

Lions *from B1*

breath', and I hit [both] and felt so much relief."

Berry's clutch free throws tied the game at 51 and, after stopping the Falcons on their next possession, he got an opportunity to do something even bigger.

As time ticked away, Berry brought the ball upcourt and, in lieu of settling for a jump shot, made an executive decision to try to finish the game aggressively. Berry used the same strength he employs as the running back of the football team to barrel his way into the paint, flipping the ball up towards the hoop amongst a sea of taller defenders. The shot went in, the clock expired and the Lions won.

"Usually in practice when I get the ball low enough, I'm a little bigger dude, so I just did what I do best and got to the hoop," Berry said. "It wasn't even designed for me. I was supposed to hold the ball," said Berry.

But, with time running out and limited options, Hutchison audibled and instructed his

point guard to attack. The game-winner gave Berry 15 points in the game along with seven rebounds and three steals. He was only 3/6 from the free throw line overall, but he hit the two that mattered most.

"I attribute all that to him," Hutchison said. "He took on a leadership role for us tonight. He was positive with his teammates all night ... He was inspirational for us. He attacked the basket really tough for us."

The unexpected ending was made even more exciting by the fact that a few factors were working against the Lions from early on. Due to injuries, Cottage Grove only had seven players dressed in uniform for the game. This lack of depth was exacerbated by early foul trouble, including for senior Zach Anlauf who was pulled in the first quarter with three fouls.

"That really put us in a bind right there after we were doing



PHOTO BY NICK SNYDER/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL
Senior Zach Anlauf was once again integral to the Lions' success.

so well," Hutchison said. The Lions got out of the gate to an early 12-7 lead, but the advantage was done in once the referees' whistles began sounding.

"We were playing physical, we were going to our advantages, throwing it inside and they couldn't handle us inside. Then we started getting away from

that ... but they responded really well. They held their composure. They kept fighting and battling."

Cottage Grove bounced back in the second half to limit their fouling and creep back into the game, creating the opportunity for Berry to make the bus ride back home a happy one.

Also with strong performances for the Lions was Cameron, who finished the game with 17 points and two steals and sophomore Carter Bascue, who added nine points on 4/6 shooting with seven rebounds.

The other senior on the team along with Berry, Zach Anlauf, once again made his presence known both on and off the stat-sheet. After recovering from early foul trouble, he finished with 12 points and six rebounds, but more importantly was a +12 in 28 minutes of play, meaning that Cottage Grove outscored Elmira by 12 points during the 28 minutes that Anlauf was in the game. The next highest player for the Lions was +2.

Cottage Grove's next game will likely be its toughest test

of the season as they head to Marist (13-3, 3-0) on Fri., Jan. 31 to take on the third-ranked Spartans.

Girls basketball

After the adrenaline-pumping finish of the boys game, the Cottage Grove girls (12-5, 3-0) took care of business against Elmira (2-14, 0-3), winning 55-29 to earn their third consecutive victory and fifth in their last six games.

The Lions were once again spurred on by a balanced effort from entrenched starters Emma Gardner, Matty Ladd, Gracie Arnold and Mikaela Blomquist. Ladd and Arnold, in particular, combined for 17 rebounds and nine steals and, as per usual, used their height advantage to create problems inside for the Falcons' defense.

Cottage Grove's Fri., Jan. 31 game against Marist (8-6, 3-0) will pit two teams undefeated in league play against one another. The winner will take sole ownership of the top position in the 2020 Sky-Em standings.

Warriors *from B1*

for the visiting team and put North Douglas alone in first place in the Skyline league standings.

"Days Creek, you gotta tip your hat to them," said head coach Tyler Vancil. "They play incredible defense and they make you work for it. It was back and forth the whole time. It was nerve-racking."

The victory provided a good example of the direction the North Douglas boys' team has taken over the last two-and-a-half weeks. They began the season 6-6, but have won six consecutive league games after back-to-back losses to Perrydale and this same Days Creek team in early January.

While health was a concern early in the season, the team is currently near full strength and quickly improving, which is to be expected for a roster with six

freshmen. The growth was evident in last weekend's contest as the Warriors turned a 21-point loss in their first matchup with the Wolves into a 1-point win in the second.

"We took care of the ball much better," Vancil said. "I think we had 20 turnovers or so in the first game. The second game, I think we had 12. It's not a huge difference, but that's eight possessions. We responded to their pressure much better than we did the first time around and we actually pressured them."

The Warriors played a full-court, man-to-man press defense the entire game, keeping the score close and giving themselves a chance late in the fourth quarter.

With 18 seconds left, Days Creek's Zane DeGroot hit a shot to tie the game at 50, prompting Vancil to call a timeout. The Warriors set up their offense and the Wolves forced them into a difficult shot.

The ball rattled off the rim and was rebounded by Black who got fouled on the

putback attempt. With under one second left, Black took to the free throw line, made the first to give the Warriors the lead and missed the second. Days Creek had only enough time to miss a halfcourt heave and the previous league leaders went home dethroned.

Black finished with seven points and seven rebounds, five of which came in the fourth quarter, and was helped along by seniors Tanner Parks (12 points) and Jake Gerrard (10 points, 10 rebounds) as well as freshman Keegan Mast (12 points).

"It feels like we're starting to gel a little bit," Vancil said. "I think the biggest thing you can say for our team is ... we don't have a guy that has to go out and get his. It's nice for me that I don't know who's going to lead us in scoring that night because they're so unselfish."

As North Douglas sits alone atop the league standings, they now have an unprecedented opportunity before them.

Whereas the girls' team has won league every season except one (2017-18, finished fourth) since joining the 1A Skyline league in 2014-15, the boys' squad has never achieved the feat. Their current best is a second-place finish in 2016-17 when the team went 11-2 in league play (24-10 overall) and ended the season ranked #4.

While Vancil and his players may not have that fact at the forefront of their minds, with only six games remaining, they still know what they need to do.

"That game was huge in determining where we finish out in Skyline and now, we control our own destiny," Vancil said. "If we can win our next few games in Skyline and win out, then we'll have an opportunity to play for that one seed."

Just four of the Warriors' remaining six games are league matchups. They will play twice this weekend, at home against Yoncalla on Fri., Jan. 31 and then away at Elkton the next day, Sat., Feb. 2.

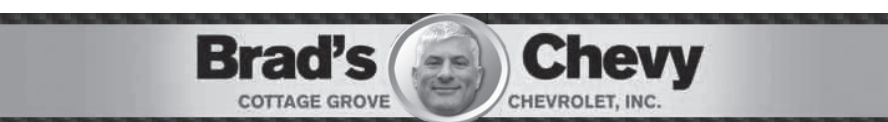
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