

Riverton coach raises the 'steaks'

By Kurt Kragthorpe
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Somehow, Riverton coach Ron Ence sensed the 5A girls' state basketball championship would not be decided by any kind of glamorous play.

In the locker room at halftime Saturday, Ence figured it was time to make a bold statement, to increase the value of his standing offer for any Silverwolves defender willing to absorb a charging foul.

That explains how senior forward Whitney Saunders left Salt Lake Community College's gym with a precious strand of the net and the promise of a steak dinner from her coach.

No, the usual prize of pizza would not be sufficient this time.

"Who knows if it'll happen?" Ence said after Riverton's 41-37 win over Layton. "It sounded good at the time."

Oh, it had better happen — unless maybe the Silverwolves' bounty program for taking a charge violates a Utah High School Activities Association rule.

Toughness was the trait that was going to win this game. Each team shot 30 percent from the field and especially struggled in the second half. Layton made only one basket (and four free throws) in the fourth quarter.

Yet the Lancers had a



Riverton coach **Ron Ence** congratulates **Shelby Richards** as the Silverwolves celebrate winning the 5A girls basketball state championship.

chance to win. As the clock ticked inside 30 seconds with Layton trailing by one point, Maddi Smith drove into the lane, crashed into Saunders and forced up a shot as the whistle blew. Charge.

"I knew we needed a little turn of — what is it called? — momentum," Saunders said, searching for the right words after posting nine rebounds and 12 rebounds in an emotionally draining game.

"Whitney's just done that all year," Ence said. "She's not going to jump out at you, like, 'Oh, look at that.' She just gets it done every night."

Riverton then made one of the second half's few efficient offensive plays for either team,

with Shelby Richards driving and feeding Gerika Ballard for a layup and a 40-37 lead with 18 seconds left. Layton looked for a tying three-pointer, but never even got a shot away. That's because Richards stole the ball and added a clinching free throw.

Richards said she was simply responding to assistant coach Jodi Lee's exhortation during a timeout: "C'mon, kid, right here. Give it everything you've got."

There was a lot of that going around Saturday. This 5A title game will not be remembered for any kind of artistic merit, but the girls sure

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RIVERTON BASKETBALL: Newspaper article



TOP LEFT: Ron Ence accepts the 5A trophy.

TOP RIGHT: Whitney Saunders is congratulated.

MIDDLE: Ence with Shelby Richards and Saunders.

MIDDLE RIGHT: The scoreboard tells the story.

LOWER RIGHT: Ence is congratulated by boys basketball coach Steve Galley.

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got after it. The teams combined for 27 offensive rebounds, 22 steals and five blocked shots, all serving as evidence of effort.

"We just gutted up and played good defense," Ence said.

File this coaching achievement under irony, then.

Thirty years ago, Ence played for Utah State's NCAA Tournament team that was known for its offensive prowess, not necessarily for anything the Aggies were doing on the other end on the floor.

So after announcing his retirement last spring and then coming back for a ninth season, Ence coached a team that was overshadowed by powerful Bingham in Region 4, earning a No. 3 seed in its league. But then Layton knocked off Bingham in Friday's semifinals and the Silverwolves played their way to the championship that eluded Ence in 2009, when his 24-0 team was upset by American Fork in the finals.

"I'm just elated for these kids," Ence said. "Riverton's been hanging around every year ... we finally got over that mountain."

All because the slender Saunders stood her ground, took a charge and earned a bonus — following the example of a teammate, earlier in the second half.

