

Ashton Smith goes deep on senior night with game high 14 points



Photo: Douglas Cottle

Warrior Ashton Smith during TCHS Senior Night basketball action with the Meridian Hawks. The Warriors rolled the Hawks 46-14.

By Lenny Sementi

Ashton Smith shined on senior night taking full advantage of her last game at Tuscola's gymnasium matching the visiting Meridian Lady Hawks on the scoreboard all on her own in a 46-14 Lady Warrior rout of the Hawks on Monday, Jan. 28.

Smith hit four threes enroute to a game high 14 points on 5 of 7 from the floor and 4 of 5 from three point land.

Classmates Natalie Bates, Grace Dietrich, and Lexie Russo were all smiles, as well, following the Warriors' 21st victory of the year.

Russo was next up in the scoring department dropping in 12 points, while posting a double-double with 11 rebounds in her last game on the home floor of the Warriors. Bates delivered on both ends of the floor adding six points to her season stats, four assists, four rebounds and a game high five steals. Dietrich was strong on the boards as well securing five rebounds and found her way into the passing lanes for four steals.

As always, the Warriors' defense was smothering, allowing no more than six points total in any one quarter. They gave up just eight points in the first half limiting the Hawks to just two field goals. Smith hit her first three three minutes into the game and drained her second less than a minute later, and Russo converted on a pass from Bates giving the Warriors a 9-4 lead after one.

Russo and Bates combined to score the first seven on the second period to make it 16-4, which allowed Kohlbecker to look to his bench early. Tuscola held the Hawks without a field goal for nearly 10 minutes, giving the visitors little hope of a comeback. Abbey Jacob and Brynn Tabeling added baskets late in the stanza as the Warriors increased their lead to double-digits entering the locker room in front 22-8.

Tuscola blew it open in the third thanks to

eight points by Smith and four points by Russo, which pushed the Tuscola advantage to 26 points at 40-14. That would be all the points the Warriors would allow shutting out Meridian the final eight minutes of the game to deliver the victory.

"Ashton came through for us tonight shooting," stated Kohlbecker. "This group of seniors will truly be missed they never have a bad night in the effort department."

The Lady Warriors stumbled in the their final two regular season contests falling to a pair of state ranked teams. Altamont used a big second half to upset Kohlbecker's crew in a high scoring affair 68-53 one night later. Then fell 56-24 to Sullivan on Friday, Feb. 1.

It was a tale of two halves at Altamont. Tuscola was lights out on the offensive end in the first two frames then struggled to score after the break. Threes were wild early with the two squads combining for 16 threes in the first 16 minutes of action. Coach K. got two treys each from Bates, Dietrich, and Smith that helped the Warriors to a double-digit advantage late in the second period before the hosts hit two of their own in the final minutes including a buzzer beater to initiate the comeback.

The rims closed up for the Warriors after the break, but the threes kept falling for Altamont who utilized a 21-point effort jumping in front 51-38 entering the fourth. Tuscola found its offense late despite going 8 for 19 from the charity stripe. It was too late, however, to trade points with the 20-win team. Bates ended the night with 18 points, 14 coming in the first half, four rebounds, and three steals. Dietrich posted 13 points and five rebounds while Smith donated eight points. Russo led the way on the boards securing seven rebounds, and Tabeling accounted for the Warriors only three points in the third

and four total in the game.

"We played really well offensively for a half. Had a 12-point lead with about 30 seconds to go and they made two threes, one a prayer at the buzzer," Kohlbecker was quoted as saying. "We struggled with their pressure defense and height in the second half. Natalie was awesome, and, Ashton continued her hot hand."

They ran into another buzz saw a few nights later in Sullivan. Tuscola erased an early 8-0 run by the Lady Redskins to start the game with a pair of deep threes from Dietrich and two free throws from Russo to climb to within two at the first buzzer down 10-8. From that point forward it was Sullivan on the offensive end posting runs in all three frames while limiting Tuscola to just 16 points in the last 24 minutes of the game to secure a regular season Central Illinois Conference title.

Effort never waned despite the lid on the basket in the second half. Six girls in all recorded steals for Tuscola who came up with 14 in the game. Tabeling was tops, swiping four, followed by Bates and Dietrich with three each.

"Our girls played hard, but offensively we were a disaster, you can't win when you miss layups and shoot under 20 percent," stated Kohlbecker.

Tuscola ends the regular season with a 21-9 mark overall and will travel south to Pana for the first round of the IHSA regional tournament. They enter as the second seed in the Regional and will look to avenge a loss to Arthur-Lovington-Atwood-Hammond in the opener in hopes of a shot at top seeded Pana in the finals for the right to move on to the sectionals.

"I feel we ran into a perfect storm, they were playing for the conference championship, it was their senior night, had Hall of Fame inductions, so it was packed house, and we hadn't prac-



Photo: Douglas Cottle

Warrior seniors are pictured with their parents during TCHS Senior Night pre-game ceremony. Players and parents from left are Lexie Russo with parents Mike and Tina, Grace Dietrich with parents Doug and Christine, Natalie Bates with parents Sandy and Steve, and Ashton Smith with parents Shannon and Michael.

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Around the Halls

gram.

Friday, Feb. 1 the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) held their weekly meeting.

Great job to the Tuscola Warriorettes and Warrior Babes at the IDTA home competition on Saturday, Feb. 2!

Monday, Feb. 4 Tuscola FFA Officers and member went to Richland Community College in Decatur to meet with the National FFA Officers. In workshops, they learned to find joy in every situation, your passions have a purpose, strive to reach your goals, failure can be good; learn from it and do better next time, and more!

The 2019 TCHS Spring Musical is Once Upon A Mattress! Come see it at 7 p.m. on Thursday, March 7 through Saturday, March 9 and at 2 p.m. on Sunday, March 10.

By Caleigh Parsley

A huge thank you to Joe's Pizza for giving 10 percent off the entire bill to families who mentioned #TuscolaKind! Despite having two snow (wind chill) days on Wednesday and Thursday, #TuscolaKind week continued and ended with "Get in the Spirit of Kindness!" The Junior class won the Pack the Pig contest with a total of \$214.51 raised for the Douglas County Mental Health After School Pro-



Submitted photo

Pictured in the front row from left are Hannah Lemay, Morgan Jones, Olivia Fulk, Maddie Green. Pictured in the back row from left are Jordan Stowe (National FFA Southern Region Vice President), Caleigh Parsley, Luke O'Leary (National FFA President), Marisa Poole, Parker Norman, and Cameron Ochs.