St. Augustine of San Diego 67-56 in the Division III state championship game Saturday at Arco Arena.

Russell dribbled out the final seconds and then triumphantly threw the ball high overhead, setting off a celebration on the arena floor that ended with a Santa Cruz dogpile at center court.

"It's been a goal of mine since the eighth grade, to win the state championship," said Russell, who scored 11 points in a decisive 20-2 run by the Cardinals (36-1 overall) that started with them trailing the Saints 49-41 and ended with Santa Cruz up 61-51 with 2:35 to play in the game.

Saturday's win capped a remarkable 30th and final season for coach Pete Newell Jr., who goes out having won his first Central Coast Section title, earning his first wins in the Northern California regional playoffs, and claiming the first-ever boys basketball state championship for a Santa Cruz County team.

As always, Newell gave all the credit to his players. "These kids set as a goal the state championship," Newell said. "I don't think I in my

### More Inside

■ Sammet says he'll miss regular lectures from coach Pete Newell.  
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## Crowd gets 'W' for effort

SACRAMENTO — The chants of "Santa Cruz ... What?" heard throughout Arco Arena Saturday afternoon could have just as easily been "Ghostbusters!" as the Cardinals' fans stole a scene right out of the movie "Ghostbusters 2."

The scene in the movie is a cheesy one. A blob of gloom and bad juju is about to take over New York City. To stop it, the entire city breaks into song. It works, blowing the blob into a million pieces.

Santa Cruz supporters from across the state applied the same tactic by offering verbal support for the Cardinals in their 67-56 win over St. Augustine of San Diego to bring home the county's first state basketball title.

The game was a tough one for the Cardinals. It was no easier for the fans. Sure, when things were going well, it was fine. But as they watched the Cardinals unravel in the third quarter, they felt helpless.

Anchored to their chairs, they couldn't give the team a pep talk or jump on the court and make a steal. They couldn't take their sons, brothers, neighbors and heroes aside and advise them to stop, take a breath and reset — that they would be proud of them no matter what. No, all they could do was yell. So yell they did.



Santa Cruz center Chris Sharp contests a St. Augustine shot Saturday in the state title game.

It started late in the third quarter, as sporadic as the Cardinals' play. The loss of center Chris Sharp to fouls and the disparity between Santa Cruz's nine fouls in the quarter to the Saints' one made their calls weak, desperate. But slowly, surely the voices of the more than 1,500 people dressed in red and black began to come together.

It started out slow, then it started to grow. Voices joined, one next to the other. Soon, every possession, every defensive stand, the fans raised

their voices in support.

Sure, they got tired of chanting "Defense! Defense!" over and over again. Sure their throats grew hoarse. Of course their hands hurt from clap-clap-clapping over and over again.

But they hung in there, and so did Santa Cruz. A Junior Russell layup here, two Michael Northey free throws there, a Cliff Sammet block — the



JULIE JAG



STATE CHAMPIONSHIP



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

**ABOVE:** Junior Russell (1) and Chris Sharp close in on St. Augustine star Andre Hardy during Saturday's Division III state championship game at Arco Arena in Sacramento. The Cardinals pulled out a 67-56 victory.  
**BELOW:** Santa Cruz coach Pete Newell gives direction to his players from the bench. The game was the last in his 30-year career as coach of the Santa Cruz High boys basketball team. Thanks to his players, Newell goes out a winner.

Cardinals

Continued from Page C1

heart believed that, (but) they had this tremendous belief in themselves and each other. As great an achievement as it was to win the state, to win it with this group of young men makes it even more special."

Russell missed his entire sophomore season with a knee injury, then played last year with a torn ACL, but Newell knew having him on the floor this season gave his team a chance to do special things. At the start of the season, Newell told his team, "The keys are in Junior's hands and he's going to drive it as far as he wants to go. I have a lot of confidence in his abilities. I know he has a burning desire to compete at the highest level."

The Cardinals jumped out to a quick 10-2 lead, but momentum appeared to shift when Russell hobbled off the court after missing a shot and landing awkwardly with 2:36 left in the first period. He didn't stay out for long, though, returning just 15 seconds later.

"For Junior to score 27 points in the championship game on a knee that was very painful for him is tremendous," Newell said. "There was no way other than amputation that Junior was going to go out of the game."

The Saints didn't go away either, and after trailing throughout the first half, they took their first lead at 35-34 early in the third quarter on an Andre Hardy jumper.

At that point the fouls started stockpiling against the Cardinals, and the foul total reached 10-1 in favor of St. Augustine when Cliff Sammet picked up his third with 2:29 remaining in the third. Along the way, junior center Chris Sharp fouled out and senior guard Austin Swift picked up his fourth, sending him to the bench for the final 4:37 of the period.

"I felt we were getting cheated a little bit," Swift said. "I was a lit-

*'There was no way other than amputation that Junior was going to go out of the game.'*

PETE NEWELL  
ON POINT GUARD  
JUNIOR RUSSELL

post. But the biggest play of the game came at the end of the third quarter.

Battling back from the 49-41 deficit, the Cardinals went in to the final period down just three, 49-46, when Russell buried a 3-pointer as the quarter buzzer sounded after Sammet came up with a steal and passed ahead to him.

"That came off a great play by Cliff," Newell said. "It was a huge momentum lift for us to go into the fourth quarter, Junior making that shot."

From there, it was all Santa Cruz.

Michael Norteye gave the Cardinals the lead back at 50-49 when he snuck in a basket down low between a pair of taller defenders. Swift followed with a pair of baskets sandwiched between a Jesse LoBue jumper on the right wing.

Russell capped the 20-2 outburst with a layup on a 2-on-1 break after another steal by Sammet.

LoBue finished with 15 points and five rebounds, and Sammet added nine points and game highs of 13 rebounds and six blocked shots. Sophomore guard Robert Hayes led the Saints with 20 points in a thrilling matchup with Russell, and senior forward Hardy added 19 points and 10 boards.

"Him and our guy really went

Sammet



coach of the Santa Cruz High boys basketball team. Thanks to his players, Newell goes out a winner.

# Sammet to miss Newell's lectures

By STEVE NELSON  
and TOM MOORE  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITERS

SACRAMENTO — When a reporter asked Cliff Sammet in the postgame press conference what it felt like to be the source of coach Pete Newell Jr.'s ire Saturday during the Cardinals' state championship win over St. Augustine, Newell interrupted to make the point that Saturday wasn't the first time.

It was the last, however, with Newell leaving the team after this, his 30th season, and Sammet, a 6-foot-8 senior forward, going off to play basketball at Santa Clara next season.

True, Sammet has been on the receiving end of Newell's lectures plenty of times in his three-year varsity career, but Sammet said he wouldn't have it any other way.

"It's been a good run," Sammet said of his relationship with Newell. "It's been three years of a good yelling spree. When he's yelling at me, I know he's doing it for the best. If he wasn't yelling at me, I'd start to get worried that maybe he didn't care anymore."

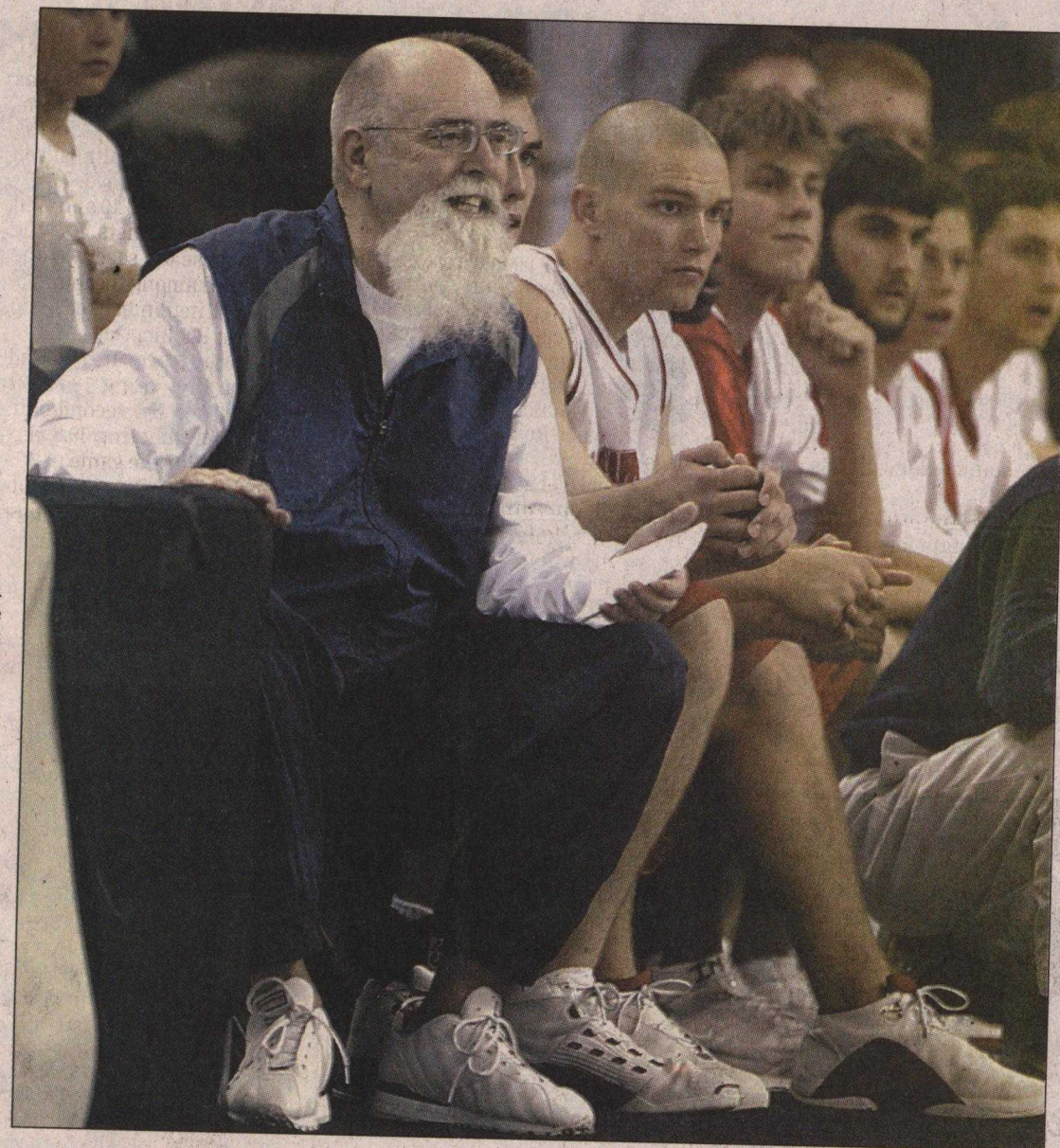
"I feed off it more than I take it as a negative. It gets me to work hard for the team, and I think the team sees that and works off it as well."

Newell had reason to raise his voice a few more times than usual Saturday, with the Cardinals down by eight at one point in the third quarter and going into the fourth trailing for one of the few times of this 36-1 season.

But Santa Cruz, usually a third-quarter team, used the fourth period this time to knock out the Saints, outscoring them 21-7 over the final eight minutes. Sammet was in the middle of the action throughout, playing 29 of a possible 32 minutes and scoring nine points to go along with six blocks, 13 rebounds and three steals.

He put the punctuation mark on the win when he swatted an Andre Hardy shot out of bounds in the closing seconds.

Hardy, a 6-5 senior forward and



St. Augustine's leading scorer, challenged Sammet on several occasions, a pleasant surprise for Sammet. "I usually have a lot of people pump fake me because they're used to playing against taller guys," he said. "It seemed like he had the confidence to go up."

Sammet dealt some punishment during the game but took the brunt of it when the final horn sounded. He did a swan dive at center court and soon found himself on the bottom of a pile of Cardinals.

"I dove and two seconds later I saw Billy (Pedersen), probably the biggest player on our team, pretend like he was playing football," Sammet said. "After that, it was just a blur."

Sammet won't have much time to savor the team's historic state title. He's off to San Diego with teammates Michael Norteye, Junior Russell and Pedersen to join the Santa Cruz High baseball team for a tournament in San Diego. Their first game is Monday.

■ **THE UNDERCLASSMEN:** Juniors Jesse LoBue and Chris Sharp had wildly different experiences in the state championship game, but celebrated the same conclusion and shared a commitment to leading

next year's Santa Cruz team.

LoBue was the team's second-leading scorer, finishing with 15 points, five rebounds, three steals and a blocked shot. The 6-foot-6 forward knocked down two technical free throws in the third quarter to start an avalanche as Santa Cruz finished strong on a 26-7 run.

Sharp, a 6-foot-6 center, started strong, but found quick foul trouble. After picking up his fourth foul early in the third quarter he took a seat on the bench. Inserted into the game late in the third, he immediately picked up his fifth and had a good seat for Santa Cruz's fourth-quarter performance. He finished with four points and a bloody lip.

Sharp said he hadn't thought about a senior season until the game ended.

"Me and Jesse turn into the team leaders," Sharp said.

Both LoBue and Sharp plan to follow the footsteps of Eric Van Vliet, Cliff Sammet and Austin Swift, spending time this offseason working on their games at San Jose's West Valley Basketball with Bobby Bramlett.

Sharp's role grew during the year, and he hit the game's biggest basket in the win over Campolin-

do of Moraga. He's not sure what to expect next year.

"It's going to be different," Sharp said.

LoBue became a huge weapon as the season progressed, scoring in double figures over the final six games of the year. He's also looking at an uncertain future next season as a new post-Pete Newell era begins.

"I don't know what to expect," LoBue said. "It's a new coach. Me and Chris are going to have to step up."

■ **SUING UP:** Senior Eric Van Vliet suited up and ran through layup drills, but kept his promise that he wouldn't play. The 6-foot-10 center has been recovering from early-season knee surgery and hadn't played in a game all season. The state championship was his first in uniform.

Despite foul trouble to Sharp, Sammet and Swift, Newell said he wasn't tempted to turn to Van Vliet. "We were just happy he was able to suit up," Newell said.

"We weren't going to jeopardize his college future for one possession."

Van Vliet has committed to Fresno State. But Fresno State coach Ray Lopes resigned this week.

2:29 remaining in the third. Along the way, junior center Chris Sharp fouled out and senior guard Austin Swift picked up his fourth, sending him to the bench for the final 4:37 of the period.

"I felt we were getting cheated a little bit," Swift said. "I was a little bit heated. Coach talked to me and told me to calm down, come back in the game and try to do what I can to help win a state championship."

Swift scored six of his seven points in the fourth quarter when the Cardinals changed their offense to feature him at the high

and five rebounds, and Sammet added nine points and game highs of 13 rebounds and six blocked shots. Sophomore guard Robert Hayes led the Saints with 20 points in a thrilling matchup with Russell, and senior forward Hardy added 19 points and 10 boards.

"Him and our guy really went at it," Saints coach Mike Haupt said of Russell and Hayes. "That kid (Russell) looks like a man."

He sure played like one Saturday.

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## Jag

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players seemed energized by the fans. Or was it the other way around?

Only the players can say whether the crowd's boisterous, united support sparked the fourth-quarter surge that eventually was the difference in the game. But it must have had some effect. How could anything be unaffected by the power of all that concentrated hope and goodwill?

Like the residents of New York in the movie, the Santa Cruz fans at Arco Arena and those listening on the radio at home can take pride in knowing they did their part. For a little while, the people of an entire city, a county, spoke as one.

May the aura they created last as long as the memory of this historic game.

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## Santa Cruz 67, St. Augustine 56

St. Augustine 10 21 18 7 — 56

Santa Cruz 16 18 12 21 — 67

**St. Augustine (31-1)** — Hardy 5-12 9-11 19, Manalo 1-5 0-0 3, Hayes 8-17 2-5 20, Pinkney 2-8 1-2 5, Parker 0-1 0-0 0, Johnson 1-7 2-4 4, Holt 2-2 1-2 5, Wooten 0-1 0-0 0, Warnock 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 19-55 15-24 56.

**Santa Cruz (36-1)** — Russell 9-22 7-12 27, Swift 3-7 1-2 7, Sammet 3-8 3-4 9, Lobue 5-7 4-6 15, Sharp 2-4 0-0 4, Norteye 1-1 3-6 5, Pederson 0-2 0-0 0, Haussler 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 23-51 18-30 67.

Halftime—Santa Cruz 34-31. 3-point goals—Santa Cruz 3-11 (Russell 2-5, Lobue 1-3, Swift 0-1, Sammet 0-1, Pederson 0-1), St. Augustine 3-16 (Hayes 2-6, Manalo 1-3, Wooten 0-1, Parker 0-1, Johnson 0-5). Fouled out—Sharp. Rebounds—Santa Cruz 43 (Sammet 13), St. Augustine 42 (Hardy, Pinkney 10). Assists—Santa Cruz 12 (Russell 3), St. Augustine 6 (Manalo, Johnson 2). Technical fouls—Holt. Total fouls—Santa Cruz 20, St. Augustine 24.