

Downey brothers lift Santiam boys to 2A state crown

By Gary Horowitz, Statesman Journal, first published March 4, 2017

PENDLETON – Santiam High School boys basketball coach J.D. Hill captured the euphoria of winning the OSAA Class 2A state championship.

During an on-court celebration with players and fans, Hill reflected on what Saturday's 57-54 victory over No. 2 seed Stanfield at Pendleton Convention Center meant.

"That performance we had tonight, it just blows my mind," Hill said.

No. 4 seed Santiam (23-4) had only won one boys state basketball championship prior to Saturday, and that came in the Class A Division in 1974.

The Wolverines were making their first state championship game appearance since 1976, decades before any player on this season's roster was born. But players knew how much this victory meant historically.

"It's for the whole community," said senior guard Julian Downey, who scored 15 of his game-high 33 points in the fourth quarter. "It feels good to bring a trophy back home."

Downey, who grew up in Mill City, was part of a 5A state championship team with Silverton in 2015. He transferred to Santiam for his senior year when his family moved back to the area, and had the opportunity to play with his younger brother Jonah in high school for the first time.

Jonah Downey, a sophomore guard, scored 21 points in the championship game.

"I've been playing with (Julian) forever, against him one-on-one outside," Jonah Downey said. "It's amazing I could win it with my brother."

The Downeys combined for 54 of Santiam's 57 points and were selected first-team all-tournament.

Santiam, which lost in the Tri-River Conference district championship game to Western Mennonite, brought momentum into the game. The Wolverines defeated No. 1 seed Western Mennonite 53-33 in Friday's semifinals.

"We had confidence after that game, but we had as much confidence coming into the first game (against No. 5 seed Imbler)," Jonah Downey said. "We knew if we play our game we could win."

Stanfield (22-2) took a 44-37 lead into the fourth quarter, but Santiam did not wilt under pressure. The lead changed hands five times in the last 3:50.

After Stanfield's Dylan Grogan scored on a drive to put the Tigers up 50-49, Julian Downey hit a top-of-the key 3-pointer and was fouled. He completed a four-point play that gave the Wolverines the lead for good at 53-50 with 2:20 remaining.

Santiam hit key free throws down the stretch to seal the win. The Downey brothers combined to score all 20 of the Wolverines' fourth-quarter points.

"They're such great players," Hill said. "They have that little extra, that competitive juice. You can't teach it. That's inside of them and they just stepped up and made huge plays."

They had plenty of help in what was a total team effort.

Senior forward Riley Nicot didn't score, but he had a game-high 11 rebounds. Senior guard/forward Austin Fawcett had seven rebounds and two blocked shots to go with his two points.



Courtesy photo by Gary Horowitz, Statesman Journal

Santiam won its first boys basketball state championship since 1974.

"My teammates, they bring me up," said Julian Downey, who was 9 of 15 from the field, including 5 of 9 on 3-pointers. "I wouldn't be as hot as I was tonight without them."

Downey, the Tri-River Player of the Year, will always treasure his last high school game that was played on a court donated by the Phoenix Suns from their former home, America West Arena.

After the semifinal win, Downey noted that "it's cool to think about how some legends played on this court."

Players took turns cutting down the net, which will be on display at Santiam along with the championship trophy for generations of Wolverines to cherish.

"It's surreal," Hill said. "It seems like a dream."

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Courtesy photo

Julian Downey (left) and Jonah Downey are the sons of Siletz Tribal member Jeremy Downey and his wife, Meghan. They have a younger brother, Ezra, and a younger sister, Maizy. Their grandmother is Penny Barclay and their great-grandfather is the late Roy Downey. Both young men also made the first team 2A all-tournament team.

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