

12th Region Champions...

Third time's the charm for Casey County in region finals

By Derek Brightwell
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All year long, the Casey County girls basketball team had one goal in mind — get to the state tournament.

And while that is every team's goal, for the Rebels it was extra imperative given the fact that they finished as the 12th Region's runner up two years in a row.

But with a team full of seven seniors — including the region's player of the year and player of the year runner up — Casey County can call itself 12th Region Champs after beating its district's champion Rockcastle County 55-41 on Saturday night.

"Oh my gosh, it's a blessing," Casey senior Gena Cravens said. "We've been waiting for this since we lost the first time. We were waiting for it and we're so excited."

"Honestly, it's a bit of relief because we've been here the last two years and couldn't get it done," Lauren Lee added. "How they always say third time's the charm — in this case it really was."

Casey surrendered the first points of the game when Casey Coleman made a nifty reverse layup. But the Rebels went on a 10-0 run to take the lead and wouldn't give it up the rest of the game.

"The first game we went down 9-1 and last night (against Danville, Jenna) Akers hits the three to start it out. In the region, we started off in the hole so I thought they were OK," Casey coach Tara Weddle said. "Those big games, that we've played and the tough schedule we've had has been roller coaster games all year. So they know that just because we're down or up doesn't mean it's over."

The Rebels have built their team around the fact that any of their seven seniors can go off any night — and often, multiple do. Saturday night's championship game was the embodiment of that.

The team's leading scorer Cravens

only had two points, but pulled down six rebounds. Instead, it was Jordy Stephens leading the way on offense for Casey with 18. She also added four blocks on the defensive end. Region Player of the Year Lauren Lee was once again the steady leader of the team, scoring 15, dishing four assists, hauling in three offensive rebounds and coming away with five steals. Natalie Duggins had 16 points, six boards and four steals.

That quartet all were named to the All-Tournament team.

"That's the big thing about our team.

a row needed extra motivation, but the Rebels had some in the fact that their opponent, Rockcastle, beat them in the 47th District championship.

"Right after districts when they were handing out the trophy, I thought 'They can have this one. It's theirs and we'll take region,'" Lee said.

Before the game, Gena Cravens got a text from her boyfriend — it was a picture of Rock cutting down the nets after the district title game.

"It made me mad but I think it helped thinking about that," she said. "So mad,

having that mentality," she said. "I felt like they did that, especially on the defensive end. They were on loose balls, they were knocking balls loose, they were rebounding the ball.

"When we went on that first run, I felt like they were kind of gassed — you could see it," she added. "That goes back to that aggressive mentality. You've got to get pressure on the ball so the pass can't get in the lane as easily and you make their guards uncomfortable. We really talked about applying pressure and helping when you're not on the ball and really pushing the pace of the game. So after the first quarter, we knew they were gassed and we had to keep going."

Rockcastle closed the first half on a run to cut the lead to five points and wrest some momentum from the Rebels. In the locker room, Cravens said that they knew that they had to clamp down on defense if they wanted to win this. While Lee said that they couldn't let the Rockets start to gain more confidence.

"Obviously, we did that a little in the first half and they came back," Lee said. "In the second half, we knew that if we let them come back, it's over. So we knew we had to come out focused and ready. Tara always tells us it's a game of runs. When they go on a run, we have to stay calm and play through it."

While the 12th Region monkey is off Casey's back, the mission isn't finished.

"This is important, it's what we need to do to get to state," Lee said. "But we want to win state, too. So we can't really dwell on this one. We have to focus on our next game."

As for how long coach Weddle will let them bask in the moment?

"Well, we're going to practice Monday."



We have seven seniors and they're all talented," Weddle said. "You never know which one is going to step up. Haley (Brock) stepped up and had some big steals, Gena rebounded the ball like a machine tonight. Lauren and Jordyn both scored so you never know who's going to step up and that's nice."

Not that a team who has come up short in the regional final two years in

but in a good way."

After beating Danville last night to advance to the finals, Weddle said that if they saw Rockcastle again, it would be about neutralizing their size. To that end, the Rebels came out aggressive with a active press to try to wear the Rockets down.

"Before the game, we talked about playing with an aggressive nature and