

SPORTS

Arcola boys on four-game winning streak

Miller scores 30 in 53-29 win over Arthur Christian

By Mike Monahan

ARCOLA—Jackson Miller, a 6-3 junior, scored a career-high 30 points as the Arcola boys' basketball team cruises past Arthur Christian Friday at Nancy Stiff Gymnasium 53-29. Arthur Christian entered the game at 19-11.

On the last day of January Arcola picked up a Lincoln Prairie Conference victory over Tri-County, a team coached by Nate Logan, an Arcola graduate (class of 1995) 58-48.

Arcola entered Tuesday's conference home game against Argenta-Oreana with a 13-11 record and a four-game winning streak. The Purple Riders, 3-3 in the LPC, travel to Cumberland Friday for another LPC contest.

Arcola 53, Arthur Christian 29

Arcola and the Conquering Riders had a close game going in the first half as the Purple Riders, who took a lead they would never relinquish with 1:26 left in the opening quarter on a 3-pointer by Gerardo Alanis for a 9-7 advantage, led 17-12 with 3:08 remaining in the half.

That is when Arcola reeled off the final seven points of the half, with five points by Miller and two by Braden Phillips. The Purple Riders doubled the score on Arthur Christian, a private non-IHSA school (approved by the IHSA though not a member) leading 24-12 at the break.

"We stress winning two segments; the first two and the last two of each quarter," said Arcola coach Greg Gisinger. "Those are kind of the momentum times too. We try and start and finish quarters strong. I thought we did a good job of that tonight. We executed under a minute getting one shot and getting a play that we liked and making it pay off. We just try and put guys in position so that they can be successful. Having the lead at 12 was nice because it gives you a double digit leave a little room for error if you need it, especially with a young team. Closing the half out like that was huge for us and for momentum and to make them try and make adjustments at halftime that they maybe didn't want to do."

Arthur Christian lost to Tri-County 52-46 earlier in the season and to Tuscola 80-66. The 29 points was the season-low for the Conquering Riders. The previous low was 41 in a 45-41 loss to Tri-Valley.

"The defense played really well," said Arcola's Braden



ARCOLA HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL - Sophomore Jackson Miller (14) scored 30 points in the varsity game played at Arcola on Feb. 3, with twenty-three of those points coming in the second half. The Purple Riders defeated Arthur Okaw Christian 53-29. Photo by Nancy Raiden.

Phillips. "That team scores in the mid 50's (averaged 54.8 prior to the game) and we held them to 29. Offensively at halftime we talked about getting more into our offense and not taking shots early. Once we did that we got what we wanted like down low and pick and pops. We take pride in our defense and I think Arcola has also been especially since coach Gisinger got here; defense first he says. We were locked in and focused on defense, which has been our focal point as a team."

Miller came out in the sec-

ond half and sank three straight 3-pointers and suddenly it was not a close game anymore as Arcola led 33-12 with 6:37 left in the third.

"We actually ran our first play to start the second half for Gerardo for a jump shot and they helped (on defense) which gave Jackson an open three and he made it," said Gisinger. "We thought, 'okay, Jackson makes one, he might make 4 or 5 in a row' Then we just kept running plays for Jackson and he kept getting open looks and kept making them."



ARCOLA HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL - Junior Gerardo Alanis (2) appears to be fouled in the varsity game played at Arcola on Jan. 31. The Purple Riders defeated Tri-County 58-48 in a Lincoln Prairie Conference game. Photo by Nancy Raiden.

Miller, who had seven points at halftime, was 7-of-10 from the field, including 4-of-6 from 3-point range in his 18 (of 21) point third quarter and Arcola expanded its lead to 45-23 heading into the fourth quarter.

"You talk about being selfless; you know Jackson was hot, but I think that Jackson would even tell you that he is playing defense at a pretty high level. He is rebounding at a pretty high level although there are not a lot of rebounds to get out there with Phillips clearing the glass (13 rebounds), but he is still getting rebounds and doing the little things well. When he is not scoring he is doing things to keep him involved in the game. Whereas in the past if he would not score in the first half he would kind of disappear. He is scoring inside now. The 3's are awesome and everyone remembers those, but he has also probably had 6 to 8 points in the paint off put-backs and post-ups."

Through three quarters Arcola held Arthur Christian to 6-of-34 shooting from the field (.176) and the Conquering Riders were 4-of-26 from beyond the 3-point line (.154). They are a team that shoots 27 percent from the three-point line and shoots an average of 23 per game.

Alanis was also in double digits with 13, including 10 in the first half.

"Alanis is a true point guard," said Gisinger. "We play five guys most of the time and we were selfless. They don't care who it is that scores. Gerardo had 10 at half and he could have had a total of 30 tonight maybe. I thought it was Gerardo's best game of the season because they pressured him hard. They switched ball screens on him and trapped him some in the ball screen. He really did a good job of handling that pressure which he wasn't doing at the start of the year. I was

really proud of him for being a true point guard tonight."

Arthur Christian was led in scoring by Jaden Mast with 10 points.

"We are playing our best basketball right now," said Phillips. "Four in a row feels good as we go down the stretch into the regionals."

Gisinger agreed saying, "These guys know their roles and they know what they are

good at. They know their strengths and weaknesses and they are using that to play pretty dang good basketball right now."

Arcola 58 Tri-County 48

Tri-County only led 4-3 and 6-5 with Arcola taking the

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ARCOLA HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL - Sophomore Braden Phillips (10) attempts to make a basket but meets some resistance in the second half of the varsity game played at Arcola on Feb. 3. Arcola defeated Arthur Okaw Christian 53-29. Photo by Nancy Raiden.



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