

CLASS 1A-DIVISION I GIRLS STATE BASKETBALL

Olpe's Eagles overcome cold-shooting to reach 1A-I final

Hodgeman County comes up short in 38-21 loss

DODGE CITY – Two compelling statistics personified Thursday's opening semifinal battle of the Class 1A-Division I girls state basketball tournament here at United Wireless Arena.

Olpe's girls suffered through one of the worst shooting performances of legendary 44-year coach Jesse Nelson's career, hitting only 14-of-61 shots (23 percent). Jetmore-Hodgeman County was guilty of 34 turnovers while only able to put up 30 shots in the game.

The result was Olpe surviving with a less-than-glossy 38-21 victory to propel the Eagles into their ninth state championship game in school history.

Thursday's victory improved the Eagles' record to 24-0 and extended their two-season winning streak to 49 games. Hodgeman County, meanwhile, was making its first state appearance since consolidating with Hanston back in the mid-2000s. They finish the season at 21-5.

The poor shooting and turnovers were not lost on either winning coach Nelson or Hodgeman County mentor Trent Bright.

"I can't remember a team of mine shooting this poorly," said Nelson, whose team gave their coach win No. 948 in his career. "It started in the first few minutes and never got better. We were fortunate they turned the ball over as much as they did."

For Bright and the Longhorns, it was a case of tournament nerves that struck when they walked into the Arena a couple of hours earlier.

"My girls have never been in this environment and it's all new to them," Bright said prior to the start. "We never got comfortable in the first half. We played better and competed better in the second half. I'm proud of what the girls accomplished because we fought hard for all of what they did."

Bright said he would have a happy coach if someone had told him prior to the game that his defense would hold Olpe to 38 points, after averaging nearly 70 points a game and putting up 91 in Monday's quarterfinal win over Rosalia-Flinthills.

"Defensively, we held them to 3 points in the third quarter, so I can't be unhappy with that part of our effort," Bright said. The Longhorns also held a 43-31 advantage on the boards with Malynn Biel and Grace Shiew grabbing 11 each. Shiew's 6 points led the Longhorns.

The only points by the Eagles in that third-quarter drought came on a 3-point bomb from Hattie Fisher. By the end of the low-scoring affair, it was Olpe up 25-16.

Hodgeman County cut the lead to 29-20 at the 6:14 mark, but then Olpe scored 7 unanswered points to essentially put the game out of reach. In that mini-run, Lauryn Bowles scored on a layup off a nifty pass

from Macy Smith, and then Smith hit the second big trey at the 5:20 mark before Marley Heins dropped in another floater layup to make it 36-21 with 2:53 remaining. While Hodgeman County couldn't score the rest of the way, Olpe could muster only a couple of free throws by Smith.

Heins topped all scorers with 17 points (6-of-17 field goals) and Maya Bishop grabbed 8 rebounds.

Olpe will await the winner of the late 7 p.m. semifinal between Highland-Doniphan West and Norwich.

The first half seemed to be a combination of Olpe's cold shooting being offset by the turnover miscues that best the Longhorns.

During that opening 16 minutes of action, Hodgeman County could only get off 11 shots, making 5 of them while committing an unsightly 23 turnovers.

However, Olpe couldn't totally capitalize as they were icy cold from the field, connecting on just 8 of 33 shots for a chilly 24.2 percent. Still, it was enough to provide them leads of 10-4 after one quarter and then 22-10 heading to the locker room at halftime.

Heins seemed to be the one spark that lifted the Eagles in the first half, scoring half of her team's points off 4-of-8 field goals and 3-of-4 free throws to finish with 11 points at the break.

Rebounding also helped the Longhorns as they were up 21-11 on the boards in the opening half. Shiew had 6 boards and 4 points to pace the Longhorns.

JETMORE-HODGEMAN COUNTY (21) – James 2-7 1-2 5, Borger 0 2-2 2, Pelton 0-6 0-0 0, Schaffer 0-1 0-0 0, Beil 2-3 0-1 4, Shiew 3-7 0-2 6, Burke 2-6 0-0 4, Ruff 0-0 0-2 0. Totals 9-30 3-9 21.

OLPE (38) – Smith 2-14 4-4 9, Steffes 0-1 0-0 0, Roberts 0-1 0-0 0, Heins 6-17 3-6 15, Bishop 2-8 1-2 5, Fisher 1-13 0-0 3, Scheve 0-1 0-0 0, Clark 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 14-61 8-12 38.

Jetmore-Hodgeman County (21-5) 4 6 6 5 -- 21

Olpe (24-0) 10 12 3 13 -- 38

3-point goals: Hodgeman Co. 0-3 (Pelton 0-2, Beil 0-1); Olpe 2-26 (Smith 1-8, Steffes 0-1, Roberts 0-1, Heins 0-4, Bishop 0-2, Fisher 1-10). Rebounds: Hodgeman Co. 43 (Beil, Shiew 11 each), Olpe 31 (Bishop 8). Assists: Hodgeman Co. 4, Olpe 11. Turnovers: Hodgeman Co. 34, Olpe 8. Fouls: Hodgeman Co. 16, Olpe 12. Fouled Out: None.