

# Black & Gold



TUSCOLA SENIOR JALEN QUINN tries to negotiate around the Meridian Hawk defense in the sectional title game. It took double overtime for the Hawks to overcome the Warriors. Also pictured from the Warrior basketball team in the shot are Preston Brown (0) and Jordan Quinn (23). Photo by Daniel L. Chamness.

## Warriors eliminated from Sectional on last-second shot

**By Daniel L. Chamness**  
Nine times out of ten, Meridian guard Graham Meisenhelter would miss the three pointer from over 60 feet away from a very distant right wing with less than one second to play.

But, on Friday night, it was the one time out of 10 that he would make it.

The three-pointer by the Hawk senior guard abruptly ended the game in double overtime, with Meridian winning a 82-79 victory over the Warriors. With the long distance shot, he also ended one of the classic trilogies of the 2021-2022 basketball season.

"That was something that you see on television, not in real life," said Meisenhelter of the shot. "When I let it go, I thought "that is actually has a chance". When it went in, I could not believe it. We rotated our guards a little bit, because we were trying to stay away from Jalen (Quinn) a little bit."

But, on the final shot of the game, it was not Jalen Quinn that Meisenhelter needed to worry about. It was Jordan Quinn. The sophomore got up in the air and attempted to block/alter the shot as the clock drained away. The sophomore did everything he needed to do, but it was not to be.

With each contest between the Central Illinois Conference foes, the intensity and the stakes got more and more important. The Hawks would win two of the three game trilogy with Tuscola as each matchup will go down as a classic in their own right.

While that was the final bucket, it was not the only time that Meisenhelter had brought the Hawks back from the jaws of defeat. In the final minute of second overtime, he would nail another three pointer, this one a little closer to the basket from the right wing.

In the opening overtime period, Tuscola would be leading by as many as five points when Jalen Quinn nailed an old-fashioned three pointer with 36.5 seconds left. The three points had Tuscola leading 68-63.

But the Hawks were not to be denied. They got a layup from Mekhi Phillips with :22 left in the first overtime and a pair of free throws from Phillips with only :13.1 left on the clock. At the end of the first overtime, the two teams were deadlocked at 70. Meisenhelter sent the game from regulation when he drove down the mid-

dle of the lane and hit the tying bucket with :29 to play.

The Hawks entered the game fired up and put the first nine points on the board. But, every single person in the Enlow Center knew that was not going to be the way the game would ultimately go. Preston Brown, a 6-foot-4 Tuscola Warrior senior, scored the first points for his team grabbing his own missed shot and hitting a bucket with 4:52 to play in the first. Tuscola would use the three point line to get back into the game and got a trey from James Parsley early in the second quarter to tie up the game at 16-16.

The Warriors would score the first seven points of the second quarter. After Parsley hit his trey, Jordan Quinn and Jalen Quinn each nailed a bucket. Meridian would regain the lead by using the three pointer, getting one trey from Phillips and another from Hurelbrink. The Warriors final score of the first half was a three-pointer from Jalen Quinn from the top of the key. Meridian would hold a 28-25 lead intermission as Graham Meisenhelter hit a layup and drove the baseline to hit another bucket.

Easton Cunningham would drain a pair of three pointers, both from the top of the key, in the third quarter. The long-ball efforts, combined with the normal scoring prowess of Jalen Quinn and his younger brother Jordan Quinn, turned the tide of the game and gave Tuscola a 46-44 lead as they ended the

third and opened the final eight minutes of play.

"We had a couple of opportunities there to extend the lead beyond the five points," said Justin Bozarth, Tuscola's head coach. "That was a credit to Meridian. The last shot of the game. If he had to take that shot 10 times, he probably only makes it one time. Losing by that little is tough, because you can drive yourself nuts playing the what-if game. I wish we could have pushed and expanded the lead, but it simply did not work out. They made some big shots."

Jalen Quinn finished with 37 points for the Warriors. He was joined in double figures by Jordan Quinn, who had 17 points. The Warriors finish the season with a 28-7 record.

"One sports writer said it was like Ali-Frazier," said Shannon Houser, Meridian's head coach, of when the two teams faced each other. "This certainly felt like Thrilla in Manila."

To illustrate how close the teams were, talent wise, the Warriors were ranked ninth, tied with two other teams, in the final Associated Press Poll of Illinois High School Association Class 1A Teams. Meridian was ranked seventh in the same poll.

The 2021-2022 Warrior basketball team will be together as a team one final time on March 21 at 7 p.m. for the Warrior Awards banquet. At that time, award winners from the various entities, including Tuscola High School, will be announced.



PRESTON BROWN (0) keeps the ball away from Drew Hurelbrink of the Meridian Hawks as both athletes play for their respective teams in the Effingham St. Anthony Sectional Final. Photo by Daniel L. Chamness.

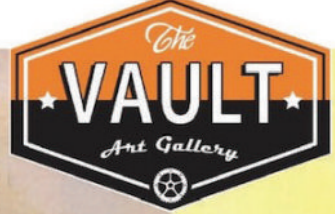


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