

Girls Class 2A State Tournament

Kennedy wins second championship in three years

By ALEXIS MANSANAREZ
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — With 20 seconds left on the clock and No. 1 Kenny up 51-40, Trojan senior Hannah Arritola was sent to the free-throw line.

On the bench, head coach Kerry Hall was thinking one thing: I told you so.

It wasn't the first time the Kennedy girls basketball program was in a 2A state title game. Two seasons ago, the Trojans took home a championship with a talented group of seniors.

This year, however, the squad had doubters and at times, doubts of their own.

"At the beginning of the season we told them you can do it," Hall said. "There was a point midway through the season when I was having a conversation with Hannah, both of us got a little emotional and I said if you keep working hard the way you're working hard you are going to do it."

"So, honestly when the time was ticking down there in my brain I was thinking I told you so and that's a good feeling to have."

Arritola was one of six seniors



Kennedy players celebrate after winning Saturdays OSAA 2A girls championship game against Monroe at the Pendleton Convention Center.

on the court for Kennedy, which claimed the 2018 2A girls state title after a 53-40 win over Monroe. Arritola played in the championship game two years ago and her experience on the court showed as she nabbed nine rebounds, dishes out two assists and recorded seven points.

But along with the veteran group were younger players, including sophomore Sophia Carley.

Carley had an impressive outing in the semifinal game, notching a double-double with 14 points and 12 rebounds, and again impressed on the floor with 11 points and 10 boards Saturday.



Not yet in high school, Carley remembers watching the Trojans (28-1) win it all two years ago and couldn't wait until she could have a say in that same outcome.

"It was crazy because I remember going to my state tournament as an eighth grader and having to miss their state championship game," Carley said. "We had to watch it in the hotel and I was like, 'I can't wait to be there' and now we're here."

The win did not come easy, at first.

Kennedy was familiar with Monroe as it faced the Dragons (26-3) two previous times in preseason, winning both games by a combined 27 points.

The Trojans were prepared for their sharp shooter in seniors Madison Ballard and Payton Greene.

A bulk of Monroe's top scorers points were scored in the second

half when the Dragons worked to chip away at an early deficit.

Ballard opened the game with a 3-pointer to give Monroe an early 3-2 edge over Kennedy. But the Trojans also found a spark along the perimeter and nailed some three's of their own, one of which was at the buzzer for a 15-7 advantage.

Kennedy's steady shooting continued and were still up at the half, 30-18.

Monroe's best efforts came in the third quarter.

The Dragons came within one possession of the Trojans after a 15-4 run that ate up nearly the entire quarter. But as quickly as Monroe cut its deficit, Kennedy began to rebuild its lead.

The Trojans put together a 13-7 fourth quarter to seal the deal. Leading their efforts was senior Kaylin Cantu with 12 points. Carley followed with her 11 and junior Kalyssa Kleinschmit added nine points.

For Monroe, Ballard and Greene both finished with 12 points.

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Boys Class 2A State Tournament

Columbia Christian overcomes first quarter woes to win title

By ALEXIS MANSANAREZ
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PENDLETON — A year ago Columbia Christian freshman Ben Gregg was still in middle school, and the Knights ended their basketball season with a fourth place finish and graduated 12 seniors.

Fast forward to Saturday night, and the No. 2 seed with nearly an entire new roster was pitted against the No. 1 Western Mennonite Pioneers in the 2A state championship game.

At first, Columbia Christian's youth showed. The Knights were outscored 15-9 in the opening quarter and committed seven turnovers against a seasoned team that loves to press and trap.

"They create chaos," Columbia Christian head

coach Bart Valentine said. "It was really tough to matchup with (Western Mennonite), because they press and trap and rotate and they are so active and they play so hard."

"So, that's what we expected and early on, even though we talked about it, you can't replicate it in practice. So, we got a little flustered with it and then we settled in and we were okay."

Valentine's message was simple. After the first quarter he told his team to stick to the game plan and chip away at their deficit.

Over the next two quar-



Columbia Christian's Isiah Mariscal (1) lays up the ball during Saturday's OSAA 2A boys championship game against Western Mennonite at the Pendleton Convention Center.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

ters, the Knights did just that to come away with a 65-61

victory and a shiny new trophy.

Aiding in Columbia Christian's efforts was Gregg, who recorded a double-double in his first ever state title game. He notched 23 points and 19 rebounds, and after it was all said and done the 15-year-old barely knew what hit him.

"I don't even know what I just did but it feels pretty good," Gregg said.

Gregg also admitted that nerves hit the Knights (29-1) early.

"We had to get the nerves out our first quarter," he said, "but after that we were all good."

In the second quarter, Columbia Christian went on a quick 11-4 run to take a three-point lead over the Pioneers (26-3). But Western Mennonite's top scorers answered.

Sophomore Payton Richardson and junior Johnny

Williams combined for six points in the final minute to give their squad a slight advantage entering the break.

Both teams kept that same energy throughout the second half, as the game whittled to a shoot out.

Behind Gregg's game leading performance was fellow freshman Elijah Munyan with 13 points, junior Dominic Blake with 11 and sophomore Isiah Mariscal with 10.

For Western Mennonite, Richardson finished with 22 points, and 11 boards for a double-double of his own. Junior Keaton Hull notched 17 points and Williams followed with 16.

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OREGON: Gave Stanford only its third loss in 15 trips to Pac-12 championship

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why. The sophomore has been a standout all season but saved one of her best career performances for the final. Ionescu set a championship game record for points scored, hitting 14 of 24 shots, including a four of 3-pointers, the last of which set a new career-high for points. Her 3 from the baseline with 6:17 remaining gave Oregon 19-point lead and the Ducks coasted the rest of the way.

"I think it was just our mindset coming in to be honest," Ionescu said. "I think we had some unfinished business, and our coaches did a great job on the scouting. We adjusted from what we did last game, and I was just ready."

That unfinished business was the disappointment lingering from losing to Stanford in the only regular season meeting. The Cardinal topped the Ducks in Eugene by rallying from a nine-point halftime deficit and outscoring Oregon 46-24 in the second half. Brittany McPhee scored 33 points in the earlier win over Oregon.

This time, McPhee struggled with foul trouble early and finished with just 12 points. Alanna Smith led Stanford (22-10) with 17 points.

"I feel like our team has been very resilient, very determined," VanDerveer said. "We've worked very hard. Quite honestly, we lost to a better team today. They are a very skilled offensive team."

The Ducks barely reached the final, needing a 10-0 run to close the game in its 65-62 win over No. 9 UCLA in the semifinals. But they looked the part of a champion in the title game. Ionescu, who had

been quiet for nearly an entire quarter, scored 11 of the final 13 points of the third quarter for the Ducks and Oregon went to the fourth quarter with a 54-43 lead. Stanford never got any closer in the final 10 minutes.

Satou Sabally added 12 points and Ruthy Hebard finished with 11 points and nine rebounds for Oregon.

"We weren't going to be complacent just getting to the championship game," Ionescu said. "I knew we wanted to win this."

TOURNEY FUTURE

Pac-12 commissioner Larry Scott said no decision has been made on the future location of the Pac-12 women's tournament. KeyArena is scheduled to undergo a two-year remodel with construction expected to begin by the end of 2018. Scott said the hope was to have an announcement on a site before this year's tournament, but a decision should happen in the next few months.

BIG PICTURE

Stanford: The Cardinal lost in the tournament final for just the third time in 15 trips to the championship game. Stanford lost to Arizona State in 2002 and UCLA in 2006 in the finals. Stanford won the title last year as the No. 2 seed, knocking off top-seeded Oregon State in the finals.

Oregon: The Ducks probably don't have a shot at a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament, but winning both the regular season and conference tournament titles should assure Oregon of a chance to stay out West. The regional is in Spokane, Washington and would be a friendly environment as Oregon coach Kelly Graves previously coached at Gonzaga.

NIXYAAWII: Last-chance shot landed wide left

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Nixyaawii's Mary Stewart and trapping the ball high in the half court. It flustered Stewart, causing three turnovers in that led to points for the Cougars.

The Cougars' Molly Lewandowski then swished an open jumper from the right elbow with one minute left, tying the game at 54-54. And then with 15 seconds left, Stewart drove and let go of a floater from five feet out that clanked off the front of the rim and fell into the waiting hands of a Cougar rebounder.

After a Country Christian (26-4) timeout, the Cougars broke through Nixyaawii's full-court press with ease and the ball bounced into the hands of Lewandowski, who layed it in for the go-ahead basket. That sent the Cougar fans into pandemonium and the Golden Eagle fans into shock.

Nixyaawii had one last shot to tie or win the game, but Stewart's three-quarters court desperation shot landed way left of the rim to seal the championship for the Cougars.

"I just think Country Christian played one of the best games they're going to play," Nixyaawii senior Kaitlynn Melton said. "And we didn't play our best game. We played our 'C' game or 'D' game."

Country Christian shot 43 percent from the floor (22-of-51) and used its height inside to rebound Nixyaawii 42-28. Lewandowski had a team-best 26 points to go with 10 rebounds and Meghan McGrath had 13 points and 12 rebounds.

Country Christian coach Russ Halverson agreed that it was perhaps the best game his team had played, singling out McGrath's performance as an explanation. Halverson believed McGrath had made two or three 3-pointers all season, and she was a perfect 3 for 3 in the game.

"I'm honestly still in



The Country Christian Cougars celebrate their 56-54 win against the Nixyaawii Golden Eagles on Saturday at the state 1A girls championship game in Baker City.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



Nixyaawii's Milan Schimmel shoots the ball guarded by Country Christian's Debby Grandle (23) and Mollie Lewandowski in the Golden Eagles' 56-54 loss to the Cougars on Saturday at the state 1A girls championship game in Baker City.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

shock," Halverson said afterward. "I run the coaches poll and there was not one vote all year that didn't have Nixyaawii No. 1. It felt like we were going against an unbeatable a little bit ... Nixyaawii is probably one of the best 1A teams I've ever seen and our girls played one of their best games they've ever played and what a time to do it."

Nixyaawii also deployed a different defensive philosophy than fans were used to seeing. Gone was the full-court pressure that would rack up turnovers and in its place

was a mostly half-court zone defense that the Cougars did not have many issues working around in the game. Maddern explained that he made the switch to the zone to try and lessen the size advantage the Cougars had inside with the likes of Lewandowski.

"I'll probably be second-guessing myself a little bit," he said. "We did extend our pressure a little bit here and there, but they're (the Cougars) a fundamentally good team, so we didn't feel like we'd get many turnovers off of it. But who knows, a different gameplay might've

made a different result."

For the Golden Eagles, Stewart had a game-high 28 points with five steals, four rebounds and one assist and Schimmel had 13 points, nine rebounds and five assists. However, both combined for those points on just 14-of-37 shooting. The remaining six players to see the floor for the Golden Eagles combined for 13 points on 5-of-17 shooting.

Even though the Golden Eagles head home with disappointment of not achieving a goal that they set last February, Maddern still wants his team to hold their heads high and realize the magnitude of their success over the past two seasons.

"We went on one of the most historic runs there, with 56 in a row," he said. "I told the girls in the locker room, there are bigger things in life than a basketball game. I'm more upset that we lose our seniors and won't be able to see them anymore. At the end of the day, yeah it's heart-breaking because you put a lot of energy and effort into it, but it is just a game and these kids are going to do better things for their life."

NCS 17 14 15 8 — 54
CCS 19 13 8 16 — 56
NIXYAAWII — M. Stewart 28, M. Schimmel 13, E. Looney 6, E. Butler 4, K. Mountain Chief 2, K. Melton 1, T. Melton, T. Van Pelt.
COUNTRY CHRISTIAN — M. Lewandowski 26, M. McGrath 13, S. Phillips 7, K. Sandberg 4, K. Halverson 3, A. Farmer 3.
3-pointers — NCS 8, CCS 4. Free throws — NCS 8-17, CCS 8-11. Fouls — NCS 15 (fouled out — Schimmel), CCS 14.