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Pioneers grind to another win

When the Pioneers stumbled on their home court to Stone Memorial last week, coach Chris Sullens pondered if his team had enough grit to get a district title.

He may have gotten his answer Friday night in Rhea County.

Facing the fired-up Eagle team on its senior night and down a key member of their rotation for the most of the game, the Pioneers came back to win 65-64 to get an emphatic 20th victory.

"I can't say it enough about how much our kids battled," said Sullens. "The stands were packed for a senior night. It was loud. We had some obstacles. "Our kids just refused to back down."

While Irving Espinoza's 18 points, a team-high, were vital, it was a steal late that may have been his biggest play. The Pioneers were clinging to a one-point lead when the sophomore got his hands on the ball to stop the Eagles from regaining the lead.

Isaiah Grayson got a chance to polish off Rhea County at the line, hitting a pair of clutch free throws down the stretch after snaring a rebound in traffic and being fouled. It was part of a 16-point night for the senior, who continues to carry a bigger offensive load in District 6-AAA games.

Grayson is averaging 14.0 points per game for the 20-5 Pioneers, but his average has jumped to 19 points per game in the team's six district games.

Defense was the difference though, according to Sullens.

"Our guys locked in after halftime. Chance Hobbs took on a big challenge and worked hard for 32 minutes," said Sullens. "We weren't going to stop battling."

Tyree Ladet scored 12 points in the victory, his third game in a row in double figures. Hobbs finished

with seven, while Sloan Seymour scored six before leaving with an injury.

Sullens also praised his bench's involvement. While not packing the stat sheet - Caleb Newby scored four points and Austin Hodges hit two free throws for the only offense off the bench - coach Sullens had to count on his bench after losing a starter midway through the second quarter.

Seymour was involved in a big collision in a race for the ball. The junior stayed down for a couple minutes, but ultimately was able to walk off the court. He didn't return, and his availability this week is still undetermined.

His absence would be big as the Pioneers prepare to play host to Cookeville Tuesday night (7:30 p.m. at Charlie Dalton Gym) and travel to White County Friday to complete the regular season.

Sullens sees the upcoming games as a continuation of what his team started Friday in Dayton.

"I'm proud of the guys. Step one is complete. Now it's on to step two."

LADY PIONEERS ROCKED BY RHEA

Fueled by a 27-5 second quarter, Rhea County easily dispatched the Lady Pioneers 82-43 Friday night.

It was the fifth straight loss for Warren County, which fell to 11-15 overall and 1-5 in District 6-AAA play.

The Lady Pioneers held a 18-16 lead after the first quarter, but the Lady Eagles swished six 3-pointers in the second period en route to building a 20-point halftime lead.

It only grew in the second half as Rhea County improved to 22-4 overall and 5-1 in district.

Lady Pioneer scoring - Tyra Wright 12, Megan Patch 9, Callie Cathcart 7, Grace Rains 6, Bri Young 5, Emily Mikkola 2, Beth Vaughn 1, Kam Nowlin 1.

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Tournament set to start Monday

The madness has reached McMinnville a month early.

The most anticipated brackets locally aren't for March Madness. The brackets on everybody's minds arrived Friday when the 5-6 grade elementary basketball season completed.

At the culmination of 20 games this week at Warren County Middle School, two champions will emerge.

The two teams playing on their home court enter the postseason as the heavy favorites.

Both WCMS teams enter the tournament after going 8-0 in the regular season. The Pioneers and Lady Pioneers also have proven their skills in tourney play, winning the preseason 5-6 grade tournament held at Morrison Elementary School.

Both teams will have to wait until Thursday to take the court, but action will get started much sooner.

Four games are on the slate Monday and Tuesday nights, where teams either advance or see their seasons end.

Postseason play begins with the Bobby Ray Lady Stars taking on the Irving College Lady Tigers at 4 p.m. The second girls game of the night is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. and features the West Elementary Lady Wizards matching up against the Hickory Creek Lady Hawks.

FINAL STANDINGS	
GIRLS A DIVISION	
1. WCMS	8-0
2. Dibrell*	5-3
2. Boyd	5-3
4. Hickory Creek	2-6
5. West	0-8
GIRLS B DIVISION	
1. Centertown*	7-1
1. Morrison	7-1
3. Eastside	4-4
4. Irving College	1-7
4. Bobby Ray	1-7
BOYS A DIVISION	
1. WCMS	8-0
2. Boyd	5-3
3. Hickory	4-4
4. Dibrell	3-5
5. West	0-8
BOYS B DIVISION	
1. Centertown	8-0
2. Morrison	6-2
3. Eastside*	3-5
3. Bobby Ray	3-5
5. Irving College	0-8
*WON TIEBREAKERS	

In Monday's boys action, the Bobby Ray Stars face the Irving College Tigers (5:15 p.m.) and the West Elementary Wizards face off against the Dibrell Wildcats (7:45 p.m.).

Tuesday's action begins with a clash between the Morrison Lady Eagles, who slipped to a No. 2 seed after a 30-12 loss Friday to Centertown, and the Boyd Lady Broncos. Boyd (5-3) finished in a tie with Dibrell for second place in its division, but a coin toss dropped the Lady Broncos to the third seed.

Tuesday's first game begins at 4 p.m. and is followed by the Morrison Eagles facing the Hickory Creek Hawks (5:15 p.m.), the Eastside Lady Bulldogs squaring off against the Dibrell Lady Wildcats (6:30 p.m.) and the Eastside Bulldogs versus the Boyd Broncos (7:45 p.m.).

After completing an 8-0 regular season, the Centertown Warriors earned a bye into the semifinals. The Warriors await the winner of Monday's Wizards-Wildcats matchup. The Warriors will face the winner at 7:45 p.m. Thursday.

The Centertown Lady Warriors also earned a bye and will play Thursday at 6 p.m. The Centertown girls will face the winner of Monday's matchup between the Lady Wizards and Lady Hawks.


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