

Lions down Falcons

Cottage Grove uses fast start to secure another league victory

By Zach Silva
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With just under four minutes left to play on Friday at home against Elmira, Cottage Grove called timeout. Leading comfortably all game – thanks to a 16-0 run to start the opening quarter – the Falcons (6-9, 0-3 Sky-Em) cut the Lions' (4-13, 2-1) lead to single digits. Having given up similar leads throughout the season, the Lions needed to talk.

"At the timeout we were like, 'Hey, we're being too cautious about everything, let's just play our game and do what we do best and get to the rim and score.' And then I think just us flying around on defense, getting those steals and really gave us the momentum to keep going," said Cottage Grove senior Dylan Graves who finished with 14 points on the game.

Elmira cut the deficit to seven before the Lions were able to close out the game via made free throws and steals to finish on an 11-5 run to score a 53-40 victory.

"I called that timeout, I explained the situation, they said, 'Ok.' They understood it, they went out and they executed," said Cottage Grove head coach Seth Hutchison. "They defended hard, they contested shots and then we executed offensively and we got the shots we wanted to shoot and we knocked down free throws in the fourth quarter, too."

In the final two minutes of play, Cottage Grove came up with three steals, from Graves, Jaden Doolittle and freshman Landon Colburn, that turned into six points to seal the game. Doolittle was four-of-four from the free throw line in the final quarter for all his points in the game.

"Not the most points but those are big, meaningful points. Because if you miss those free throws then they're continuing their run. They're run stoppers," said Hutchison.

While it was the play of the Cottage Grove guards finishing the game, the day started with the success of the bigs inside. The Lions looked unstoppable in the opening minutes as they dismantled the Elmira defense to take a fast 16-point advantage and finished the quarter with an 18-5 advantage. Leading the charge was Cottage Grove's Creed Lufkin inside scoring 10 points in the first quarter. Lufkin finished the day with 15 as frontcourt partner in crime Jasper Nichols-Ferguson added 11.

"Beginning of the season I don't think they were as confident but these last five games, I've seen a whole new Creed and Jasper. Just them being able to crash the boards, get big rebounds for us and be able to put them back in and bail us out half the time. It's great having them," said Graves.

Their presence was also felt on the defensive end as they created problems for

LIONS see B3

Roberts steps down as CGHS head coach



Gary Roberts tells the Cottage Grove football team on Jan. 15 that he is stepping down from his role as head coach after 11 seasons.

PHOTOS BY ZACH SILVA/CG SENTINEL

Winningest coach in program history departs after 11 seasons

By Zach Silva
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After 11 seasons of leading the Cottage Grove football team, Gary Roberts has stepped down from his position as head coach.

Roberts announced the decision last Tuesday at a lunchtime meeting with next year's football team.

"I'm here today to let you guys know that I'm stepping down as the head coach as of right now," Roberts said. "So, I just wanted to tell you guys that 11 years, it's been fun but I'm tired. I'm just being honest with you."

Roberts, 40, finished with a 75-42 record at CGHS and has become the winningest football coach in school history. He was named Sky-Em Coach

of the year five times (2010, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2017) and 4A Coach of the year twice (2016, 2017) while also winning the school's first ever state football title (2017). Before coaching at CGHS he was an assistant for seven seasons at Sheldon High School.

"There is no offseason for the head football coach. There is no offseason for a lot of coaches, I mean, there isn't. Between ordering things, inventory, coaches' clinics, starting the weight room up and doing all the summer stuff. It's a year-round job. I'm just tired and I need a break," said Roberts who also serves as CGHS athletic director and vice principal.

"This isn't going to be (a situation) where two weeks now I'm taking a job from somewhere else. That ain't happening. Now, my plan is to be back here next year. I guarantee I'm not taking another football job. I'm taking a break, we'll see what the future

has." For Roberts, this decision was not made lightly and has been something he has been thinking about and discussing with a select group of people.

"I thought about it last year, I decided I would come back and do one more and see how it went. It just, even entering the season I was a little bit, I was excited to work with this group of kids, it was a different challenge but I kind of knew at the end of the season, it was just a little different feeling," he said. "Then over the holiday break I felt like I'm not getting recharged like I thought or like I had in the past so I need a break."

While coaching the Lions, Roberts has brought the team to the highest of highs including a stretch of three state championship appearances in five years. But while the team has achieved newfound success, Roberts focuses on the what-ifs when looking back at his time as head

coach.

"Just the competitor in me thinks about the things that could have happened different. I look back at the 2010 team and think, if we would have done this different, where would it have gone? I look back at the 2008 team and think maybe – I look back right now and think of the things that I could have

done better instead of the things that I accomplished," he said. "I think that's kind of one of the reasons why we're in the position we're in is because I didn't feel like I ever took a bunch of time to reflect on the positives. I spent more time thinking about how I could have done a better

ROBERTS see B3



A Cottage Grove football player gives his former coach a hug after Roberts made his announcement.

North Douglas finds answer to Riddle



PHOTO BY BECKY GERRARD

The North Douglas defense attempts to slow Riddle's Nate Hopkins as he drives to the rim. Hopkins was held to 14 points on Saturday night.

Behind strong defense, Warriors hand Irish first loss of the season

By Zach Silva
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All season no team has been able solve Riddle. With height (seven players over six feet tall) and weapons across the board (including senior Nate Hopkins who is averaging over 25 points per game), the Irish jumped out to a dominant 14-0 record on the year including 11 wins by 25 points or more.

But Saturday night in Drain, it was North Douglas (10-6, 5-1 Skyline) leaning on their defense as they ended Riddle's (15-1, 5-1) undefeated season with a convincing 57-45 victory.

"I thought this was by far the best game. We played four quar-

ters of defense which is something that we haven't done this year," said North Douglas senior Cal Parks who led all scorers with 18 points. "We'd put two quarters together one game, another two, maybe three. But this was definitely our game of putting four quarters of solid defense together."

Riddle entered the game averaging 71 points per game on the season and the team has twice scored over 90 points in games this year. The focus of the North Douglas attack was centered on the ever-explosive Hopkins. A penchant for offense and ability to turn steals into layups – or a two-handed dunk as he showed in the opening minutes of play – Hopkins can score from anywhere on the floor and in a game last season dropped 45 points.

"They have one of the best players in the league, possibly the state in Nate. And our plan was to slow him down. If he gave up the ball, deny it back to him as best we could and just get into him and play physical. And the boys did exactly that," said North Douglas head coach Tyler Vancil. "I don't have enough good things to say about my boys, extremely proud of them right now."

Guarded everywhere he went by North Douglas' Austin Frieze or Killian Bond, Hopkins was held to 14 points and was scoreless in the fourth quarter.

"That was our game plan from the beginning of the week. (Killian) and (Austin) are two of our best, if not best, defenders on our team," said Vancil. "We

WARRIORS see B2

Athlete of the Week



This week's athlete of the week is Cottage Grove freshman Gracie Arnold. In Friday's 46-35 victory over Elmira, Arnold led the Lions with 12 points.



Cottage Grove's Gracie Arnold gets into a defensive stance earlier this season against Hidden Valley.

PHOTO BY JADEN DOOLITTLE/CGHS PHOTOGRAPHY