

Black & Gold

Warriors battle Meridian to double OT Jalen Quinn pours in career high 45 points

By Daniel L. Chamness
There will be a rematch between Tuscola and Meridian. Maybe more than one.

The Meridian Hawks, the visiting team, won the first round, but it took until double overtime. In the process, they had to overcome not only the Warriors, but a Herculean effort of Jalen Quinn, who scored a career-high 45 points in the double overtime game. The Hawks, who are currently ranked fifth in the state by the Illinois High School Association Class 1A Poll posted by the Associated Press, downed the Warriors 81-73. The Warriors are ranked sixth in the same poll.

But, the Tuscola faithful will not have to wait long for the rematch. They will face them on Wednesday, February 16, but this time the game will be at Macon Meridian. That game, which was supposed to be played originally on February 4, but Mother Nature/God had other plans. It will be for the Central Illinois Conference Tournament Championship and is slated to start at 7 p.m. If both teams win their respective regionals and their first round sectional game, their could be a third matchup between the two state ranked teams at the Effingham St. Anthony Sectional in a few weeks.

But that is many "if's" and providing the weather does not rear it's ugly head again, the game on Wednesday is a sure thing.

The game, which took 40 minutes of court time to complete, came down to the final four minutes. In the first three minutes of second overtime period, the Meridian defense limited Tuscola to one free throw by Jalen Quinn. Quinn's free throw, the second of two attempts, was drained at 1:53.

That defensive effort, combined with seven points of their own by three different players had the Hawks entering the final minute of the second overtime boasting a 73-67 lead. Drew Hurelbrink, the sen-

ior center, kicked off the scoring with a three pointer at 3:16. That was followed by a layup by junior forward Brett Brown and another bucket by Mekhi Phillips, who scored with 58 ticks left on the clock.

In the final minute of the game, the Warriors would get within four points, all scored by Jalen Quinn, a future NCAA Division I player, but could get no closer. The 6-foot-3 senior guard would step to the free throw line and nail a pair of charity tosses with 53.6 seconds left and he would duplicate the feat with 45.9 seconds to play. It would respectively cut the lead to 73-69 and 75-71. He would drive from one end of the court to the other and sink a layup with :23.7 left to play.

"That was a great game between really talented, superlative teams," said Justin Bozarth, Tuscola's head coach. "Without a doubt, we look forward to seeing them again. This game lived up to the hype for sure. The atmosphere was memorable and both teams got better, as a team, because of tonight. We have to get better at guarding. We had some moments where we gave up some easy baskets. This is what we need as the season is nearing the end. You play a game like this and you lose one, you are itching to get back out there. We got beat off the dribble a couple of times."

The Hawks were adept at staying one step ahead of the Warriors and they used the free throw line to do it. In the final minute of the game, the Hawks stepped to the line a total of three times to make all six of their free throws. With :51 to play, Riley Day hit a pair of charity tosses. Graham Meisenhelter put the icing on the cake netting a pair at :28.6 and another set :21. His charity tosses at :21 were the final points of the contest.

While the game ended in the Hawks favor, it did not start out that way. It was Tuscola's senior night and in front of favorable hometown crowd providing a



JALEN QUINN DRIVES down the floor with the ball at the much anticipated game between Tuscola and Macon Meridian. The senior guard, who will be playing Division I basketball in Chicago next year, scored a career high 45 points. Photo by Daniel L. Chamness.

raucous atmosphere on both sides, the Warriors got off to an extremely fast start. They scored the first 13 points, as Quinn was in double figures before the first eight minutes had drained off the clock.

The senior hit a trey from the right wing at 6:40 to start the scoring. He then saved a pass from going out of bounds and promptly fed his younger brother, Jordan Quinn. The younger Quinn scored from the top of the key, just beyond the arc. The elder Quinn would score regulation buckets at 5:11 and again at 3:13. The younger Quinn would score at 4:42. In addition, Jalen Quinn would score from the free throw line as well. Five minutes and five seconds drained off the clock before Meridian got a bucket from Graham Meisenhelter with 2:55 to play in the opening stanza. He would score one more time before the end of the quarter, but

Tuscola would hold a commanding 18-4 lead at the end of the first quarter as they got the final three points on a Colton Musgrave trey with 17 seconds to play.

The Warriors would hold the lead at halftime as well, but Meridian was effectively chipping away at that 14-point lead in the second quarter. Phillips and Meisenhelter scored in the final :37 of the quarter as Meisenhelter hit a pair of charity tosses and Phillips scored with only one second to play. The Hawks entered the second half trailing 26-21, but a layup from Day in the first minute of the quarter shaved the Tuscola led to three. Meisenhelter tipped in a missed Phillips shot at 3:45 of the third and the game, which had started as a Tuscola rout, was all tied up at 32-32.

After Jalen Quinn nailed a

pair of free throws, the Hawks went on a 7-0 run in a two minute time span. They would get a Brown bucket at 2:36, followed by a three-pointer by Day and another bucket by Meisenhelter. By the end of the third, the Hawks led 41-36.

Tuscola scored the first five points of the fourth quarter and from there it was a tug-of-war between the two teams each with over 20 wins each this season. Easton Cunningham hit a reverse layup in the opening 40 seconds and Jalen Quinn followed that with an old-fashioned three-pointer at 6:59. At the end of regulation, the teams were tied 56-56.

Meisenhelter's bucket with five seconds to play in the first overtime sent the game into a second overtime with the team's knotted at 66.

"I knew that our shots

would eventually start falling," said Shannon Houser, Meridian's head coach. "We are a good three-point shooting team, but it is not the only way we can win games. We have other ways to go to. With a win tonight, we might win the conference championship. I figured this would be a great game, but I did not expect it to be double overtime. This was an example of an old fashioned ball game and the way basketball should be played.

Besides Jalen Quinn's 45 points, Jordan Quinn had 12 points for the now 21-5 Warriors. For Meridian, they had three athletes in double figures. Besides the afore mentioned Meisenhelter's 32 points, they also got 14 points from Phillips and 11 from Hurelbrink. The Hawks improved to 22-5 on the year.

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