

# Cardinals take second in Big Sky District Championship

The Ione Cardinals had the Big Sky District Championship in their sights in one fantastic ball game on Saturday, February 20, before Nixyaawii picked up a long rebound and swished an even longer three at the buzzer to take the win 59-57. The heart-breaking loss culminated an exciting tournament run for the Cardinals who won games on Thursday and Friday before ending up second place in the Big Sky on Saturday.

The Cards kicked off the district tournament taking on Horizon Christian of Hood River on Thursday, February 18. In the first half, the Ione team sizzled with Matt Hams scoring 20 of his game high 26 points and Zac Orem knocking down four three pointers and scoring 14 points. At the half, Ione led 38-26 and looked ready to run away with it. But the Hawks were not quite ready to concede. In the third quarter, Horizon was matching Zac Orem three-pointer for three-pointer. With 3:10 left in the third, the Hawks hit a three to pull within four points and followed with another bucket to narrow the lead further, 45-43. In the last 40 seconds, Tanner Rietmann hit a shot and Zac Orem hit his sixth trey of the game and put the lead back to seven, 50-43. The Cards led by nine early in the fourth but the Hawks chipped away at the lead and when Ione went stone cold at the free throw line (1-9 in the fourth) the Hawks got to within one 57-56 with 22 seconds on the clock. Adam Collin and Zac Orem went to the line for two shots each and Orem was able to put one down to make the lead a tad more stable at 58-56.

The Hawks worked to get one shot off in the closing seconds but it was way off and the Cardinals hung on to win 58-56.

Matt Hams led all scorers with 26 and Zac Orem added 23. The Cards shot 44% from the floor and the Hawks shot 49% for the game.

"This as a great win to get to open district," said Coach Dennis Stefani. "Matt and Zac each had a huge first half to give us a good lead at halftime. Once again, our free throw shooting almost cost us but we were able to hold on for the win."

The win sent the Cards to the semi-finals where they met the number one team from the Big Sky West, South Wasco County. For the past five years, South Wasco has been a basketball nemesis for the Cardinals and their ranking as well as sharp-shooter, Steven Larlee commanded respect again this season. Ione jumped out to a 14-11 first quarter lead but stalled a bit in the second. The Redsidies led 21-19 at the half. The Cards were able to bust things open in the third. RJ Ramos had his best quarter this season when he went on a 10 point scoring rampage, canning two threes in a row and following up with two more baskets. Zac Orem hit back to back threes in the last two minutes of the quarter as the Cards outscored South Wasco 21 to 8 to build a 40-29 lead heading into the fourth. Down the stretch, the teams swapped scores before Matt Hams hit back-to-back layins off steals to build the game's biggest lead, 50-35 with just over three minutes to play. But Larlee did not allow the Cards to coast to the win as



The Ione Cardinals took second place at Big Sky District Tournament this past weekend. -Photo by Theresa Crawford

he almost single-handedly drug the Redsidies back into contention. Back-to-back threes with under 1:30 to go put the Redsidies within six points but the Cards stayed cool to take the 52-45 win.

Zac Orem led the team in scoring with 19 points, shooting 50% from the field and canning four three-pointers. Matt Hams added 15 and RJ Ramos had 10. The team shot 48% from the floor while the Redsidies managed 38%. Tanner Rietmann had nine rebounds but the Cards were out-rebounded 32-26.

"What a great win for this team," said an ecstatic Coach Dennis Stefani. "These kids wanted to end South Wasco's streak against us so they went out and played a terrific team game to get it accomplished. I feel great for the seniors s they now realize they are in the state playoffs."

The win guaranteed the Cards either the number one or two seed into the state playoffs, depending on the outcome of the championship game against Nixyaawii, staged Saturday night February 20. From the opening tip,

it was clear the Cards were determined to not let the high-flying Golden Eagles get away. Throughout the game, Nixyaawii's lead was never more than four and Ione held the biggest lead in the game at eight with 2:49 left in the third. It was at that point, though, that it started to rain three pointers for Nixyaawii. The Eagles hit six treys in a row on their way to eight three's in the last quarter and a half, some easily from NBA range. With 37 seconds left in the game, the Eagles hit a long three to go up 56-54. Zac Orem, who had struggled from long range in this game, knocked down a huge three for the Cardinals with 19 seconds on the clock to put Ione up by one. Nix had a final possession and when their first shot bounced off, the Ione crowd held their breath. A long rebound put the ball back in the hands of Nixyaawii's Shawn Simpson who hit the shot of his life, a long-range three point swish at the buzzer to give Nixyaawii the win.

"This was one of the best basketball games I have been part of during my tenure here," said Coach

Dennis Stefani. "Both teams played hard and it was a game that could have gone either way."

Although the loss was heartbreaking for the team on the floor, the standing room only crowd in attendance knew they had seen something special. "At the end, it was a long rebound and a bounce of the

## Hams receives Jason Halvorsen Spirit of Basketball award

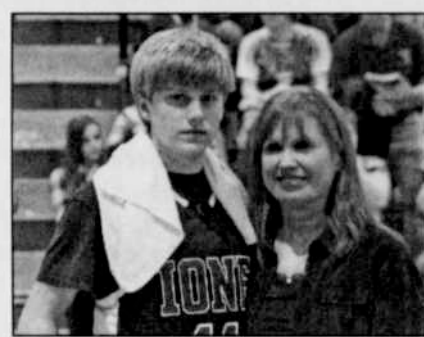
Ione Senior Matt Hams won the Jason Halvorsen Spirit of Basketball award. Each year, the award goes to a boy and a girl who best exemplify the spirit of basketball. Qualities considered are spirit, floor leadership, selflessness, contribution and sportsmanship. Janelle Keever of Dufur also received the award.

"It is a very big honor to receive the Jason Halvorsen 'Spirit of Basketball' award," stated Matt Hams. "I know what it means to the community

ball that set up Nixyaawii for the winning shot at the buzzer," noted Coach Stefani. "I'm very proud of the kids. We are playing very good basketball right now."

Matt Hams led the team with 22 points, very close to his amazing season average of 22.7 points per game. Tanner Rietmann had a big game in the paint with 14 points and 16 rebounds. Rietmann averaged 8.3 boards per game.

The Cards shot 43% compared to Nixyaawii's 36% but they had to combat ten three-pointers from the Golden Eagles. The Cards had just 11 turnovers and the Eagles had just nine, meaning not many mistakes happened in the game. The Cards had an outstanding rebounding night, tallying 50 boards to just 25 for Nix. Adam Collin helped out Tanner Rietmann with 11 boards and RJ Ramos added eight.



Pictured is Matt Hams with Cathy Halvorsen. -Photo by Theresa Crawford

and to our school and it means a lot to me. I am excited and grateful to have my name on the plaque in our trophy case honoring Jason."

This is the second time in 15 years that the award has made its way home to Ione.



# SIMPLY THE BEST



Back Row-Asst. Coach Jim Swanson, Kevin LaRue, Alex Fetterhoff, Zac Orem, Adam Collin, Christian Cederquist, Tanner Rietmann, Matt Hams, Evan Rietmann, R.J. Ramos, Head Coach Dennis Stefani  
Front Row-Alex Rietmann, Micah Stillman, Marco Juarez. Not Pictured-Gunner Jessen

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GAME

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**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24TH 6:00**

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