

late game heroics save Cougars



Steven Weldon
Associate Sports Editor

look on the players' faces. The look on the fans' faces was disappointment. The Mt. Saints were up 23-4 mid-through the first half on the Cougars Wednesday, at Randall Hall.

Without All-NWAACC Cheheles Tapscott for the minutes of the game, the offense stalled and the team couldn't buy a basket.

Then, Tapscott came into the game, and the Cougars woke



ing off a 14-1 run, the brought the game to 24-18, new life to the team once the water.

At the end of the first half, the Cougars were down 37-31, a turnaround considering the opening stages of the game.

What happened in the second half changed everyone in the gym.

Down for the entire game, the Cougars began chipping closer to the Saints' lead. The teams traded baskets until the Cougars got a much needed offensive stop.

Fast-break began. What a dreary night became an exciting one.

Justin Steinke sped up the game. Tapscott ran parallel down the court. All it took was one look at the two teammates and they knew exactly what to do. Steinke passed the ball to Tapscott, gliding down the court who snatched it and threw a alley-oop slam that could have been the way to Rook Hall. The Cougars their first lead of the game at 47-46, and in turn energized a powerful crowd and would have the game around.

As the announcer for the basketball game, I've seen my share of exciting games and a few exciting finishes, but nothing could prepare me for what I would see next.

The Saints and Cougars battled

to the final seconds, and with less than 30 seconds left, the Saints had control of the ball.

Saints guard Earl Jones, who had his fair share of 3-pointers and spectacular layups the entire game, drove to the basket and was fouled with 7.1 seconds left. Going to the free-throw line, with the crowd standing and releasing deafening noise to distract the shooter, a poised and experienced Jones hit both free throws.

The Cougars had only made three 3-pointers the entire night, shooting an anemic and albeit uncharacteristic 15 percent from behind the arc.

Down 66-64, a 3-pointer to win the game would have been a long-shot (literally). Racing up the court and trapped in the corner as time ticked down, Cougars guard EJ Manley whipped a pass to Steinke, who saw a wide open Jeff Dorman. Dorman, like Tapscott, was an all-NWAACC player as well. This night, he showed it.

Dorman took the wide open 3-pointer. SWISH.

The bench went mad. The crowd went bonkers. The Saints were stunned. Time expired as the ball bounced to the court after Dorman's amazing shot, however, according to college rules, in that situation time is to be reset to the moment the ball finished going through the basket. The ball was to be inbounded by the Saints with 0.5 seconds left.

After timeouts to set up the desperation play, the Saints inbounded the ball down-court. The ball deflected off of a Saint and a Cougar and fell out of bounds as time expired.

The game was over. Fans rushed the court to congratulate their classmates for their exciting, exhilarating victory.

After the game, Dorman said, "That was my first game winner."

I've seen teams come back from insurmountable deficits. I've seen game winning buzzer beating shots. I've seen games full of highlights and inspired play. I've been watching basketball for over 10 years, and it has never happened all in the same game.

Saturday night, the suspense did not end. Playing against the Portland Panthers, the Cougars were heavily favored to win.

However, the Panthers had other ideas. Seemingly making every shot late in the second half, the Panthers could smell victory.

With two minutes left in the game, the Panthers coach Kevin Collier called his final timeout, his team up by seven and looking like they needed to gain composure. After all, this team had only won one game in the southern division. To beat one of the best teams in the NWAACC on their home court would be nothing short of amazing.

Then, the turnaround came. The Cougars, staring an embarrassing loss in the face, turned up their offense and effort. After each shot, they fouled as well. The late game strategy that usually ends up failing for the team that is down, was working for them. The Panthers missed critical free throws.

Down three with 30 seconds left, the Cougars inbounded the ball after a made free throw by the Panthers' Ernesto Mayz. Cougars guard Steinke found the ball for a prayer 3-pointer.

SWISH. Tie game with 12 seconds to go.

The Panthers inbounded the ball, no timeouts in their arsenal. Panthers guard Russell Millage began to race up court with the ball when the referee's whistle blew emphatically.

"OUT OF BOUNDS! HE STEPPED OUT OF BOUNDS! WHITE BALL!"

It was back to Cougars ball with



All photos by Hillary Cole Clackamas Print

TOP: Cheheles Tapscott takes a jump shot over the Saints' Chris Weitzel on Wednesday, Feb. 10. Tapscott had 20 points in the Cougars' victory.

LEFT: Tapscott and Travis Robbins celebrate after the Saints' last second heave drops out of bounds. The Cougars won 67-66 on a clutch shot by Jeff Dorman.

four seconds left. In a week that had Dorman hit a game winning three, it was only natural for him to see the ball again.

The Cougars made the inbound pass to Dorman. He drove towards the basket, stopped and took a shot. The bank was open, as the shot kissed

off of the glass and in. Cougars took their first lead since halftime, 91-89 with 1.2 seconds left.

The Panthers desperation beyond half court shot would draw no iron, and the Cougars won another thrilling game, on another Dorman dagger.

What happened on Wednesday and Saturday was unforgettable and will surely go down in Clackamas Cougars lore for years to come.

The Cougars' final home game of the season takes place Feb. 20 at 6 p.m. against the Lane Community College Titans.

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