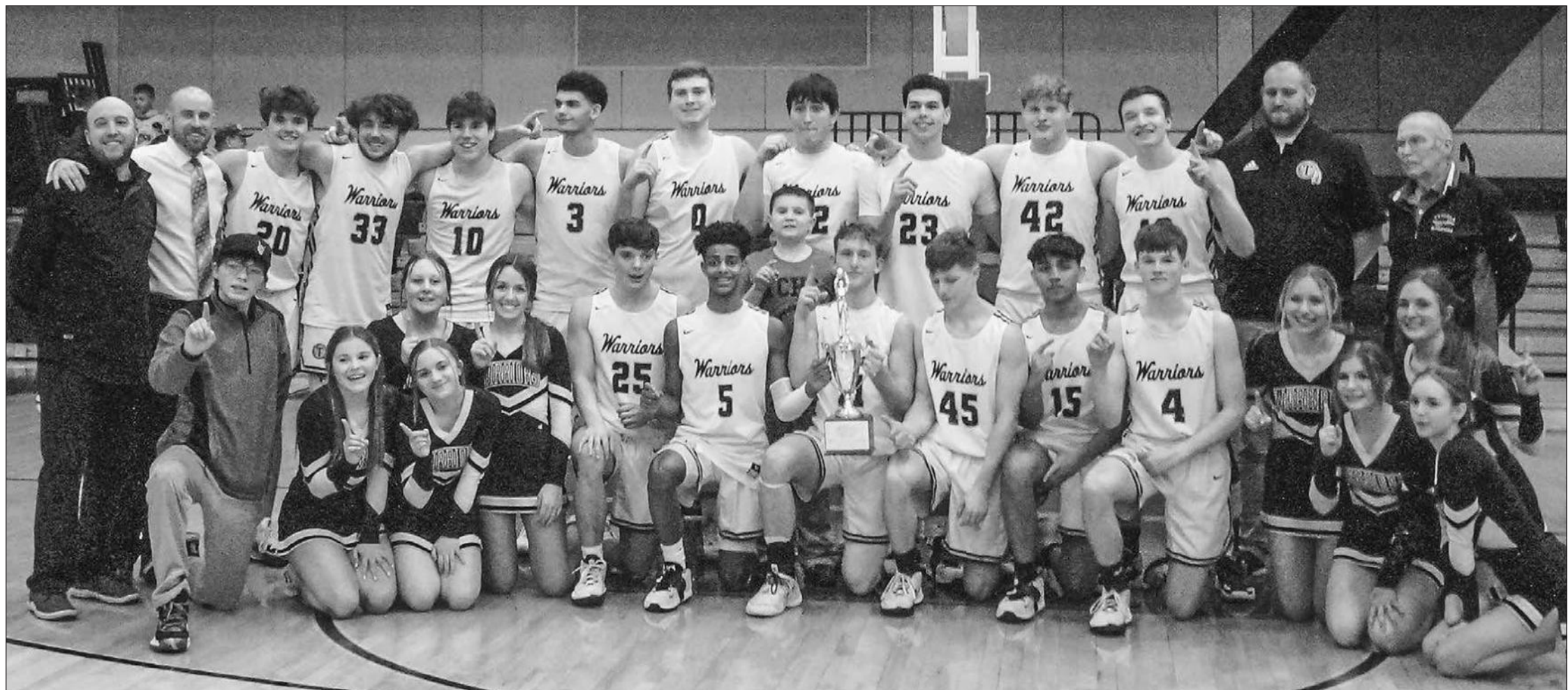


Black & Gold



TUSCOLA SENIOR JAMES PARSLEY (11) holds up the Central Illinois Conference Tournament Trophy for all to see. Sharing in the moment with the senior, who was returning from injury, is the Tuscola varsity basketball team, the Tuscola cheerleading squad and the Tuscola coaching staff. Photo by Daniel L. Chamness.

Warriors win CIC tourney trophy

By Daniel L. Chamness
The Tuscola Warriors avenged their loss to Macon Meridian on Wednesday.

Not only did they avenge the double overtime loss from five days earlier, they left Macon with the Central Illinois Conference Tournament Trophy.

Meridian hosted the Tuscola Warriors and the long awaited Central Illinois Conference Tournament Title was awarded to the Warriors after they downed Meridian 49-47. The game was delayed by 12 days, due to weather, and was the second time the two Class 1A state ranked teams played each other in five days. At the time of the second encounter, Meridian was ranked seventh in the Class 1A poll, while Tuscola was ranked 10th in the same poll. The last poll posted was dated Feb. 16.

"Tuscola played a hell of a game tonight," said Meridian Coach Shannon Houser. "Tuscola outplayed us. We need to play our game and that did not happen tonight. I told Jalen (Quinn) when we shook hands that we will meet again for part three of this war. They took us

out of our rhythm tonight. Congrats to them."

The two teams could meet again on March 4 at the Effingham St. Anthony Sectional Final, but there are a few games to be won before that, by both teams. The Warriors have taken the first step, winning the first game of the Arcola Regional on Saturday.

The first contest between the pair of teams was a double overtime game and the second game, came down to the final minute of regulation. As he has done many times in his career, Tuscola senior Jalen Quinn proved himself to be a big money play, scoring seven of his total 27 points scored during the game came during the final five minutes of the game. The Loyola University-bound senior started the scoring with 4:17 left to play by hitting a pair of free throws. That pair of charity tosses gave Tuscola a slim one-point lead, 40-39. It also gave them the lead for good.

"There are not too many times you get a shot to redeem yourself less than a week after playing a team," said Jalen

Quinn. "Everyone stepped up tonight. Josiah (Hortin) hit a big three point. We just tried to contest their shots and make them earn their points. We are playing our best basketball right now as it should be."

Quinn would follow that with a pair of buckets, the final one being at the 1:40 mark. With only 19.9 seconds to play, he put the finishing touches on, hitting both charity tosses awarded him. At that point, the Warriors held a 48-44 lead and to retake the lead, the Hawks would need two trips down the floor.

The fourth quarter commenced with Tuscola leading 35-32. With a trey from Hawk senior guard Riley Day at 7:45, the two teams were knotted up at 35-35. Drew Hurelbrink sunk a free throw 30 seconds later and meridian took a 36-35 lead. The two teams played tug-of-war with the score as Jordan Quinn answered with a bucket as the Warriors retook the lead. Mekhi Phillips scored at 5:25 and again at 4:35. The Warriors stepped out of bounds with the ball twice and

Phillips capitalized on the second unforced turnover.

"It was the greatest feeling in the world to be back out on the court," said James Parsley, who was returning from injury. "I think they are a top team in the state, but so are we. We are looking forward to matching up with them again, but first we have to get through regional and first round of sectional."

Tuscola would post two more wins since their win over Meridian. They would thump both Sullivan 53-25 in their final regular season game, which took place on Friday night. On Saturday, they would host Heritage in the first game of the regional, beating them 76-22 in Tuscola. Quinn scored 21 points in each of the contests. He was the only one in double figures against Sullivan. In the win over Heritage, both Chris Boyd and Thomas Brown joined him in double figures. Each athlete had 10 points.

Tuscola is 25-6. They finish the CIC season with a 6-1 mark and earn a share of the overall conference title.

"We improved defensively



JAMES PARSLEY looks around the court and weighs his options as he keeps the ball away from Meridian guard Mekhi Phillips. Parsley, who did not play in the first game between the two state ranked teams, was instrumental in defensively thwarting the Hawks and helping Tuscola earn a win. Photo by Daniel L. Chamness.

tonight," said Justin Bozarth, Tuscola's head coach. "We gave them too many opportunities last Friday. We had a bit more determination to stop them tonight. You have to be tough and stand in front of them and keep them in front of you. These games are building up in intensity and of importance. This was a competitive, respectful game. We feel good about where we are and the potential of what we could do."

GOOD LUCK WARRIORS!
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