

Cardinals drop quarterfinal contest to Damascus Christian

Ione/Arlington boys will play a consolation game Friday morning

By JAYSON JACOBY
EO Media Group

BAKER CITY — When Carson Eynetich whipped a perfect pass to Taylor Rollins for a layup late in the third quarter, it looked as though Ione/Arlington was making a serious run at stunning top-ranked Damascus Christian. Rollins’ bucket narrowed the

Eagles’ lead to 37-26 in a Class 1A state tournament quarterfinal game on Thursday afternoon at Baker High School, their smallest advantage since the first quarter. But on the ensuing possession Damascus Christian’s Jacob Zakharyuk, who led all scorers with 20 points, made a 3-pointer to push the Eagles’ lead back to 14 with two minutes left in the quarter. The Cardinals (21-7) would get no closer, and went on to a 58-46 loss. Zakharyuk’s basket was just

one of several the Eagles (26-1) converted when Ione/Arlington was on the brink of slicing the lead to single digits. “There were opportunities to get the game into single digits, we just didn’t get it done,” Ione/Arlington coach Dennis Stefani said. The Cardinals scored the first four points of the final quarter, with Wesley Goad’s two free throws paring the lead to 46-34. Damascus Christian’s Spencer Powers scored inside, then the teams traded baskets before

Goad, who led the Cardinals with 14 points, made one of two free throws to get the Cardinals within 50-39 with 4:46 left. Zakharyuk then took over, scoring consecutive baskets to boost the Eagles’ lead to 54-40 with 2:51 left. Stefani said Damascus Christian’s knack for stifling the Cardinals’ momentum was a combination of the Eagles’ composure and Ione/Arlington’s defensive lapses. “They’re very fundamentally sound,” he said of the Eagles. “I thought we on defense had some

communication breakdowns on our switches.” Eynetich, a freshman who had 13 points, said he felt the Cardinals lost some of their aggressiveness when they were poised to put real pressure on Damascus Christian. “I think we started slowing down, we didn’t keep the pedal to the metal the whole time,” Eynetich said. Maintaining momentum wasn’t the problem in the first quarter — the Cardinals never had any.

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LET’S TALK SPORTS

Officials are in short supply, are you to blame?

The next time you want to tell an official what you think of their call, hold your tongue.

The verbal abuse by parents and fans from the youth level through high school has officials from every sport rethinking their decision to pick up a whistle or step behind the plate.

In truth, basketball officials make between \$60-\$70 a game. In the end, the abuse isn’t worth the money.

With state basketball tournaments being played this week in Oregon and Washington, it’s a good time to keep your thoughts in check, and your comments contained to positive words for your favorite team.

Think this is not an issue? Check again.

This week, the Mid-Columbia Conference moved freshman baseball games to Tuesdays and Fridays at the same time, but on opposite fields, as the varsity games. This was done because there is a lack of baseball umpires to work every day of the week.

In Oregon, district wrestling tournaments for 2A/1A, 3A and 6A are held two weeks before state, while the 4A and 5A are the week before state. This is simply because there are not enough wrestling officials in the state to cover all of the tournaments in one weekend.

A shortage of officials is nothing new in Washington, Oregon or nationwide.

From 2009-19, the OSAA saw a decline in officials. This year, there has been a slight uptick in people putting on the stripes, mostly in basketball.

In Washington, things are no better.

The Washington Officials Association (WOA), which recruits, trains and assigns officials for games sanctioned by the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA), has lost more than 1,500 members over the past 10 years, according to research done by the *Seattle Times*.

The athletes who suffer the most from this are the young ones just learning the game. Freshman and junior varsity games could be canceled for lack of officials. Youth tournaments could see a cap put on the number of teams that can participate for the same reason.

Long-time referees like George Gillette of Milton-Freewater, who has spent the better part of 50 years calling basketball, football and baseball games in Oregon, are becoming as rare as dinosaurs.

Gillette, who turns 70 next month, is one of the most respected officials in Oregon. This week, he is evaluating officials at the 2A state tournament in Pendleton.

As commissioner of the Blue Mountain Conference Basketball Officials Association, Gillette said most of the turnover in his group is because of health-related issues as one ages. He admitted that is not the case in other associations.

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GOLDEN EAGLES CLINCH QUARTERFINAL VICTORY

Nixyaawii will face Damascus Christian in Friday’s semifinals

By COREY KIRK
EO Media Group

BAKER CITY — With their hopes for a second consecutive state title on the line, the Nixyaawii Golden Eagles relied on defense.

Before an electric crowd in the Baker High School gym Thursday afternoon, Nixyaawii freshman Shane Rivera had two key steals in the final 40 seconds as the Golden Eagles scored the final five points to beat Trinity Lutheran 66-63 in a quarterfinal game at the Class 1A state boys basketball tournament.

After Mick Schimmel, who led Nixyaawii with 25 points, made two free throws with 50 seconds left to tie the score at 63, Rivera snagged the first of his two steals.

Trinity Lutheran’s Matthew Eidler fouled Schimmel, who made 1 of 2 free throws to give the Golden Eagles the lead with 31 seconds remaining. Rivera stole the ball again with 17 seconds left, and this time he completed the play with a layup for the final points of the game.

“Our kids stayed the course,” said Nixyaawii coach Shane Rivera. “It was a good win, but we are not done yet.”

Rivera said it was exciting to watch his son make game-changing plays.

“I’m as proud as any parent could be,” Coach Rivera said. “When it was his time to step up, it was satisfying for sure.”

From the tipoff of this rematch of the 2019 state title game, which Nixyaawii won 59-42, physicality was shown by both teams as players were diving for loose balls, grabbing rebounds and, unfortunately, racking up team fouls. The teams combined for 41 fouls in the game and 38 free throws.

Trinity Lutheran coach Kyle Gilbert said he was pleased with his team’s sense of urgency.

“They leave everything out on the court; during this game I never questioned their drive and their attitude,” Gilbert said.

After the teams played to a 17-all tie after the first quarter, the Golden Eagles broke the game open by going on a 15-0 run in the second quarter led by Schimmel, a senior, and Magi Moses, who had six points each. Nixyaawii outscored the Saints 22-6 in the



EO Media Group Photo/S. John Collins

Nixyaawii’s Mick Schimmel (24) drives toward the basket. The Nixyaawii Golden Eagles defeated the Trinity Lutheran Saints 66-63 in the quarterfinal round of the OSAA 1A State Basketball Tournament at Baker High School on Thursday night.

quarter and led 39-23 at halftime. Rivera was content with how much his team was on the same page during the second quarter spurt.

“The kids were verbally communicating with each other, making the right adjustments,” Rivera said.

As the players trickled back onto the hardwood in preparation for the second half, Gilbert saw a change of mentality in his team, and he knew they weren’t going to go down easily.

“They came out without any fear,” Gilbert said.

Shots began to fall for the Saints, and they scored more points in the third quarter — 26 — than in the first two quarters combined.

Led by Scooty Gilbert, the coach’s son, who had a game-high 28 points, Trinity Lutheran cut Nixyaawii’s lead to 53-49 entering the fourth quarter.

“He just had that feel for that kind of a game and those bigger moments,” coach Gilbert said about his son. “At times we rely on

him to bring us back.”

Eidler’s free throw with 4:31 left in the game tied the score at 55. Nixyaawii then scored four straight points, including a 3-pointer by Rivera, to lead 59-55 with 3:31 left. But the Saints responded with a 5-0 run capped by Gideon Schippers’ 3-pointer with 2:53 left, giving Trinity Lutheran its first lead, 60-59, since the first quarter.

Rivera said he kept encouraging his players to keep up the pressure defensively even as the Saints took the lead.

“The jump balls, the diving on the boards, those little things add up,” Rivera said.

The teams traded baskets, and Scooty Gilbert made a free throw to give the Saints a 63-61 lead before Nixyaawii’s final run.

The Golden Eagles will continue their quest for back-to-back state titles, taking on Damascus Christian in the semifinals at 4:15 p.m. Friday.

Trinity Lutheran will play Ione/Arlington at 8 a.m. Friday in the consolation semifinals.

Bucks brace for tough matchup against Wolverines

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — It has come to the point of the season where winning is the only thing that will keep you playing another day.

The Pendleton Bucks, who eked out a 74-73 overtime road win over Parkrose last year in the first round of the 5A state basketball tournament, are back in the mix this season.

The Bucks (19-5) will take on Willamette (16-9) at 4 p.m. on Saturday in Eugene in a loser-out game. The winner advances to the Elite 8 next week at Oregon State University in Corvallis.

“I think we match up well,” Pendleton coach Zach Dong said. “We are similar in personnel and play a similar style. My coaches and I were watching film, and they remind us of us. We have been

playing the past three, four months for this one game. It should be a fun one.”

A good portion of the Bucks were on the team last year when they went to Corvallis, so Dong is relatively confident his team will be able to push the jitters aside and get to work against the Wolverines.

“We’ve talked about it,” Dong said. “We know what it takes, how much focus we have to have in practice. Been there, done that — the pressure will help us going into Saturday.”

Among that group of returning players is Dakota Sams, Kason Broncheau, Tanner Sweek, Cooper Roberts and Redmond O’Hanlon. You also can toss in Lane Maher, who missed last season with an injury, and Stockton Hoffman, who transferred from Weston-McEwen.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney, File

Pendleton’s Stockton Hoffman (22) launches a three-point shot during a Jan. 28, 2020, nonconference game against La Grande.

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