

Marist overpowers Cottage Grove



Cottage Grove's Jaden Doolittle gets fouled going to the rim on Friday.

Spartans lean on depth for wire to wire victory over Lions

By Zach Silva

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With a balanced scoring attack and a fast start, it was Marist defeating Cottage Grove 62-49 on Friday night in Eugene.

It was a first quarter to forget for the Lions (4-15, 2-3 Sky-Em) as they struggled to convert on offense and gave up open looks on defense allowing the Spartans (11-6, 4-0) to take a 22-8 advantage. In the opening quarter five different Marist players scored and the 11th ranked team in 4A hit three three-pointers.

"As teams have to come out to contest (our three point shots), it gives us even more space and negates their height advantage to where we were able to finish at the rim," said

Marist head coach Bart Pollard. In 1991, as a CGHS student, Pollard helped guide the school to its only state title and he also later coached the team. In his coaching tenure he coached current CGHS head coach Seth Hutchison.

The Lions started the game with big men Creed Lufkin, Jasper Nichols-Ferguson and, for the first time this season, 6-foot-8 sophomore Shambay Gabriel Trapp as the back line of the team's 2-3 defense.

"They're a good shooting team but when we went with 2-3 to start the game they shot us out of it," said Seth Hutchison. "We got really good looks... but that's sometimes the game of basketball, they just didn't fall"

With renewed energy in the second quarter, Cottage Grove began to stop the bleeding as they found shots on offense and Marist began to miss. Outscoring Marist 13-9 in the quarter,

the Lions cut their deficit to 10 points heading into halftime.

"I'm proud of the way the kids fought, they competed. Multiple times it could have been a blowout game and (Marist) could have pushed it to 25 at times. [They went] up 17, we got it back to 10 and then they'd push it back to 15, and then cut it back to 10," said Hutchison. "It was just kind of a back and forth. These kids couldn't just push over the hump there."

The second half mirrored the first as the Spartans pushed their lead to as many as 16 before a 9-2 Cottage Grove in the fourth quarter run had them trailing by single digits before another Marist offensive surge.

Cottage Grove was led in scoring by Creed Lufkin who had 24 points on the day.

"I really believe [we] are a good team. They have the pieces to be a really good team, I just wish we had more time together. I mean, they competed, they played hard, they could have easily gave up but they just didn't give up and I'm proud of that," said Hutchison.

It wasn't all positive for Hutchison who was displeased with his team for picking up a pair of technical fouls for talking back to the referees.

"They can't do that. That's my big philosophy as a coach, I don't talk to the refs disrespectfully, they can't do that. It's frustrating that it was coming from upper classmen. That's one of the things that's bigger things that I'm upset with, coming from a senior and a junior," said Hutchison. "And that just can't happen. I'm asking these upper classmen to lay a foundation for these younger kids and that's not the foundation we want to lay right there. We want to just be respectful."

With a 2-3 record in league play, the Lions will start the second half of the Sky-Em season on Friday at home against Siuslaw at 7:15 p.m.

SUCCESS from B1

chorage basketball team.

There was no guarantee on what White would become on the basketball court. But he was a committed athlete and was ready to put in the work. In Cottage Grove, Finley was hoping for that same buy-in from an athletic duo. And he got it.

"Austin White showed up every morning, every afternoon - I couldn't give him enough basketball," said Finley. "And Creed and Jasper are the same way. They are programmed the same way and if they had more time, they definitely could have been special players for sure."

For Nichols-Ferguson and Lufkin, both had previously dabbled in basketball throughout their lives to various levels of success.

"Well, I was pretty bad," said Nichols-Ferguson at a recent CGHS varsity practice. "And the whole team was pretty bad. I think I played on the C team in middle school. It was just a weird experience."

For Lufkin, he had played more recently and had also struggled.

"I wasn't fast enough, I wasn't quick enough and I wasn't very skilled," said Lufkin, remembering trying out and getting cut from the basketball team during his freshmen year of high school. For both boys, both talented athletes in other sports, they had moved on from basketball. Nichols-Ferguson has been a key part of the CGHS soccer team while Lufkin was an integral part of the football team. But Finley was just getting started.

"He [was persistent] and he kept coming and bugging me and bugging me," said Lufkin. But Finley remembered those interactions differently.

"I just kept encouraging him, kept encouraging him, kept encouraging him and then he shows up for our meeting and things like that and he ends up playing and being a big part of our team," said Finley.

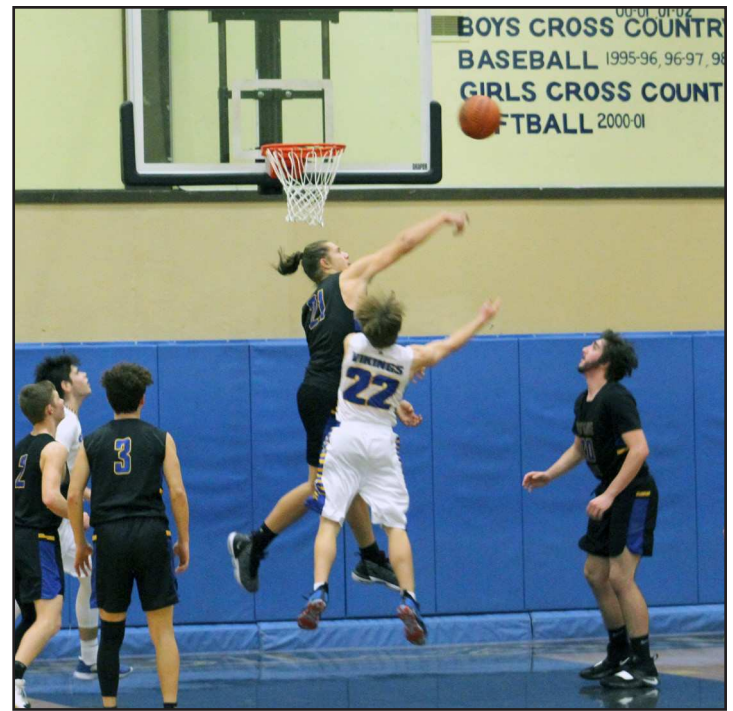
Lufkin made a deal that if the CGHS football team won the state championship, he would come out for the team. Sure enough, the team secured the school's first-ever title and Lufkin made his way to the hardwood. He played JV where, at 275 pounds, he worked himself into basketball shape. Constantly running and focusing on post work, the game slowly but surely started to click.

"I just started getting comfortable and then started learning offenses and how to play good defense. Because I used to be like Shaq, I'd just hit everyone and just probably foul out just about every game," said Lufkin.

By the end of the season, he was suiting up on varsity and was joined on the end of the bench by Nichols-Ferguson. Still debating if he wanted to join the team or not when the season began, Nichols-Ferguson joined the team midway through the season.

"[Jasper] just said his heart wasn't in it and he wanted to focus on school and I was 100 percent behind him," said Finley. "I said, 'Ok, maybe next year. Maybe next year,' you know. And so we went on and then I think he came to me like three weeks into the season and he saw what his friends were doing and he missed it."

Never playing more than a few minutes on varsity at a time, Lufkin and Nichols-Ferguson both went into the offseason motivated for their senior year when they knew they would be



Top: Lufkin looks to set up the offense against Elmira earlier this season. Bottom: Nichols-Ferguson records an emphatic block against Siuslaw.

called into action. They both played spring ball and summer ball to get ready. During the off-season, Lufkin started his days at 5:15 a.m., when Finley would pick him up for morning practice.

"I knew going into my junior year that I wasn't going to get much time on varsity, if any at all. So it was pretty much just gearing me for my senior year to become a senior leader and fill in those big shoes ahead of me," said Lufkin.

One pair of shoes he was looking to fill was the role of big man Jordan Hagewood. Hagewood graduated from CGHS last year and helped Lufkin and Nichols-Ferguson along with their basketball journey. He is again helping them this year but not as a teammate but as an assistant coach for the team.

"Before, they would kind of throw the ball at the hoop and not really shoot it," said Hagewood reflecting on the growth the pair has made in one season. "Now they've got a little bit of touch on it."

Growing in confidence and skill alike - and for Lufkin, now down to 203 pounds - the real test came once the pair of seniors were named starters on the varsity team.

"It was kind of a whether they are ready or not, kind of had to step into the role that they play," said Hagewood. "Instead of backing down from that, they kind of stepped up and accepted the challenge."

While both had played in big games in soccer and football respectively, varsity basketball was its own beast.

"It's like a lot of pressure. Because with soccer you go out there and there weren't many people in the stands," said Nichols-Ferguson. "For these games, these varsity games are usually packed. And then you go to other away games and those

are packed and there are away crowds that actually jeer and say mean stuff sometimes and it's just weird... I do like it. It's a different energy."

With inexperienced varsity players scattered across the team and first year head coach Seth Hutchison at the helm, the Lions struggled at the start of the year, losing their first 10 games of the season. The team picked up a couple wins including three wins in a four game stretch in early January.

While the team has looked to find its footing, Lufkin and Nichols-Ferguson have made their impact in games throughout the year. Defensively they create problems for any team looking to drive the lane as they challenge each shot and regularly rack up blocks. On offense, Lufkin has consistently been the team's highest scorer in games as he has developed a post-game and if he misses, it seems that Nichols-Ferguson is usually there for the offensive rebound and put back.

"Just seeing them when they started in November to what they're at now, it's day and night," Hutchison said last week. "Kind of just the basketball experience part, the IQ of being on the floor. You can see their minds start to slow down a little bit. And that's the exciting part when they have that, 'Aha!' that, 'Oh, I get it now' moment."

While neither player will be named Oregon's Gatorade Player of the Year or lead the team to a state basketball title, their coaches extolled these players for who they are off the court in addition to their work ethic.

"I think that will carry over into their lives. They're going to do some amazing things after they graduate because they are men of their word," said Finley. "They'll do what they say and they'll follow through and they'll work hard."

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