

Boys basketball splits two tight games

By Rongi Yost
Correspondent

The Outlaws fell 43-42 in a tight contest at Cottage Grove on Tuesday, January 17, but three days later turned it around and edged out Sutherlin 33-32 in overtime.

On Tuesday, Sisters faced last year's Sky-Em champions, the Cottage Grove Lions, who returned four starters, all dynamic guards that can drive and shoot the ball.

The Outlaws started off well and jumped to a 16-6 start in the first quarter. Sadly, untimely turnovers let the Lions back in, and at the half the Outlaws held a slim 24-22 advantage.

"We built a lead, but continued to not take care of the ball, and gave them opportunities back," said Coach Rand Runco. "We worked hard to cut penetration and close on shooters."

Cottage Grove's guard, Blake Sentman, kept the Lions in the game with long three-pointers that hit the mark.

The Outlaws held onto their slim lead into the fourth quarter, but then the Lions went on a run and with less than two minutes left in the game took a two-point lead. Sisters was able to reverse the ball and went inside-out to find Ben Saba, who hit a huge three to put the Outlaws up by one with 25 seconds left on the clock.

Sisters deflected a pass and almost got possession, but fouled. CG got the ball out with 8.1 seconds left. The Lions got the ball to Sentman who tried to penetrate.

Runco said, "We'd stopped him (Sentman), but in the effort we did not communicate and left a player open under the basket, and with less than a second on the clock, they hit a lay-in and time was out. It was a really tough loss. We played well in so many areas,

but came up short. We need to keep improving and work on our end of game situations. We are playing well, but are turning it over without pressure too much."

Ty Horner recorded 12 points, Saba tallied nine, and Tyler and Tanner Head combined for eight.

The Outlaws beat the Lions on the glass, and tied them in turnovers. CG was eight-for-15 from behind the arc and most were very tough shots. The Outlaws were three-for-13 from the three-point line.

Three days later, the Outlaws played an intense game at home against Sutherlin, who play a tough match-up zone and are a patient team on offense.

Sisters had a great start and were up 15-8 at the close of the first quarter. Unforced turnovers were costly for the Outlaws in the second period and as teams entered the half, the Bulldogs held an 18-17 advantage.

The Outlaws struggled offensively the second half, but in the final period stepped up their defensive pressure and forced several turnovers. The Outlaws got their energy back, took over on the defensive end, but struggled against the Bulldogs' zone.

"I was proud that we kept battling, even though we were really struggling scoring," said Runco.

Sutherlin kept up their patient offense, and the Outlaws had to battle to get the ball back. Sisters outscored the Bulldogs 4-2 in the fourth, which sent the game into overtime.

In overtime, both teams worked hard to get a good shot at the basket. The Outlaws finally got the ball to Horner, who was good on his shot.

Runco said, "With the lead, we spread the court, and we knew once they had to guard



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Keegan Greaney goes to the basket in an overtime win against Sutherlin.

us, they were in trouble."

Keegan Greaney flew by his man, hit a lay-in, and put the Outlaws on top by four with less than a minute left on the clock.

Miscommunication left the Bulldogs' in-bounder unguarded, and he stepped in and hit a three-point shot. Up by just one, the Outlaws turned the ball over and had to defend with just a one-point lead. Sisters kept the pressure on and defended to the final buzzer.

"It was not the prettiest game, but a good battle," said Runco. "Everyone played hard and we learned that in league, teams will do anything within the rules to beat you. It had a playoff feel and it was a great experience for our players."

Runco told *The Nugget* that overall the Outlaws stayed with the game plan, the guards defended the drive well, and the bigs rebounded like crazy.

Horner, Tanner and Tyler Head, and Greaney all did an incredible job on the glass. Saba and Noah Richardson took good care of the ball, and Greaney attacked the rim when he could get through the Bulldogs' zone.

Horner finished the game with 10 points, and Greaney put up eight.

"I am really proud of the boys after suffering a tough loss at Cottage Grove, bouncing back and staying mentally focused and hanging in there for an overtime win against Sutherlin," said Runco. "Both games would have easily been won if we had taken better care of the basketball. It is a good time of the season to learn this lesson."

Sisters was to play at Junction City on Tuesday, January 24. On Friday, January 27, the Outlaws will play at home against Elmira. Tip-off is scheduled for 5:45 p.m.

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