

# Clinton Lady Arrows fall short in state championship run

By Danny C. Davis

It had been thirteen years since the Clinton High School Lady Arrows had won a Class 6A state basketball championship - or even made a serious run for the title. But under first-year head coach Pearlaine Fairley, CHS had a stellar season this year and advanced to the Class 6A title game before falling to defending girls Class 6A champion Olive Branch 75-51 on March 7 at Oxford.

Clinton finished 25-5 under Fairley, who coached for eight seasons at Pelahatchie.

"I am so proud of our girls and how hard they fought this year," said Fairley. "I knew not long after coming to Clinton that they were going to be a special group. They bought in to what we were trying to do; and, after going undefeated last summer in summer play, they went undefeated in district - and then beat the #1 team in the state, Meridian, in the playoffs."

Clinton got off to a good start against Olive Branch, taking a 3-0 lead, but fell behind 17-9 in the first quarter before closing it to 17-14 at the end of the first quarter. CHS fought back and trailed only 37-34 at the half, but ran into foul trouble and had a tough time defending Endya Buford, the Mississippi High School Gatorade Girls' Player of the year for 2019-2020. She had forty points against CHS, and about half of those were free throws.

"We got into foul trouble real early, and that really hurt us," said Fairley. "When our top scorer, Jakayla Johnson, got a lot of fouls called against her early in the game, we had to sit her, and that really hurt us in trying to come back."

Johnson, who averaged 17 points a game, 428 total points going into the title game, had four fouls in the third period and had to come out until late in the game.



She led Clinton scoring with ten points. "Our second leading scorer, Kimbreyell McBride, (13 point aver-

age, 356 points headed into the title game) just did not have her best scoring game with Jakayla out. And we just did not do our best job of slowing Buford down. But I am so proud of what we accomplished this year. Nobody expected us to be here."

Starters this season included seniors Johnson and McBride, junior Kynnedi Parker, and sophomores Keniija Flowers and Ariana Durrell.

"We are going to really miss our six seniors. They have played together since the seventh grade and are so special. Jakayla had two torn ACL injuries and fought so hard to come back to lead us in scoring and rebounding this year."

"But we are excited about the future of our program, too," said Fairley. "We have three starters and a lot of young talented girls coming back. If they put in the work like they did this year, we can get back to the championship game."



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