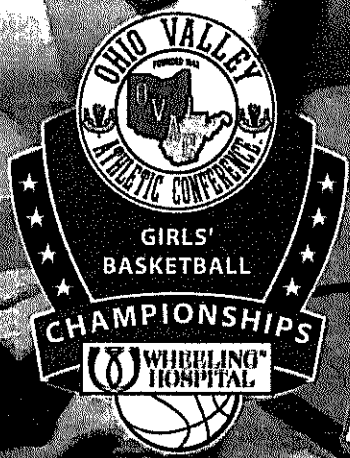


OVAC GIRLS

Basketball Championships

2019



Saturday, February 9, 2019

A Supplement to The Times Leader

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ON THE COVER

Pictured is a stand-out player from each of the five schools from The Times Leader's coverage area who will be taking part in today's championship games. From left are Katrina Davis (Bellaire), Lauren Flannery (River), Ashlie Loudon (Beallsville), Baylee Wach (Shadyside) and Maria Vincenzo (St. Clairsville).

Photos by Seth Staskey, Cody Tomer and Rick Thorp
Cover Design by Jesse Kovalski
Tab Design by Seth Staskey

Bellaire, Fort Frye set to clash

• Big Reds seek first title since '06

By **BUBBA KAPRAL**
Executive Sports Editor

ST. CLAIRSVILLE - The 3A clash between Bellaire and Fort Frye may be the marquee game of the five OVAC Girls Basketball Championship contests at Ohio University Eastern today.

The top-seeded Big Reds boast a sparkling 17-2 record while the second-seeded Cadets own an equally impressive 16-2 ledger on the campaign.

Both schools are no strangers to OVAC girls hoop championships. The Big Reds have pocketed seven titles, the last coming in 2006. Fort Frye, meanwhile, owns nine conference championships, the most recent coming in 2016.

The two teams are polar opposites when it comes to experience.

The Big Reds feature a top seven comprised of five seniors and two juniors. The

Cadets, meanwhile, have just one senior on their roster while starting three freshmen.

Regardless of youth, Farrier holds the Beverly-based ballers in high regard.

"Fort Frye is a very well coached team and (Morgan) Borich is an excellent player," the fourth-year Big Reds' boss noted. "They have a good mix of physical players and shooters. I believe whatever team wins the rebounding battle will win the game."

Bellaire, which lost to Wheeling Central in last year's OVAC finale, punched its ticket into this morning's final via an impressive semifinal rout of Union Local by an 82-53 count Monday.

Despite the lop-sided verdict, Farrier, who has done a remarkable job of rebuilding the once-proud program, is not totally happy with how his Reds are operating.

"The last few games we have played well in spots. We haven't put a complete game together for awhile," he said. "I am hoping we come out Saturday focused and ready to play from the tip."

"I think last year's (title game) experience should help. Last year, we were excited to be in the game," he added. "This year we will not be satisfied unless we win the game."

To make that championship come to fruition for Bellaire, Farrier will be relying on a core four of talented and battle-tested players. All are averaging in double figures.

Maci Crozier, Natalie Stoner and Michaela Flaherty have been through the wars for four seasons now, while Katrina Davis is one of the premier juniors in the OVAC.

Davis leads the well-bal-



Photo/PAUL KRAJNYAK

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Bellaire girls basketball team. Front row, from left, are Cristina Recio, Natalie Stoner, Brittany Falcone, Sydney Purteman, Michaela Flaherty, Maci Crozier and Linde Verheyen. Second row, from left, are Shayleigh Sochor, Kaleigh Leigh, Bryanna Beckett, Courtney Ault, Ashley McCarthy, Mia Gavarkavich, Katrina Davis, Jenna Miller and Kaya Chilson. Back row, from left, are head coach John Farrier and assistant coach Hutch McFeely.



Photo PROVIDED

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Fort Frye Cadets basketball team. Front row, from left, are Hannah Archer, Lexie Huck, Karlee Ross, Morgan Borich, Kiersten Kesselring, Olivia Schneider and Mackenzie Dalton. Back row, from left, are assistant coach Morgan Liedtke, head coach Dan Liedtke, Haylee Ross, Julia Zalmanek, Grace Brockmeier, Viola Angle, Khloee Ross, Bella Schilling, Lilli Schilling, assistant coach Chad Ross and assistant coach Pat Lang.

anced Big Reds with a 15.7 ppg. average. Crozier, a 1,000-point scorer and an all-Ohio, blends toughness with savvy to average 14.8 points a game.

Stoner, an athletic point guard and another 1,000-point scorer, checks in with a 14.0 average to go with nearly 50 treys.

Flaherty, meanwhile, is a blue-collar, hardworking post who scores at a 10.5 clip.

Farrier has rotated two players at times as the fifth starter.

Senior guard Sydney Purteman gets the call the majority time. Junior sharpshooter Mia Gavarkavich has also

seen starting time. Senior Brittany Falcone supplies inside depth off the bench.

Bellaire, which is fueled by a suffocating full-court press, is averaging more than 65 points game. The Big Reds' potent offense will face an acid test as Fort Frye hangs its hat on its de-

See, 3A, Page 3

**GOOD LUCK
FORT FRYE
LADY
CADETS!**

**GOOD LUCK
LADY
CADETS!**
From The Fort Frye
Athletic Department

• 3A

Continued from Page 2

fense. The Cadets' two losses were heart-breakers. They fell to River at Hannibal in double-OT, 33-29. They also fell to quality big-school foe Warren Local, 50-48.

Fort Frye, under the direction of legendary coach Dan Liedtke, advanced to the finals via a 70-52 home triumph against Magnolia. Borich, a 5-9 senior, led the way with 17 points.

Freshman dandy Hannah Archer netted 16 markers while sophomore Karlee Ross and freshman Kenzie Dalton added 14 and 11 tal-

lies, respectively. Freshman Cathy Borich rounds out the Fort Frye first five.

"I thought our girls for four quarters just flat got after it," Liedtke said.

"We needed a game like this. I thought we did a great job."

Morgan Borich leads Fort Frye in scoring with a 13.2 ppg. average.

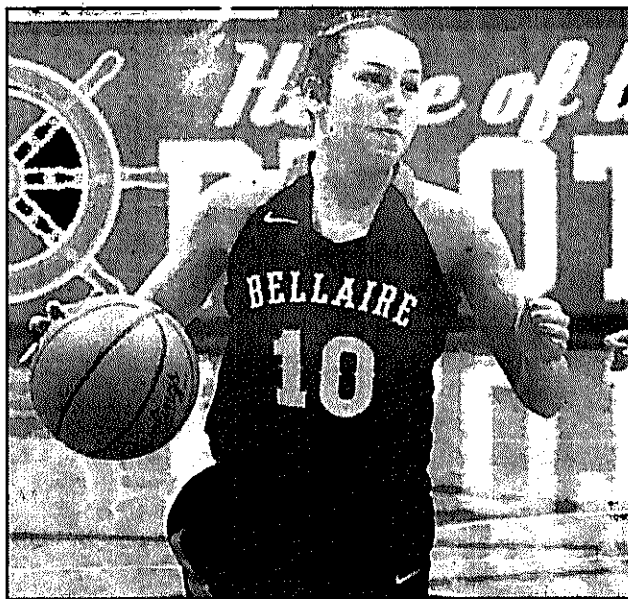
Archer checks in at 11.8 points per game while Ross averages 9.2 points and 4.8 rebounds a contest and called "a board monster," by Liedtke.

"We are playing well

right now. We are down one key player off the bench due to injury, however. That will hurt our depth," he noted. "Bellaire is a very talented team with a lot of speed and athleticism.

"They want to push the ball up and down the floor. We need to be patient on the offensive end," Liedtke continued.

"The outcome will likely be determined on which team can play at the tempo it likes. The 10 a.m. start is something I don't relish with the long drive we have."



BELLAIRE SENIOR Maci Crozier is one of the key contributors for the Big Reds. She eclipsed the 1,000-point mark in her career earlier this season. Crozier and the Big Reds will take on Fort Frye this morning at 10 in the OVAC Class 3A final at Ohio University Eastern.

T-L File Photo/RICK THORP

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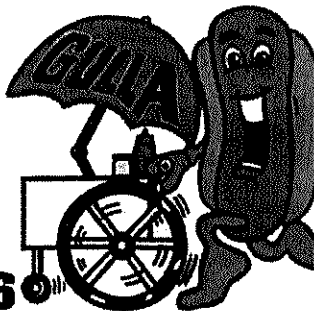
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St. Clairsville, Beaver meet for 4A title

• Red Devils chasing first crown since '07; Beavers seek initial

By RICK THORP
Times Leader Sports Writer

ST. CLAIRSVILLE – Two years ago, St. Clairsville slowly walked off the floor at Ohio University's Health, Physical Education and Recreation Center with a sour taste in its mouth.

The Red Devils' loss to Union Local in the Wheeling Hospital Girls Basketball Championship Class 4A final was a bitter pill to swallow at the time. But as St. C. head coach Stacey Agnew looks back, it, in some ways, provided the motivation his team needed to get to where it is today.

That's back at OUE, this time battling Beaver Local for the title. Tip off is set for noon, following the 3A final between Bellaire and Fort Frye.

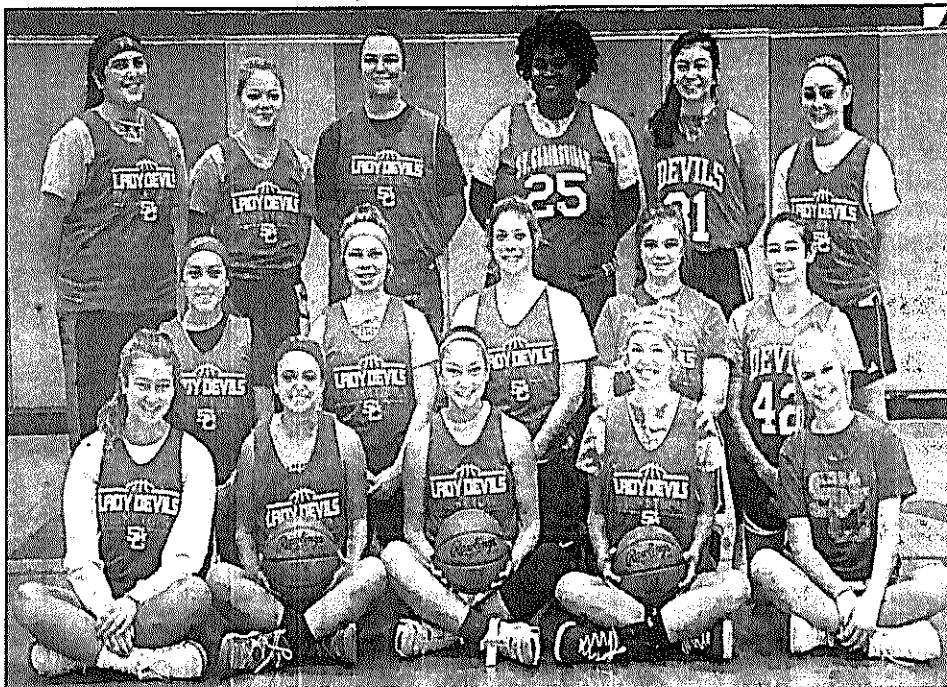
"It's not easy," Agnew said of the chore of reaching the championship game, where his squad hopes to bring home the program's first title in 19 years.

"This is very important for us. Early in the year, we talked with the seniors, and (getting to the championship game) was one of their main goals.

"They wanted to hang a banner. I told them they don't have banners anymore. They want to hang something on that wall before they leave."

That opportunity will come against a Beavers team infused with youth. Head coach Stephanie Coie's squad has nine freshman, but is bolstered by a veteran core.

"We spent the first half of the season just getting to learn our system," said Bill Croxall, Coach Casey Coie, Emma Roberts, Leah Riccardo, Jenna Riccardo, Elizabeth Kolkowski, Madison Cline, Alyson Joy, head coach Stephanie Coie and coach Scott Rogers. Back row, from left, are Jensen Britt, Chansyn Hoppel, Hailey Russell, Olivia Keller and Selena Rogers.



T-L Photo/KIM NORTH

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 St. Clairsville girls basketball team. Front row, from left, are Macy Malin, Maria Vincenzo, Rileigh Simpson, Cassidy Stephen and Alexis Thoburn. Second row, from left, are Mylie Gardner, Shae Brookover, Olivia Robinson, Annie Stroud and Kadaira Fordyce. Back row, from left, are Destiny Heatherington, Katie Strama, Emma Haley, Daishanay Easter, Keri Klinkoski and Sydney Miller. Absent was Dekotah Namack.



Photo Provided

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Beaver Local basketball team. Front row, from left, are Kitty Chen, Halle Jordan, Madison Ours, Sydnie Holden, Alexia Harding, Riley Britt, Brooke Briggs and Coach Lexie Merriman. Second row, from left, are Coach Bill Croxall, Coach Casey Coie, Emma Roberts, Leah Riccardo, Jenna Riccardo, Elizabeth Kolkowski, Madison Cline, Alyson Joy, head coach Stephanie Coie and coach Scott Rogers. Back row, from left, are Jensen Britt, Chansyn Hoppel, Hailey Russell, Olivia Keller and Selena Rogers.

things out."

Although he's had limited exposure to the Beavers (12-7), Agnew was impressed by what he saw of them during the recent Buckeye 8 placement event at Martins Ferry High School.

"They have a few really good players, and they're coached well," he said.

"They have a 6-foot girl who can shoot the 3. She's a great player.

That's one of the freshmen – Elizabeth Kolkowski. She's averaging 10 points and 8.3 rebounds per game.

Agnew was also impressed with Beaver Local's guards, of which it has three in its starting lineup – seniors Sydnie Holden and Madison Ours, and junior Riley Britt. Ours runs the point, with Ours filling the 2-guard spot.

The Beaver's final starter, Jenna Riccardo, is also the team's ace. The junior leads the team with 23 ppg and 13.6 rpg.

"They have great talent," Agnew stressed. "We'll have to box out really hard and get after them."

An appearance in today's final might've seemed far-fetched at the start of the season, but through hard work and determination, Coie said her group is peaking at the right moment.

"We are a very unselfish team," she said. "We don't worry about who scores points. Our younger kids are really starting to understand their roles and what they need to do to be successful."

Coie said a turning point may have taken place around the first of the year when she switched up practice plans. She went from having the varsity go against the JV, to dividing the varsity into two teams.

"I think that really helped our freshmen understand our defensive schemes and it's made them better," she said. "We do nothing but

competition drills at practice and it's really made us better and gotten everyone to work harder."

Coie added her team is continually improving at game management, etc. She hopes the experience some of her seniors have gained playing in OVAC soccer finals will segue into today's game.

"They kind of know what to expect (from the bigger atmosphere)," she said. "I'm really going to be relying on them to kind of relay things to the younger kids to keep them poised."

Most of Agnew's vets played in the final two years ago, so he's confident the spacious confines at OUE won't be an issue for them.

"I'm hoping they'll be able to handle it," he said. "I know the last time (we played in the final), we had to win seven or eight straight to get there and led at halftime. We looked in their eyes and I don't know how much more they had to give."

"I'm hoping the leadership we have will help."

That will come from players like seniors Rileigh Simpson and Maria Vincenzo and juniors Keri Klinkoski and Katie Strama. They, along with sophomore Macy Malin, have been the Red Devils' starters most of the season.

"She's a really good point guard," Coie said of Vincenzo, "and a really good 3-point shooter."

Agnew added that Vincenzo's defense has picked up this season, along with her shooting.

"She's been our primary ball handler," he said. "She's brought it up 95 percent of the time this year and done a great job"

Agnew said she and Simpson have provided great leadership.

"Rileigh's offense has picked up this year," he said. See, 4A, Page 5



ST. CLAIRSVILLE'S Katie Strama has been one of the Red Devils key contributors this winter. She and the Devils will go after the OVAC Class 4A title today at Ohio University Eastern against Beaver Local. The Red Devils and Beavers haven't played this season. St. C. defeated Martins Ferry in the semifinals, while the Beavers took care of Buckeye Local.

T-L File Photo/SETH STASKEY



GOOD LUCK ST. CLAIRSVILLE LADY RED DEVILS!



• 4A

Continued from Page 4

noting her 9.6 points per outing. "Nothing seems to faze her."

Klinkoski, although not blessed with great size, has held her own with some of the best post players on St. C.'s schedule.

"She battles and battles," Agnew said. "She's very consistent."

Strama is the team's leading scorer at 13 ppg and always seems to have a knack for making the key shot.

"She has so much athletic ability," Angew said. "I think she's finally understanding the game in that now she's learning to consistently slow it down and kick it out."

Malin contributes, Agnew said, many intangibles that don't show up in a box score.

"She's probably our leading offensive rebounder," he said.

Lately, the Red Devils have benefited from the improved play from its bench, which includes the likes of senior Cassidy Stephens, junior Olivia Robinson and freshmen Shae Brookover and Alexis Thoburn.

Agnew said the sum of the parts has equaled success for his club.

"We've had all five starters lead the team in scoring at least once," he said. "If we could put it all together just one night, I'd like to see our scoring."

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John Marshall, University clash in Class 5A

• Monarchs trying to exact revenge from decisive loss to Hawks earlier

By **BUBBA KAPRAL**
Executive Sports Editor

WHEELING -- This wasn't the match-up most people were expecting in the OVAC 5A Girls Tournament Championship Game.

But John Marshall and University High had different ideas. Both the Monarchs and Hawks took to the road Monday night to post impressive semi-finals triumphs.

No. 3-seeded John Marshall, in the midst of a sparkling renaissance season, stunned No. 2 seed Indian Creek, 61-52, at Wintersville.

No. 4-seeded University, meanwhile, trekked to "The Palace on the Hill" and posted a 44-36 over top-seeded and 13-time OVAC champion Wheeling Park.

As a result, the Monarchs and Hawks will vie Saturday at Ohio University Eastern for the conference crown. Tipoff is set for 2 p.m.

University drilled John Marshall, 58-26, earlier this season in Moundsville.

Brock Melko has his Monarchs peeking at the perfect time. John Marshall enters the title tilt riding the wave of some impressive wins. In addition to its huge win at Indian Creek, the Glen Dale-based crew recently bagged a road win

at Morgantown.

John Marshall is now 14-6. The Monarchs will be vying for their first OVAC championship since 2002, then under the tutelage of legendary coach Stan Blankenship.

University, meanwhile, is guided by David Price. His Hawks sport a 14-5 mark. The Morgantown-based team last won the OVAC girls crown in 2013.

Both teams are state-ranked. University resides in the Class AAA fourth spot while John Marshall is No. 10.

Senior standout Shay Straughn is the Monarchs' motor. The 5-6 point guard is one of the OVAC's premier players. The all-stater was at her finest in John Marshall's semifinal win, pouring in a career-high 40 points.

"John Marshall has a super player in No. 35 (Straughn). That was quite a performance she put on against Indian Creek," Price said. "Coach Melko has his team playing at a high level. He has brought them along very nicely."

"We know it will be much tougher this time around. They have more weapons than just Straughn," added the former Clay-Battelle coach. "I love the OUE facility. I coached in the

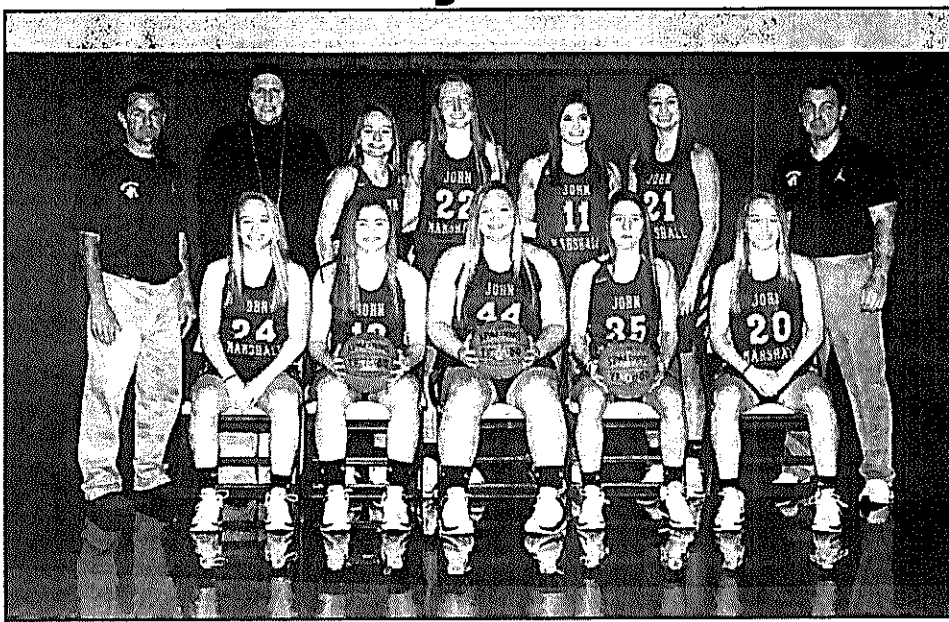


Photo Provided

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 John Marshall Monarchs basketball team. Front row, from left, are assistant coach Curt Mele, assistant coach Beth Blake, Landyn Helms, Lakyn Groves, Catherine Hunnell, Camryn Blair, and head coach Brock Melko. Sitting, from left, are Abby Blake, Kaitlyn Groves, Megan Stocklask, Shay Straughn and Anna Blake. Absent was Samara Walker

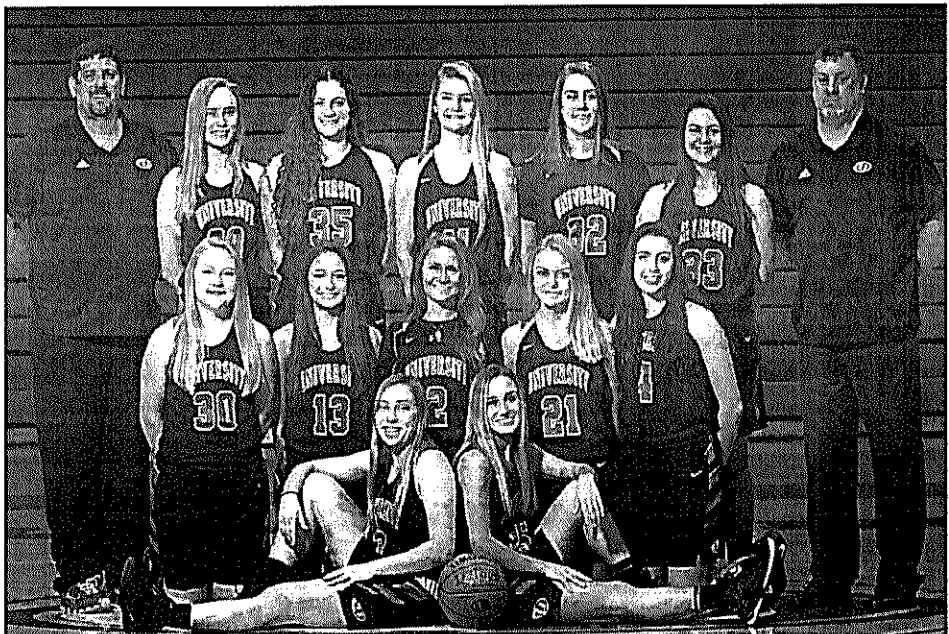


Photo Provided

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 University Hawks basketball team. Front row, from left, are Zoe Murphy and Selena Jenkins. Second row, from left, are Emily Cor-dray, Isabella Bowers, Jaimalyn Ash, Lindsey Vorndran and Lauren Dean. Third row, from left, are head coach David Price, Sierra Lanham, Mallory Napolillo, Ashten Boggs, Abbie Coen, Sela Chico and assistant coach David Boggs.

OVAC All-Star game there. Hopefully, we can get off to a quick start Saturday."

University boasts a tall and veteran lineup, featuring a starting lineup with two se-

niors and three juniors.

The guards are 5-5 senior Zoe Murphy and 5-4 senior

Selene Jenkins and junior forwards 5-11 Mallory Napolillo, 5-11 Abbie Coen and 5-11 Ashten Boggs. The Hawks feature nice offensive balance, topped by Boggs's 16 ppg average.

"We don't press much. We don't have enough bodies to do that. We like to rely on our halfcourt defense. Sometimes we extend it to 3/4 court," Price noted. "We like to limit our opponents' possessions. We are definitely a defensive-driven team."

John Marshall's journey to the title game is nothing short of remarkable. The Monarchs were virtual 5A bottom feeders last winter.

"Before our semi-final game Monday, I printed last year's OVAC standings at the cut-off point. We were 2-13 and in dead last. That was embarrassing," Melko said. "So, now we have a chance to go from worst to first. Don't know if that has been done before."

"Shay had a tremendous game at Creek. She took her game to another level," he added. "I was proud of how we played through adversity against Creek. We were down 11-0 right off the bat. But the girls didn't over-react and showed a lot of mental toughness."

On most nights, Melko likes to utilize a nine-girl rotation. Straughn, averaging some 26 points a game, is joined in the starting lineup by the Blake twins - Abby and Anna. Both are talented guards. Senior Kaitlyn Groves is solid at both ends of the floor.

Depending on the opponent, either rising frosh Catherine Hunnell or sophomore Lakyn Groves owns the fifth starting spot. Hunnell enjoyed a recent strong showing, dropping 24 points on Union Local.

Bench strength is provided by senior post Megan Stocklask, junior Camryn See, 5A, Page 5



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Beallsville, Madonna shaping up like a 'really good matchup' in 1A

• 5A

Continued from Page 6

Blair and freshman Landyn Helms. "University is big and physical. Their size gave us problems last time," Melko, now in his fifth season at the JM helm, said. "We have to do a better job on the boards. It will be a battle. We must maintain our poise. We are excited about the opportunity to play for the OVAC title."

• Blue Devils in final for second straight season; Blue Dons looking for 12th title

By RICK THORP
Times Leader Sports Writer

ST. CLAIRSVILLE - In watching tape of Beallsville this week, Madonna head coach Rodney Boniti sees a team itching to take the next step.

"They're a team that's built to win," Boniti said ahead of this afternoon's 1A final, the fourth game of the Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championships. "Just looking at their track record last year - getting to the OVAC final and losing to a very strong Cameron team - for them to repeat and get right back to the championship game tells me they have a competitive group of young ladies."

Beallsville head coach Tori Jarrett agrees, although she views the top-seeded Blue Dons, who the No. 2 seed Blue Devils meet at 4 p.m. at Ohio University Eastern's Health, Physical Education and Recreation Center, in high regard, too.

"I know they're very skilled," she said. "They have some really good players. They have a lot of older players. They're a veteran team."

"It should be a really good matchup."

While Madonna (16-4) does have the upper hand in experience grade wise, the Blue Devils (16-3) have experience - at OUE. Beallsville reached the title tilt last winter, only to fall to the Dragons. Jarrett hopes the familiarity of the surroundings bodes well for her group this time.

"I don't know if it will for sure," said Jarrett, who played in the game three



Photo/PAUL KRAJNYAK

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Beallsville girls basketball team. Front row, from left, are Kileigh Darby, Harley Valley, Olivia Muncy, Cheyenne Riley and Hannah Phillips. Standing, from left, are Ashley Louden, Jayden Gabel, Ashley Howell, Makenna Phillips and Jaycee Huffman.

straight years during her prep days. "I know, as a player, the first time you get there you have a lot of nerves."

"I know last year we were really nervous. I hope it works in our favor."

The Blue Devils showed few jitters Monday in gaining revenge on Cameron in a semifinal on their homecourt. The victory propelled Beallsville back to Belmont County and another step closer to crossing off the first of a handful of preseason goals.

"I think the regular season has gone really well," Jarrett said. "One of our goals was to get back (to the OVAC final), and we've done that."

Along the way, the Blue

Devils have improve din, not just their play on the court, but in their mental approach to the game."

"We definitely have matured this season (in comparison to last year)," Jarrett said.

"That includes in game-plans and in sticking to our style of play. I think that helped in our victory against Cameron (on Monday). We've kind of learned to stay true to our gameplan and our style."

Beallsville, seeking its first OVAC crown since 2010, has done so against an improved schedule. Its only losses have come against state-ranked foes Shadyside (home-and-home) and Magnolia.

"I think we've all improved, especially the older players," Jarrett noted.

Leading the way for Beallsville this season has been the junior tandem of Ashlie Louden and Ashley Howell. Louden, who surpassed the 1,000-point plateau a few weeks ago, is averaging nearly 19 points per game, while Howell has collected nearly 14 points a contest.

"They're both consistent," Jarrett said. I can depend on them every time. I know what I'm going to get out of them. I know I'm going to get good effort and I know they're going to be ready to play."

Jarrett also knows they'll

See, 1A, Page 8

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• 1A

Continued from Page 7

provide leadership.

"They consistently get on the other players if they're not holding up their end of the bargain," she said. "They've been a big help when it comes to that."

Senior Olivia Muncy is the Blue Devils' third starter.

"She has always been a good rebounder," Jarrett said of Muncy. "She has a real knack for getting the ball."

Junior Jayden Gabel and sophomore Makenna Phillips round out the unit. Cheyenne Riley provides bench depth.

"Makenna has really come in to her own," Jarrett said. "And Jayden is long and athletic and can get out and defend."

Jarrett will need everything to

jell as her team faces one of the best in West Virginia Class A, a squad searching for its first OVAC crown in eight years.

"We've played a heckuva schedule," Boniti said. "But the girls love the challenge. I think they'll be confident in (playing at OUE). The past few weeks we've played ranked teams like Clarksburg Notre Dame, Morgantown Trinity and Magnolia. To play, and beat, those types of teams has only added to the confidence of this group."

"I think they'll accept the challenge. They know what's at hand and I think they're looking forward to it."

The Blue Dons boast an experienced group that includes five se-

See, 1A, Page 9



BEALLSVILLE'S ASHLIE Loud-en pressures Shadyside's Jaycee Mayeres during a game in December. The Blue Devils will take on Madonna in the Class 1A final today at 2 p.m. at OUE.

T.L. File Photo/SETH STAS-KEY

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Continued from Page 8

iors, four of whom have been with the program through middle school.

Leading the way is forward Andrea Alimario. The senior is the team's lone double-figure scorer, averaging 15.8 ppg.

Senior Gabriella Staffileno is at the other forward, while junior Kennedy Martin sees time at center.

Senior Rachel Boniti is the point guard, while classmate Gia Riccadonna plays the 2-spot. Sophomore Jazzy Melnyk also figures heavily in Madonna's gameplan, one Coach Boniti said features a "start-

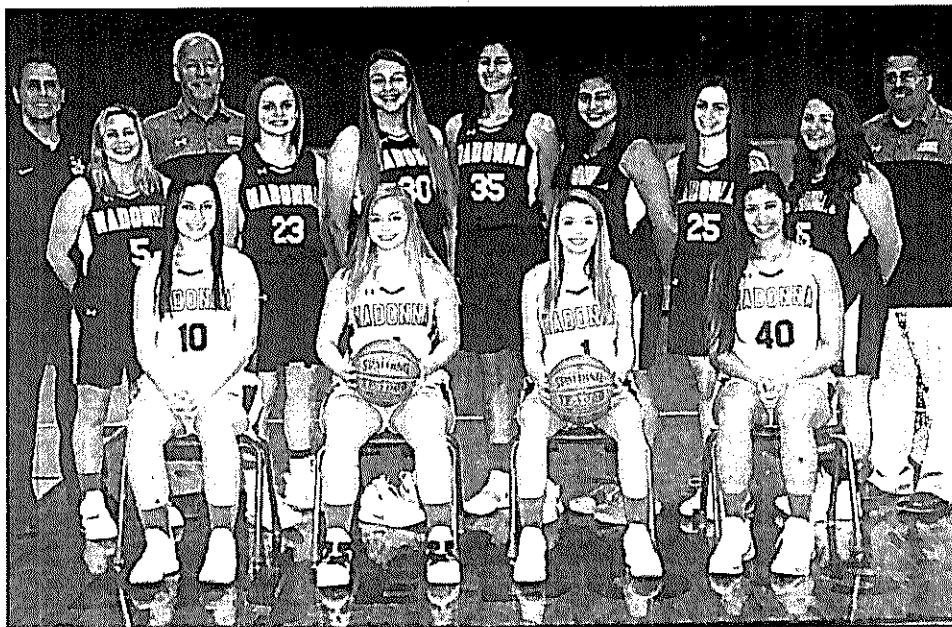
ing 6."

"We rotate those six girls depending on who we're playing," he said.

And although Alimario is his team's only player averaging double figures, Coach Boniti the Blue Dons benefit from the others averaging between five and nine points an outing.

"Not only are we a physically-improved team," he said, "I think we've improved mentally, too."

"I think (the girls) are playing with a lot of confidence. I think we have a really balanced attack."



PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Madonna basketball team. Front row, from left, are Gabriella Staffileno, Gia Riccadonna, Rachel Boniti and Andrea Alimario. Second row, from left, are Anna Bachel, Jazzy Melnyk, Alaina Moore, Kennedy Martin, Marianna Martinez-Perez, Vanessa Alatis and assistant coach Michaela Battista. Back row, from left, are head coach Rodney Boniti, Dave Lammer and Cory Wingett.

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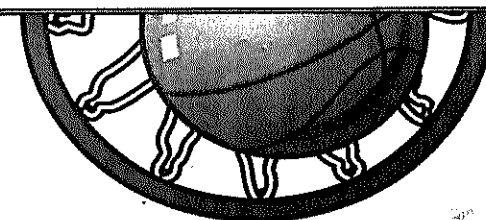
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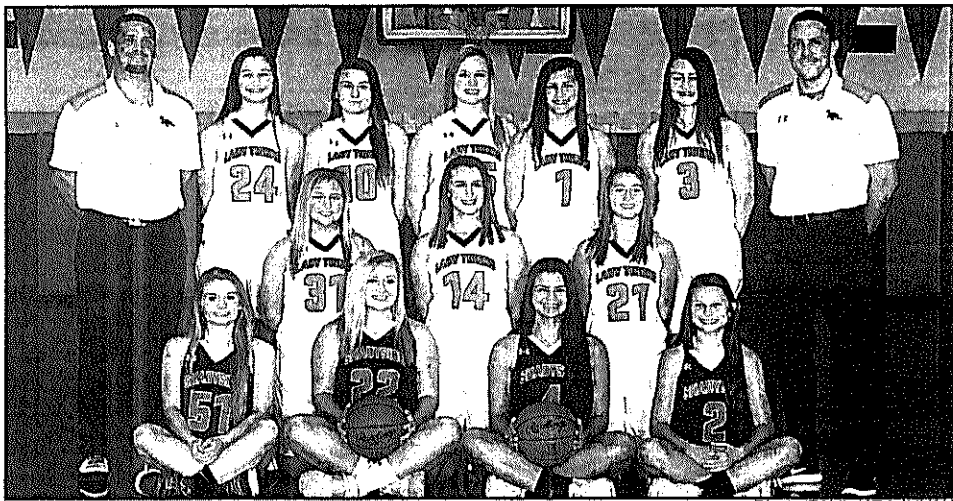
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FROM THE MADONNA ATHLETIC DEPT.



PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Shadyside basketball team. Front row, from left, are Haleigh Osman, Jaycee Mayeres, Macy Coffland and Syd Destifanes. Middle row, from left, are Madisyn Stewart, Julie Hendershot and Brooke Selmon. Back row, from left, are head coach Serge Gentile, Paige Gorby, Mandy Doyno, Baylee Wach, Kamdyn Elerick, Tory Hendershot and assistant coach Brandon Parr.

Shadyside, River set for 2A rematch and rubbermatch

By SETH STASKEY
Times Leader Sports Editor

Good, evenly matched teams splitting a pair of games in the regular season happens all the time, but winning on the other team's home court usually doesn't.

That's exactly what happened between River and Shadyside, who played on back-to-back Mondays in the middle of January.

The Pilots won the first meeting in the Tiger Den and a week later, Shadyside won the rematch inside the

R.L. Potts Gymnasium. And what could be better than playing a rubbermatch — on a neutral floor — with a conference championship on the line?

That's exactly what River and Shadyside have the opportunity to do this evening at 6 in the final game of the day-long Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championships at Ohio University Eastern in St. Clairsville.

The top-seeded Tigers and second-seeded Pilots will meet for the second straight season in the 2A title game.

"The great thing about high school sports are games like this," Shadyside head coach Serge Gentile said.

"To play for an OVAC championship against a rival is exciting. There's been a rivalry since my parents were in school here, so there's just a different feel to it. That is what makes it fun, especially when the teams are good."

The Pilots didn't wait long after last season's 47-44 victory against the Tigers to establish their goals for this season and getting back to — and winning — this game was near the top of the list.

"We've had this down as the goal since last season ended and we knew it would be tough," River head coach Rick Isaly said. "We're excited to be here and excited to be facing a really good team that's playing very well right now."

Shadyside has won five in a row since its 54-48 setback to the Pilots on Jan. 14.

"We're playing with a lot of confidence right now," Gentile said. "Getting to this game was one of our goals. We had a shot last year and River just made more plays than we did."

"We have to find a way

to make more plays than them."

The Tigers are led by its dynamic sophomore duo of Baylee Wach and Tory Hendershot.

They both came up huge in Monday's semifinal victory against Wheeling Central.

Wach, who is averaging 16 points a game, pumped in 30 against the Maroon Knights.

She's also hit 52 bonus goals.

Hendershot, who narrowly missed a triple-double in the semis, is a stat-sheet stuffer.

She's averaging almost 12 points a game. She's also averaging upwards of five assists and five rebounds, too.

"Wach and Hendershot make them go, but they definitely have other kids who can come in and knock down a shot, too," Isaly said. "We will have to guard them and challenge their 3-point looks."

The catalyst for Shadyside's engine is senior point guard Syd Destifanes. She's picked up her scoring of late, including a 22-point outburst against Bellaire nearly two weeks ago. She's also a tireless defender and ball handler.

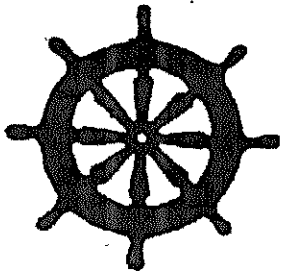
"We're a very deep team that is complementing each other really well right now," Gentile said.

"I don't think we're a team that you can just key on one girl. We have five girls who can get their feet set and bury shots. That opens up things for everyone."

Seniors Jaycee Mayeres and Macy Coffland round out the starting lineup. Both have some big moments throughout the season. Mayeres is a small forward, while Coffland, despite being

See, 2A, Page 11

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2A

Continued from Page 10

ng only 5-8, plays on the interior.

Off the bench, the Tigers rely on Brooke Selmon, Julie Hendershot and freshman Paige Gorby.

Gentile has been quite pleased with how his team has responded since its setback to the Pilots last month.

"They just pushed us around and really took it out of us," Gentile said. "Since then, I think it flipped a switch for us. We looked at ourselves and realized we had to get a little bit tougher."

River, meanwhile, is led by all-Ohioan Lauren Flannery, who does a little bit of everything and then some for the Pilots.

Averaging 23 points is just part of the story for Flannery. She also passes out four assists, grabs four rebounds and comes up with one steal a night, too.

"Lauren's a great kid who works as hard as I've ever coached," Isaly said. "When she's on the floor, you always feel like you have a

chance to win the game. She does it all. She scores, distributes, defends and she really wants this (championship) bad."

Senior Carsyn Reynolds checks in at nine points a game. Battling through a pair of knee injuries during her prep career, Reynolds is back to playing much like her old self. She nets nine points and pulls down six rebounds a game.

Seniors Candace Caldwell and Riley Lollathin are solid role players for the Pilots. Both average seven points a game.

A key player, who didn't play in the earlier loss to the Tigers because of illness, senior Alli Long. She was big in the first game on glass, especially. She averaged nine points and six rebounds a contest.

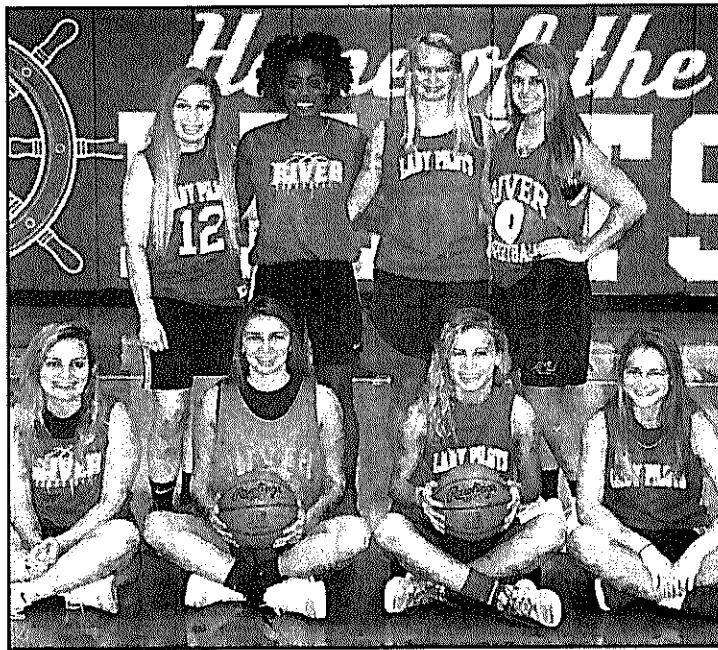
"This is a great senior class that's been playing together since the third grade," Isaly said. "It's a tight-knit group that works extremely hard."

Off the bench, the Pi-

lots utilize junior Mikenzie Cieszeski, senior Livi Rose and sophomore Emily Smith.

"The key - for us - is always trying to slow down Lauren (Flannery)," Gentile said.

"She's an exceptional player who might be the best player in the entire OVAC. When you have someone like that you have to slow her down because she's able to make everyone else better. It's going to be a tough game, but we have to find a way to slow Lauren down a little bit to give us a better chance."



PICTURED IS the 2018-19 River girls basketball team. Front row, from left, are Livi Rose, Carsyn Reynolds, Lauren Flannery and Riley Lollathin. Top row, from left, are Hannah Straub, Jonayah Moeller, Emily Smith and Candace Caldwell.

T-L Photo/SETH STASKEY

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With Shadyside's 59-29 victory over Bellaire, Ed Andes secured his 300th career win at his alma mater/11

Girls OVAC Basketball Semifinal Pairings Set

Games will be played Monday; title matchups primed for Feb. 9 at OUE

By SETH STASKEY
For The Intelligencer

BELLAIRE - The road to an Ohio Valley Athletic Conference championship is set.

The OVAC Basketball Championship Committee met Tuesday morning at the OVAC office to formally nail down the pairings for the semifinals, which will be played on Monday at the higher seed's gym, and the consolation matchups for

those teams that didn't qualify into the top four.

The winners of Monday's games will advance to play at Ohio University Eastern in St. Clairsville on Saturday, Feb. 9 in the Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championship games.

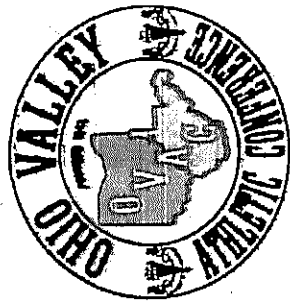
A new champion is promised in three of the five classes. Only River (2A) and Cameron (1A) will have the ability to repeat. Wheeling Central is the defending 3A champion, but has dropped to 2A.

Neither Cambridge (4A) or Parkersburg

South (5A) qualified for the field.

The championship game schedule has undergone a minor change. One ticket will now be honored throughout the day, unlike years past when the gym was cleared between each game. The title games will begin at 10 a.m. and the order of the tip off every two hours. The order of the title games is 3A, 4A, 5A, 1A and 2A.

Here's a look at the semifinal pairings in each class:



CLASS 5A
By virtue of its head-to-head win over Indian Creek Monday evening, Wheeling Park catapulted into the top seed in the class by half a point over the Redskins Coach Ryan Young's Patriots (13-4) and will welcome University (12-5) on Monday. The two W.Va. Class AAA rivals split their previous two meetings this season.

Wheeling Park, which won the Big School title in 2017, owns 13 OVAC titles, which trails only St. John for the most all time. University, a relative newcomer to the OVAC, won its only title in 2013.

Please see PAIRINGS, Page 16

PAIRINGS

(Continued from Page 13)

In the other semifinal, Indian Creek, which has now lost two games in a row after a 15-0 start, will welcome John Marshall on Monday. The Monarchs are 13-5.

Creek won its three OVAC titles in succession from 2008-10, while the Monarchs are bidding for their 10th title, but first since 2002.

CLASS 4A

In arguably the most wide-open class of the five, St. Clairsville earned the top seed in a field, which features four Buckeye 8 Athletic League members.

Coach Stacey Agnew's Red Devils are in the tournament for the second straight season, but will be on their home boards this time around. St. C. hasn't won an OVAC title in girls' hoops since 2007 and own six overall.

The Red Devils will have to contend with Martins Ferry, which has turned it on of late. Coach Paul Matuska's Purple Riders have won four games in a row and could become the first school to win a conference title with a sub .500 record (7-11).

Ferry last won an OVAC title in 2009 and have six total banners.

Beaver Local nailed down the two seed by fighting off Harrison Central in double overtime on Monday. The Beavers (9-7) have never won an OVAC title in girls basketball.

Buckeye Local, which played in the conference title game last season, pocketed the third seed despite a late-season tailspin, which has seen it lose seven games in a row and only two games in January.

The Panthers (8-9) will meet Beaver Local for the third time. The teams split their earlier meetings. Buckeye's lone girls' basketball title came in 1992.

CLASS 3A

Bellaire was the wire-to-wire leader in this class for the third straight season. Now, Coach John Farrier's team is looking to get over the hump.

Last season, the Big Reds advanced to the championship game before falling to Wheeling Central in the final. Bellaire last won an OVAC title in girls hoops in 2006 and owns seven overall.

The Big Reds path to title No. 8 begins with a date with county rival Union Local, which has already suffered two losses to the Big Reds this season.

The Jets, who fell on Monday at John Marshall, dropped to the fourth seed and are currently 10-8. Union Local has won six OVAC titles, including three in the tournament format.

In the other half of the bracket, Fort Frye has had a stranglehold on the second seed for the bulk of the sea-

son. Coach Dan Liedtke's team is 13-2 on the season and is seeking its 10th OVAC title. The Cadets have won five crowns in the playoff era.

They will face a tough opening task in the form of Magnolia.

The Blue Eagles (13-3) boast a tough inside threat of Kyndra Pilant and Maddy Winters. The Blue Eagles defeated Paden City on Monday to jump up to the No. 3 seed.

Coach Meredith Pilant's squad will look to win the school's first OVAC championship since 2004 and second overall.

CLASS 2A

Shadyside and defending champion River had a tooth-and-nail battle for the top seed for much of the season before the Tigers pulled away in the last couple of weeks.

Coach Serge Gentile's team has won four in a row since losing to River on Jan. 14.

The Tigers (17-3), who have won seven OVAC titles in school history, are seeking their first since 2013. They finished as runnerup to the Pilots last season.

Shadyside has no easy task ahead in fourth-seeded Wheeling Central. The Maroon Knights, who have won its class two straight seasons, fought off Clay-Battelle for the fourth seed.

Coach Penn Kurtz's team, which has battled injuries, is 9-8.

River, which owns five OVAC titles, will begin its quest for No. 6 against third-seeded Steubenville Catholic. The Pilots are 15-4.

The Crusaders, who haven't won an OVAC title since 1989, are 11-7.

CLASS 1A

Madonna and Beallsville have been atop the 1A standings for basically the entire season and formally locked down the home games as the 1 and 2 seeds, respectively.

The Blue Dons (12-4) own 11 conference titles, the last coming in 2011.

For Madonna to have a crack at No. 12, it will have to defeat fourth-seeded Trinity Christian (12-6). The Warriors have won one OVAC title (2012) in their brief time in the conference.

The two teams met last week in Weirton with the Blue Dons earning a narrow 38-36 victory.

Beallsville, which fell to Cameron in the title game last winter, will meet the Dragons in a rematch. The Blue Devils, who have played a challenging schedule, are 14-3 and are vying for their first OVAC title since 2010 and seventh overall.

Cameron, meanwhile, has posted a solid 12-4 record, entering the tournament winning seven in a row. The Dragons' title last year was the first in school history.

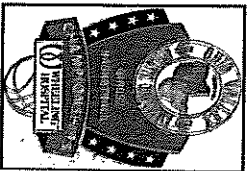
Wednesday,
January 30, 2019

OVAC girls tournament pairings set

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

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Complete consolation pairings can be found on Page B3

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• OVAC

Continued from Page B1

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OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Los Angeles' Sam Shields has fought back from concussions to reach the Super Bowl/8

The Intelligencer. SPORTS

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FINANCIAL.....10-11

7

Chase for OVAC Girls' Titles Are Wide Open

The Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls' Basketball Championships tip off Monday with 10 quality matchups spread across the five classes.

As I sit here and type this, I am intrigued by many of the matchups and how wide open the field is this season.

Sixteen of the 20 teams in the field have double-digit victories. There is plenty of star power and some of the best coaches in the game.

This is one of those times I wish I could clone myself and take a seat in all 10 gymnasiums. Unfortunately, modern technology isn't that far along and I will have to settle for just one.

Don't fret. Between The Intelligencer, Herald Star and Times Leader staffs, we will be able to bring you all the

action.

But why wait until next Saturday at Ohio University Eastern to find out who will win. I am going to tell you right now.

Class 5A

This past Monday, we may have had a sneak peek of the Class 5A final when Wheeling Park defeated Indian Creek.

The victory gave the Patriots the top seed on the Redskins, who entered the contest with a narrow lead.

In fact, when you look at that victory, it may have harmed Wheeling Park more than it helped. Wheeling Park plays host to



JOSH STROPE
SPORTS EDITOR

University on Monday. The two teams split their previous meetings with the Hawks earning their victory just last week.

Had Wheeling Park stayed at No. 2, it would have played John Marshall. The Patriots have recently had the Monarchs' number, including two blowout wins earlier this season.

Instead, the Monarchs will have to handle an Indian Creek squad coming into the tournament having won its season-opening 15-game winning streak snapped last week against Bellaire in the Buckeye 8 title

game. The Redskins followed that up with a loss at Wheeling Park where

they couldn't throw the ball in the ocean.

In games like these, I tend to lean toward the team with the better defense and the two defenses this season that have impressed me the most are Wheeling Park and Indian Creek.

I predict those teams will escape with close wins in the semis. I feel Indian Creek will shoot the ball a lot better than it did at Wheeling Park, but I just like the inside-outside punch of Shanley Woods and Bella Abernathy too much. I am going with the Patriots in another low-scoring bout.

Final: Wheeling Park 49, Indian Creek 41

Please see STROPE, Page 8

STROPE

(Continued from Page 7)

Class 4A

Nothing soups up a semifinal better than pure disdain.

And that is what you will get when Martins Ferry and St. Clairsville meet on the hardwood. These schools don't like each other. The fanbases are often the most opinionated in the valley.

Expect this game to be competitive and hard fought. Bragging rights and a spot in the final is on the line.

In the other game, Buckeye Local travels to Beaver Local.

I had the chance to see the Beavers in action recently and came away impressed. Granted, they were playing a team that hasn't had much success this season and will get a stiffer test against the Panthers.

Still, I liked the way they played and I just have a feeling about this one. Call this my upset pick.

Final: Beaver Local 50,

St. Clairsville 45

Class 3A

When you are as balanced as Bellaire is, you have a chance to win any game you are in.

The Big Reds boast four double-digit scorers and that is a luxury any team would love to have. If one person is having an off night, you are backed up by three others. And don't discount the fifth starter and a solid bench.

And the way they play defense.

I think the Big Reds will be too much for Union Local.

The other matchup in this class may be the most intriguing first-round contest.

Coach Dan Lietdke and Fort Frye are almost always among the top schools battling in the semifinals, but recently their luck getting to the big game hasn't been kind.

Enter Magnolia's inside duo of Kyndra Pilant and Mady Winters and

the Cadets are going to have their hands full in the paint.

A game like this may be too close to call. And while I don't know much about Fort Frye, I am going to give the home team the nod here in a close victory against the Blue Eagles.

But the long wait will end for Bellaire, winning its first title since 2006.

Final: Bellaire 63, Fort Frye 50

Class 2A

River is the defending champion, having defeated Shadyside in a classic last season.

In order for the two teams to meet again, they will each have a tough task standing in front of them.

River welcomes a feisty Steubenville Catholic squad, while Shadyside welcomes Wheeling Central, the winners of last season's Class 3A title.

Shadyside and Wheeling Central split their

two meetings this season, setting up a rubber match with everything to gain.

It is hard for me to go against Penn Kurtz. The Wheeling Central coach knows the right buttons to push and is one of the best coaches around come tournament time.

But Shadyside is clicking right now. Coach Serge Gentile's team had an impressive victory against Bellaire this past week, and I think the Tigers have the depth and health right now to keep the Maroon Knights at bay.

As well as Shadyside is playing, I think it will suffer another year of heartbreak.

River may have the best player in the field in Lauren Flannery and I am going with the senior having another tournament to remember, first beating Steubenville Catholic and then earning John Howell Most Valuable Player honors in leading the Pilots to a victory against the Tigers.

Final: River 57, Shadyside 49

Class 1A

A lot of credit must be given to Madonna coach Rodney Boniti for the turnaround he did this

season with Madonna. The Blue Dons faced a ton of injuries last season and he still kept them competitive in a tough section.

Healthy this season, he has Madonna as the top seed in Class A. The Blue Dons draw a tough first opponent, though, in Trinity.

Madonna earned a close victory against the Warriors last week and expect another tooth-and-nail fight Monday.

Cameron claimed the first OVAC girls' basketball title in school history last season, beating Beallsville in the final.

One of those teams are guaranteed to play on the OUE floor for the second year in a row as they meet in a semifinal.

The Dragons lost a number of key players from that team and Tori Jarrett's Beallsville squad has been one of the most consistent in the valley.

The Blue Devils own a victory against Cameron already this season and I think they will get one here and then move on to knock off Madonna.

Final: Beallsville 43, Madonna 37

Good luck to all the teams this week!

Winter Weather

I am not a big Twitter guy. In fact, if it wasn't for this job, I probably would never tweet and only check it sparingly.

So when the snow hits, I spend hours a day trying to find out if games are being played and when makeups are to keep our daily card updated and to help with our coverage. Needless to say, not very fun for me.

So I want to say a very big THANK YOU to Wheeling Park boys' basketball coach Michael Jebbia and Magnolia athletics director Brian Castilow.

Both Jebbia and Castilow use old-fashioned email to inform me when games have been postponed. And more importantly, when the makeups are going to be. It makes my job a whole lot easier and alleviates a ton of stress.

Let's Go Patriots

While I am getting tired of seeing the Patriots in the Super Bowl, I hate the Rams. I hate the Rams so very, very much. Super Bowl pick: Patriots 37, Rams 33

Josh Strope can be reached at jstrope@theintelligencer.net

LOOKING FOR INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS
EARN EXTRA CASH

Joey Burkland, Mike Ricci and John Mallett will be honored at Wheeling Park's basketball game Saturday night/11

Pairings Set for OVAC Boys' Basketball Tourney

Semifinals take place Tuesday; finals tip off Feb. 16 at OUE

By **SETH STASKEY**
For The Intelligencer
BELLAIRE — The brackets are officially set. After one of the most competitive and interesting pre-OVAC portions in the history of the tournament, the dust settled Tuesday evening. The OVAC Basketball Championship committee met Wednesday

morning at the OVAC office to finalize the pairings and set the consolation matchups for the teams that didn't finish in the top four. The boys tournament begins Tuesday and the championship finals will be staged on Saturday, Feb. 16 at Ohio University Eastern in St. Clairsville.

Here's a look at each class:
CLASS 5A
Wheeling Park earned the top seed with an 11-2 record. Coach Michael Jebbia's Patriots are bidding for their eighth conference title overall and first since 2012. Standing in the way of the Pa-

trioti and a trip to Ohio University-Eastern is fourth-seeded Morgantown. The Mohigans (10-6) darted by Weir in the final days prior to the cut-off date to grab the fourth spot. Coach Dave Tallman's squad won three consecutive titles from 2014-16.

In the other half of the bracket, University — which is the OVAC in 2014 and it owns the two-time defending big-school



champion — earned the second seed and will host Steubenville. University is 14-3.

Big Red (13-3) spent most of the season in one of the top-two spots, but lost their grip on a home game thanks to a loss Tuesday to Meadowbrook. Coach Mike Haney's team last won seven 13 hoops crowns.

CLASS 4A
Meadowbrook — in its final year as a member of the OVAC before it joins the Muskingum Valley League — is again the top seed.

Coach Scooter Tolzda's Colts posted wins over 5A powers Warren and Steubenville earlier this week to move onto the top line. Meadowbrook has won four OVAC titles, including the last three.

Next up for the Colts is a game with East Liverpool.

Please see OVAC, Page 12

OVAC

(Continued from Page 11)

The Potters knocked off Harrison Central in a de facto play-in game on Tuesday to clinch the final bid. Coach Nate Conley's team is bidding for the school's first conference crown since 1999 and fifth overall.

In the other half of the bracket, Oak Glen locked down the second seed with a win over Wellsville on Tuesday. The Golden Bears are an impressive 14-3.

To get to its first OVAC title game, Oak Glen will have to knock off St. Clairsville, which is back in the championship bracket after a year absence.

First-year coach Ryan Clifford has directed the Red Devils to a 14-4 record and locked down their spot in the field with a win at Martins Ferry on Monday. St. Clairsville won its only two OVAC hoop titles in 2012 and 2013.

CLASS 3A
A new champion is promised in this class as reigning champion Wheeling Central has dropped down a division. Shenandoah was the wire-to-wire leader. The Zeps, who own three OVAC titles, but none since 2001, finished the pre-OVAC portion of the season an

impressive 17-3 record.

Next up for the Zeps is a third meeting with Monroe Central. The Seminoles — by virtue of their win over River and Union Local's loss to Barnesville on Tuesday — squeezed into the field with a 9-9 record.

Coach Jon Perkins' team is trying to become the first in Monroe Central history to win an OVAC hoops title. Woodsfield and Skyvue, which formed Monroe, won a combined five titles.

The other 3A semifinal finds second-seeded Fort Frye (11-6) taking on Barnesville (11-7) in Beverly.

The Cadets have been consistent members in the championship bracket and are vying for their eighth title overall, fourth in the playoff format, but first since 2014. Barnesville, meanwhile, locked down its second bid to the championship bracket with a victory against UL. Coach Matt Johnson's Shamrocks have never won an OVAC boys basketball title.

CLASS 2A
A new champion is guaranteed in this division after River failed to qualify. Toronto, a team that River beat in last year's semifinal, garnered the top seed. Coach Sean Tucker's Red Knights, who are ranked third in Ohio Division IV, are 17-1 with their only loss coming to Alliance Marlinton in a holiday event at Steubenville.

The Red Knights own two OVAC boys titles in their history, but haven't hoisted the trophy since 1992.

To get to the title game, Toronto will have to deal with a Shadyside squad, which has seemingly turned the corner of late. Despite its loss at Wheeling Central on Tuesday, the Tigers hung on to the fourth spot. Coach Ed Andes' team is 11-8 and bidding for the school's 14th OVAC basketball crown, but first since 2010.

In the other bracket, Wheeling Central — a perennial entrant — is the second seed. The Maroon Knights own an OVAC-best 26 boys hoop titles, including six championships in a row. To have the opportunity to play for a seventh, they'll have to deal with third-seeded Wellsville. The Tigers haven't won an OVAC title since 1996 when they claimed their seventh overall. They enter this year's event with a 12-4 record.

CLASS 1A
Trinity Christian (12-3) was awarded the top seed in the small-school class. The defending champions will await a visit from fourth-seeded Frontier, which enters with an 8-9 record.

Coach Roger Kirkpatrick's Cougars have won five OVAC titles in their history, but none since 2004. Cameron, which fell to Trinity in last season's OVAC title game, is the second seed. Coach Tom Hart's Dragons will welcome Beallsville as they seek a return trip to OUE to play for the school's first title in hoops.

Coach Rick Jarrett's Blue Devils are one of the area's most improved teams with its 10-9 record. The Devils own one OVAC title in basketball and it came in 2003.



SPORTS

Monday,
February 11, 2019

River rallies past Shadyside to repeat in 2A

• Flannery wins Howell MVP Award
By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

ST. CLAIRSVILLE – River is not short on confidence.

When a roster is loaded with seniors and experience, there's no need to hit any type of panic buttons at any point.

And that includes when the Pilots were down 11 early in the fourth quarter to top-seeded Shadyside on Saturday evening in the Class 2A portion of the Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championships at Ohio University-Eastern.

The Pilots proceeded to take the game over in the fourth quarter where they outscored the Tigers, 27-10, to go on for a hard-earned and cherished 55-49 win over the top-seeded Tigers.

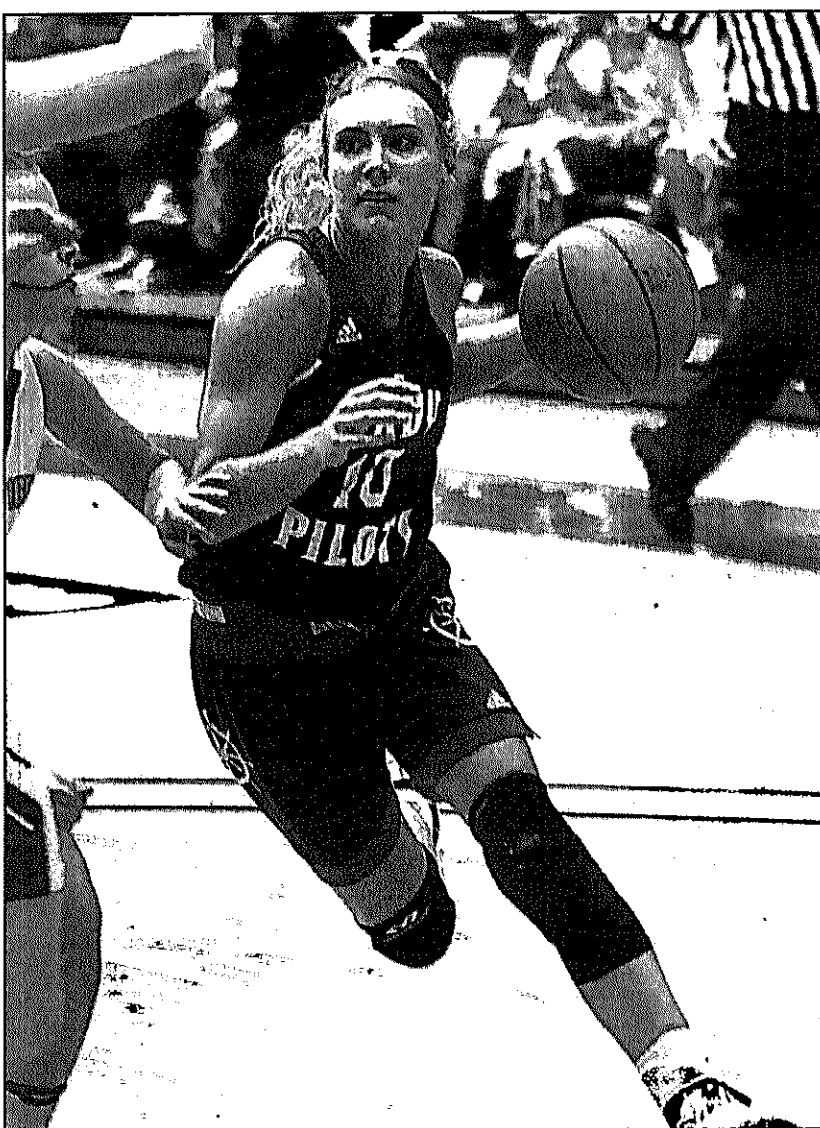
"This is a huge win for these girls," River coach Rick Isaly said. "This gives us a mountain of confidence to come back the way we did."

The Pilots not only showed the grit, will and determination that comes with an experienced team that's a defending conference champion. They also broke out their press, which they hadn't showed for most of the game.

"We don't press all the time," Isaly said. "We got into a situation where we had to press. It rattled them to the point where we got steals and points. That press was the big issue because I felt their younger kids got rattled."

Indeed.

Quite simply, Shadyside couldn't handle the Pilots' pressure. The Tigers were guilty of seven turnovers in the fourth quarter, many of which were of the live-ball variety and resulted in run-out opportunities. See, **RIVER**, Page B2



Photo/PAUL KRAJNYAK

RIVER'S LAUREN Flannery drives to the bucket during Saturday evening's OVAC Class 2A championship game against Shadyside's Syd Destifanes. Flannery scored 23 points and was named the game's MVP after River rallied for a 55-49 victory.

Ohio State hangs on for third straight win

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. (AP) – Ohio State's Andre Wesson kept fighting through the muck Sunday.

When he finally got free in the final minute, he stole a win.

Wesson forced a game-changing turnover in the final minute and then slipped behind one defender and got to the basket for a tie-breaking dunk with 20 seconds left to give the Buckeyes a 55-52 victory over Indiana.

"This is kind of the Andre I've seen since he got here," said C.J. Jackson, whose long, shot-clock beating 3 tied the score with 71 seconds left. "He's playing unbelievable for us right now and we're going to need his scoring, his ability to do everything he does on the court for us."

Sunday's game was a perfect example of how valuable Wesson can be.

While his teammates struggled to get in sync offensively, the junior forward continually made an impact. He finished with 15 points, four rebounds and two steals – none bigger than the one he had with 42 seconds to go that prevented Indiana from taking a potential go-ahead shot.

And when it mattered most, Wesson played perfectly.

"They slipped him out. Our rotation was there. I thought Romeo (Langford) had a chance to make maybe a blocked shot, but he got it off the glass quickly," Hoosiers coach Archie Miller said. "Our help obviously didn't get there in time."

Wesson's younger brother, Kaleb, and Jackson each scored 10 points and were the only other players to reach double figures for the resurgent Buckeyes (16-7, 6-6 Big Ten). See, **OSU**, Page B2

Beallsville stymies Madonna in 1A

• Blue Devils' Loudon wins Howell MVP Award

By **JOSH STROPE**
For The Times Leader

ST. CLAIRSVILLE – The old saying is "defense wins championships."

That was true for Beallsville during Saturday's Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championships at Ohio University-Eastern.

Beallsville held Madonna to one of its lowest outputs of the season, defeating the Blue Dons, 38-33, to claim an OVAC Class 1A championship.

The victory is the school's first since current coach Tori Jarrett's squad won it in 2010. That team, coached by her father, Terry, makes the Jarretts the first father-daughter combination to win OVAC championships. Terry is currently an assistant on the team.

"I thought we played really good defense and made our foul shots at the end," Tori Jarrett said. "They had me a little nervous, but I had 100 percent faith in our team. We came out and executed our game plan exactly. I knew they (Madonna) were going to go on some runs because they are a really good team. But we held true to our game plan and came out on top."

Beallsville (17-3) held Madonna to 29 percent shooting on 13 of 45. Senior standout Andrea Alimario finished with a team-high 16 points for the Blue Dons, but the Blue Devils held her to two in the first half.

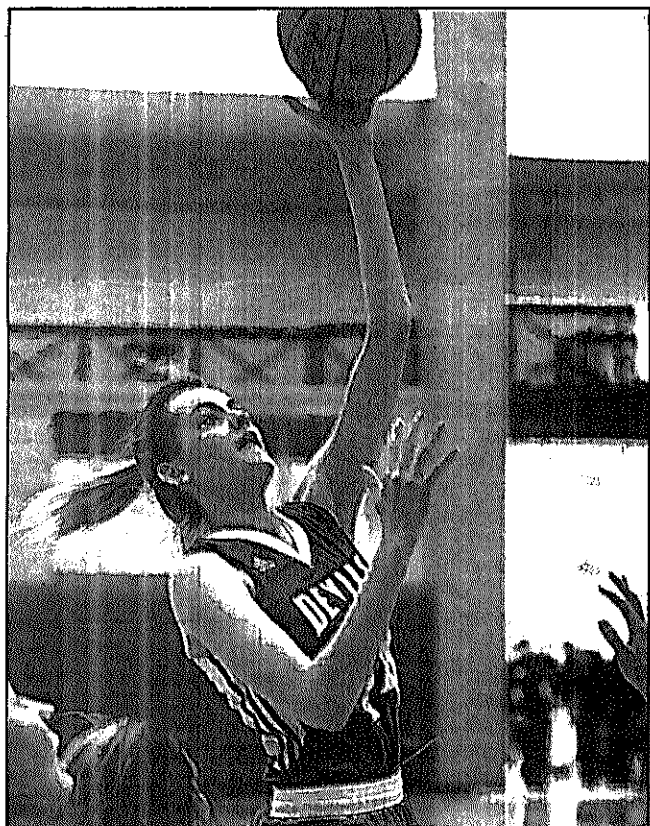
"Our defense has been solid all year and I really didn't change much," Jarrett said. "We wanted to go underneath screens and force them to shoot from the outside. I thought that was our best game plan and that worked out for us."

Despite Madonna's lack of offense, it was able to keep Beallsville from blowing the game open. Beallsville's largest lead was six points (22-16 in the third quarter).

The Blue Dons (16-5) tied it early in the fourth at 24-24 and got within one twice, but could never take the lead.

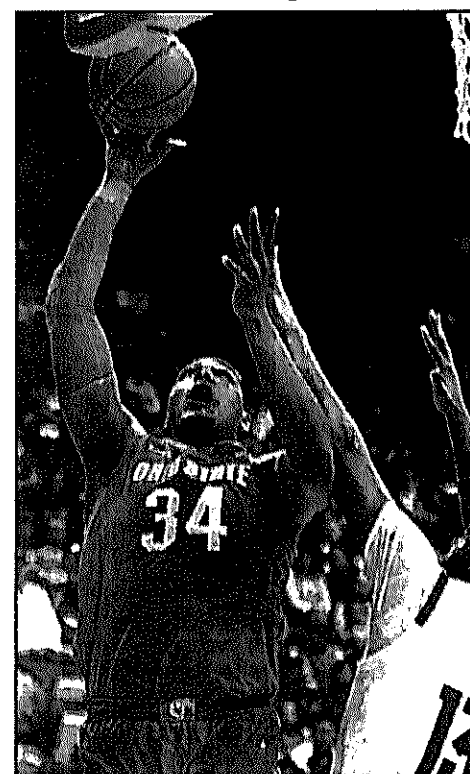
Ashley Howell, who paced the Blue Devils with 16 points, drained a 3-pointer to push the lead to two scores at 30-26 with 3:42 left.

See, **BEALLSVILLE**, Page B2



Photo/PAUL KRAJNYAK

BEALLSVILLE'S ASHLEY Howell goes up for a shot during the second half of Saturday's OVAC Class 1A championship game. The Blue Devils defeated Madonna, 38-33.



AP PHOTO

OHIO STATE'S Kaleb Wesson (34) shoots over Indiana's Juwan Morgan (13) during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game, Sunday in Bloomington, Ind.

Barnesville wins Panther Classic title

By **KIM NORTH**
Times Leader Sports Writer

CONNORVILLE – While Barnesville had some goals dashed over the



Byron claims Daytona 500 pole position

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) – William Byron put Hendrick Motorsports in a familiar position: on the pole for the Daytona 500. His bigger goal is to make the starting spot pay dividends for the NASCAR powerhouse.

The 21-year-old Byron and 25-year-old teammate Alex Bowman locked in the front row for "The Great American Race" during qualifying laps Sunday at Daytona International Speedway. They comprise the youngest front row in Daytona 500 history.

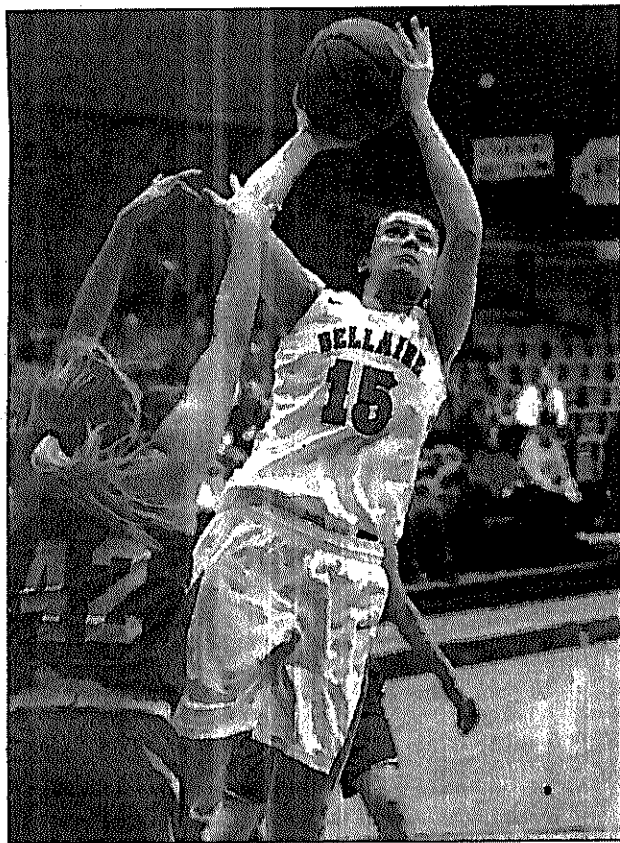


Photo by Paul Krajnyak

Bellaire's Michaela Flaherty attempts a shot against Fort Frye during the 3A Championship game Saturday at Ohio University Eastern.

Bellaire Holds Off Fort Frye

By RICK THORP

For the News-Register

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — After two years of knocking on the door to an OVAC championship, Bellaire finally broke it down Saturday morning.

The Big Reds — semifinalists two years ago and finalists last season — held off a furious fourth-quarter rally by Fort Frye in claiming a 36-34 victory in the Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championships Class 3A final, capturing the school's first conference crown in 13 years, first in the playoff era, and eighth overall.

"They've worked hard, not just this season, but in all the offseasons to prepare for this," Bellaire coach John Farrier said after spending almost five minutes posing for team photos with his victorious hoopsters on the OUE Health, Physical Education and Recreation Center floor.

"Anything they've achieved they've worked for, and I just couldn't be more proud of a group. I've been with this group since eighth grade. I'm proud of the seniors, and the underclassmen are buying in and working hard, too."

After trailing by as many as 10 in the second half, the Cadets (16-3) had an opportunity to tie or win the game in the closing seconds.

Inbounding the ball under the basket with 3.9 ticks left, Fort Frye got the ball to Morgan Borich on the right wing. But her shot failed to draw net, sending the Bellaire bench into a frenzy.

"We were right there," Cadets coach Dan Liedtke said, who's directed his program to five of its nine OVAC crowns, the last coming three years ago. "We were looking for a good shot from our hot shooter. She's a senior and we put it in her hands."

"She was a little off balance. They got close enough to her where she had to take a dribble to the side. But I would bet money on that shot."

"I knew this wasn't going to be a game where we'd come in and beat them by quite a bit."

"I knew it would come down to this type of ending."

Bellaire (18-2) jumped out to a nine-point, first-quarter lead behind eight points from senior Maci Crozier, who was

feeling it from mid-range.

"She made some buckets there to kind of relax us," Farrier said of Crozier, who finished with 12 points. "She's almost automatic from mid-range."

The Cadets scored the final four points of the first and extended their momentum into the second, scoring 10 of the first 12 points of the period to go up 18-16. Hannah Archer, who finished with a team-high 10 points, had two buckets in the spurt.

Mackenzie Dalton's layup ended the run — and gave Fort Frye the lead — with 21 seconds left in the half. Then, Kat Davis took over.

Davis, a junior guard, made a 3-point play a short time later giving Bellaire the lead. Then, she stole the ensuing inbounds pass and was fouled. Her two free throws put the Big Reds up 21-18 at halftime.

"(That sequence) gave us a lot of momentum," said Davis, who finished with a team-best 17 points and was named the game's John Howell Memorial Most Valuable Player. "Sometimes, we need a bucket to actually get us going. I was happy to be able to be the one to do it for my team."

Bellaire scored the first seven points of the second half to go up 28-18. Its defense also came to the forefront, holding the Cadets to four points in the period and one field goal.

"Sometimes we give up some bad (shots) on our press," Farrier said. "Honestly, maybe we should've been more in the halfcourt because our halfcourt defense is pretty good. Our defense stepped up and bailed us out."

Especially on a day where neither team's offenses were clicking.

Bellaire went cold during the final three minutes, only getting a Michaela Flaherty layup, one that put Bellaire up 36-31.

Archer drained a 3 from the left side with 2:21 left, but the Big Reds stood strong the rest of the way to bring home the title.

"They dug in," Farrier said of his team's defensive effort in the closing moments. "That's what they've doing all year."

"They got it done."

Red Devils Edged By Beavers

By SETH STASKEY

For the News-Register

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — Beaver Local went into the locker room staring up at a 11-point deficit during the Class 4A Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championship Game.

There were absolutely no panic buttons hit.

"We were a bit nervous," Beaver Local coach Stephanie Coie said. "We just had to settle down."

The Beavers did just that and they did so by going into their unquestioned leader, Jenna Riccardo.

The standout junior responded in a big way, too. She scored 24 of her game-high 34 points in the second half to help the Beavers pull out a 52-51 victory against top-seeded St. Clairsville Saturday afternoon at Ohio University Eastern, giving the school its first girls basketball crown.

"This was one of our preseason goals because we felt like when we dropped down (from 5A), we had a chance to be competitive," Coie said. "These kids have worked really, really hard to get

Having Riccardo on the interior certainly helped to make that goal attainable.

Riccardo displayed an entire arsenal of moves as she scored — and rebounded — at will. She also collected 18 rebounds. Her points and rebounds are both OVAC Championship records.

"They really made it a point to pound the ball inside to (Riccardo)," St. Clairsville coach Stacey Agnew said. "She was tough. Actually, she's the best player we've played all year."

Despite the antics that Riccardo put forth, St. Clairsville had plenty of chances itself.

However, the Red Devils were unable to capitalize on several chances. Beaver Local trimmed the deficit to six at the final stop by limiting St. C. to eight points and one field goal.

"We've struggled all (season) playing with the lead," Agnew said. "I don't know what it is. This (loss) hurts more than the last one, but our kids gave it everything they had."

Beaver Local took its first lead of the game with 5:16 to go when Riley Britt drilled a 3-pointer, which came during

a St. C. scoreless stretch that eventually reached three and a half minutes before Macy Malin converted a free throw.

Raleigh Simpson buried a 3-pointer for the Devils and Malin split a pair at the line to bring the Red Devils within one at 48-47.

But, Riccardo wasn't going to be denied. She kept the Red Devils at bay by cashing four straight free throws down the stretch.

St. Clairsville actually thought it had sent the game to overtime when Cassidy Stephens buried a shot from top of the key just before the final buzzer. However, the official quickly ruled it was a 2-pointer.

"I never saw her feet and everyone said it was definitely a 2," Agnew said. "When she first went up to shoot, I thought it was a 3."

While Riccardo, who was named the John Howell Game MVP, was the lone double-figure scorer for the Beavers, Britt finished with six.

St. Clairsville was led by Keri Klin-koski's 18 points. She also had seven rebounds. Simpson and Malin went for 13 and 12 points, respectively.

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Defense Keys Beallsville To OVAC 1A Title

Blue Devils Hold Madonna To 33 Points

By JOSH STROPE
Sports Editor

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“But we held true to our game plan and came out on top.”

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Please see **Beallsville**, Page C2



Beallsville's Olivia Muncey goes in for a layup while Madonna's Kennedy Martin attempts a block during the 1A OVAC championship game Saturday at Ohio University Eastern.

ONLINE EXTRA

See more photos the OVAC girls championship games at Ohio University Eastern at www.theintelligencer.net

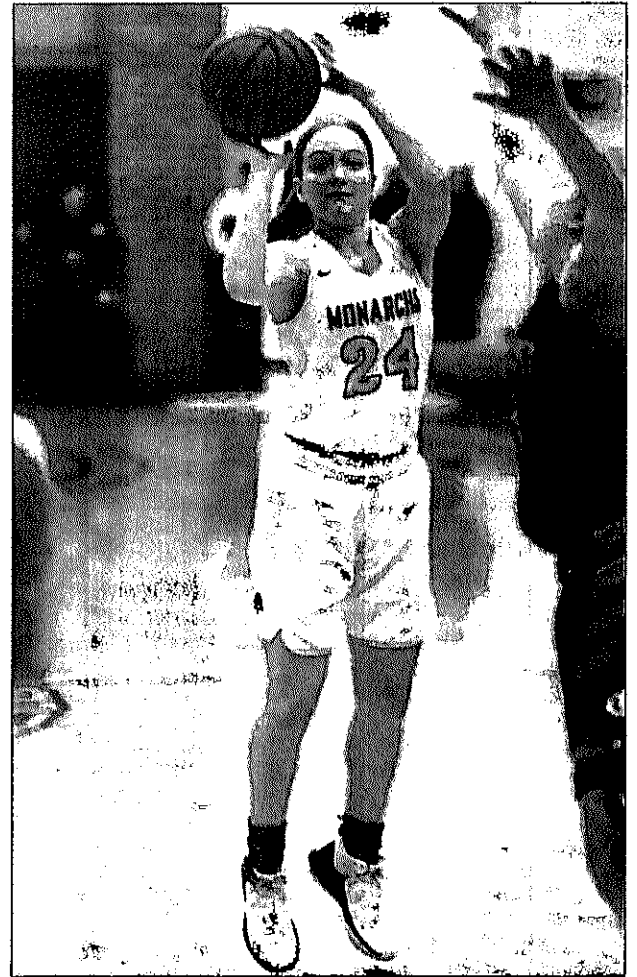


Photo by Paul Krajnyak

John Marshall's Abby Blake attempts a shot against University during the 5A Championship game.

JM No Match For University

Hawks Start 2nd on 13-0 Run

By JOSH STROPE
Sport Editor

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — When John Marshall and University last met, the Hawks dominated the entire game on their way to a 32-point victory.

After the first quarter of Saturday’s OVAC Class 5A championship at Ohio University-Eastern, it looked like this one was going to be much tighter.

Then the second quarter started. And that wasn’t good news for John Marshall.

With the score tied at 15-15, University (15-5) went on a 13-0 run to start the second and outscored the Monarchs, 27-8, in the quarter on its way to a dominating 71-51 victory for the school’s first OVAC title since 2013.

“That is a great win to start the postseason run,” University coach David Price said. “That is a great win for our program and it is great for the girls to get to take that trophy back to UHS.”

Please see **JM**, Page C2

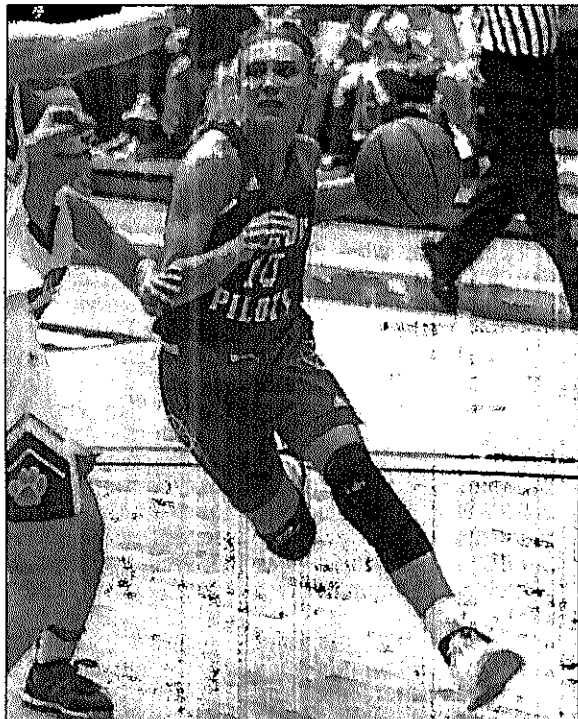


Photo by Paul Krajnyak

River's Lauren Flannery drives to the basket during Saturday's 2A OVAC Championship game against Shadyside.

River Claims 2A Championship

Flannery paces Pilots with 27 points

By SETH STASKEY
For the News-Register

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — River is not short on confidence.

When a roster is loaded with seniors and experience, there's no need to hit any type of panic buttons at any point.

And that includes when the Pilots were down 11 early in the fourth quarter to top-seeded Shadyside on Saturday evening in the Class 2A portion of the Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championships at Ohio University-Eastern.

The Pilots proceeded to take the game over in the fourth quarter where they outscored the Tigers, 27-10, to go on for a hard-earned and cherished 55-49 win over the top-seeded Tigers.

“This is a huge win for these girls,” River coach Rick Isaly said. “This gives us a mountain of confidence to

come back the way we did.”

The Pilots not only showed the grit, will and determination that comes with an experienced team that's a defending conference champion. They also broke out their press, which they hadn't showed for most of the game.

“We don't press all the time,” Isaly said. “We got into a situation where we had to press. It rattled them to the point where we got steals and points. That press was the big issue because I felt their younger kids got rattled.”

Indeed.

Quite simply, Shadyside couldn't handle the Pilots' pressure. The Tigers were guilty of seven turnovers in the fourth quarter, many of which were of the live-ball variety and resulted in run-out opportunities for the Pilots.

Fueling those run outs was senior standout Lauren Flannery. The future Lake Erie College point guard scored eight of her 23 points in the fourth.

“She's going to do that to teams,” Shadyside coach Serge Gentile said. “I thought we did the best we could on her, but there's not going to be

anyone who's really going to stop her, especially when she gets in the open floor.”

She ignited a fourth quarter in which the Pilots scored 27 points after having 28 through the first three periods.

“Before the fourth quarter, I told the other seniors that this was our last chance and we had to leave it all out on the court,” Flannery, who was named the winner of the John Howell MVP Award, said.

Flannery ignited the fourth-quarter spurt on both ends. She got two layups and then — after a Pilots turnover — raced back down the court and blocked a shot. That ignited not only the droves of Pilots faithful, but also her teammates.

“Shadyside called a timeout and you could tell they were frustrated, so we knew we had to continue to take advantage of that,” Flannery said.

The initial River onslaught was a 13-2 run that knotted the game at 41-41 with 4:12 to play.

Please see **River**, Page C2

RIVER

Continued from Page C1

Shadyside took the lead back at 44-43 on an inside basket from Macy Coffland. The Tigers' lead was short-lived, however. Alli Long and senior Candace Caldwell, who was big throughout with 15 points, scored on back-to-back possessions, putting River back in front, 47-44.

"We knew we had to get the lead, so we could then spread it out and get the ball into (Flannery's) hands," Isaly said. "Once we got the lead, I could see it in their eyes."

The Tigers only got as close as one the rest of the way. The Pilots held the Tigers at bay thanks to a sharp 12 of 16 effort at the foul line in the fourth quar-

ter. Gentile, who watched his team finish the regular season with an 18-4 record, could really only shake his head.

"They diamond pressed us, we threw it to them and they shot layups," Gentile said of the fourth quarter. "For whatever reason, we couldn't get our wits about us. We were making bad passes and weren't making the right plays. That led to them shooting layups."

Caldwell, who Isaly said "came up huge," finished with 15 points in support of Flannery. Senior Carsyn Reynolds added eight.

The Tigers, who led 19-15 at halftime, were led by Coffland's 12 points.

JM

Continued from Page C1

"We made the shots we should have, the easy shots. We made shots around the basket (Saturday) and that is something I have emphasized all week. I feel like they did a lot better job of executing on those shots 3 feet and in."

Ashten Boggs, who netted a game-high 26 points to win the John Howell Most Valuable Player Award, got the scoring started in the second quarter and it was all Hawks the rest of the way.

Zoe Murphy, who had the big shot in a semifinal victory against Wheeling Park, drained two 3-pointers in the quarter, while Mallory Napolillo and Abbie Coen also added baskets.

On the other hand, the Monarchs were ice cold.

An Anna Blake basket was the only field goal in the second quarter for the Monarchs, with the rest of their points coming from the free-throw line.

John Marshall (14-7) settled for a number of 3-pointers and rarely attacked the basket.

"Second quarter, I think we just got impatient offensively," John Marshall coach Brock Melko said. "If we would have just stayed patient and not let them get so many easy baskets, that was the difference in the game.

Other than that lull we had in the second quarter, we basically played even (44-43 in favor of the Hawks).

"That first half was disappointing because we worked for days on not letting Murphy get any open shots and knew if she got open, it was going in.

"She got four wide-open and that is 12 points we can't get back. Then Boggs hurt us in the post in the second half."

John Marshall went from being tied after one quarter to heading into the locker room in a 19-point hole.

Against a team like University, that was too big of a deficit.

The Hawks stretched the lead to 25 points at 60-35 after three and the Monarchs could only get as close as the final 20-point margin in the fourth.

Shay Straughn led the Monarchs with 21 points. Abby Blake hit four 3-pointers and added 12.

"We didn't shoot a lot of 3s by design, but more to spread the floor and then penetrate," Melko said. "At times we settled and shot the first open 3. University did a good job of guarding the basket. I am OK with all the 3s, I just wish we would have made more of the ones we shot."

BEALLSVILLE

Continued from Page C1

"Our defense has been solid all year and I really didn't change much," Jarrett said. "We wanted to go underneath screens and force them to shoot from the outside. I thought that was our best game plan and that worked out for us."

Despite Madonna's lack of offense, it was able to keep Beallsville from blowing the game open. Beallsville's largest lead was six points (22-16 in the third quarter).

The Blue Dons (16-5) tied it early in the fourth

at 24-24 and got within one twice, but could never take the lead.

Ashley Howell, who paced the Blue Devils with 16 points, drained a 3-pointer to push the lead to two scores at 30-26 with 3:42 left.

With 1:27 to go, Madonna's Kennedy Martin scored underneath to bring the Blue Dons within 30-28.

For the Blue Devils, it then became a free-throw shooting contest and one they were more than ready to handle.

Beallsville went 8-for-10 from the free-throw line down the stretch - 11 of 14 in the fourth quarter as Howell's 3-pointer was the lone field goal for the Blue Devils during the final eight minutes.

An Alimario 3 kept Madonna's hopes alive at 34-33 with 15 seconds remaining.

Olivia Muncy was fouled and true on her two shots.

Madonna had one final chance, but the inbound pass was intercepted by Beallsville's Ashlie Loud-

en, who was fouled immediately. Her free throw sealed a championship for the Blue Devils.

"This community needed that," Jarrett said.

"The last time we won was my senior year so it has been awhile. Last year, coming so close and not winning it, I said in pregame that we had been here and knew what to do. I am really proud of the girls."

Louden scored eight points, but her all-around effort on both sides of the ball earned her the John Howell Most Valuable Player Award.

"You come down here in this great environment, you work for it all year and if anybody watched the game, they saw the two best Single A teams in the OVAC," Madonna coach Rodney Boniti said.

"We knew Beallsville was well-coached, extremely disciplined and my hats off to them. They hit the shots when they had to. Unfortunately, we couldn't get the ball to drop (Saturday).

"Normal shots we make didn't fall. All year, I give credit to the other team and you have to give credit to Beallsville's defense.

"They play very disciplined defense. We got the shots we wanted, between jumpshots, between backdoors, between layups, but if you don't hit some of those 15- and 18-footers early you get in a hole. We missed two layups down the stretch. It was just one of those days."



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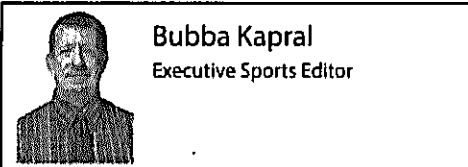
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SPORTS

C

College Signings/C3
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 Scoreboard/C5

Sunday,
 February 10, 2019



Bubba Kapral
 Executive Sports Editor

St. John's scripted rich athletic tradition

BELLAIRE - Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2019 may not mean much to many people, but it will be a date not soon forgotten by thousands in the Fighting Irish Nation.

That is the day when the Diocese of Steubenville announced its intentions to pull the plug on St. John Central. The high school, established way back in 1857, will no longer come to exist this June.

It is the same heartbreaking hand Bishop Donahue was dealt two years prior. Those priestly decisions yield pain, bitterness and reflection...and no appeals process.

The enrollment at St. John's currently stands at 43. While low, it is still a bump from last year's 30. The lack of bodies has resulted in fewer athletic programs at the school and corresponding less success.

But such has not always been the case, far from it. The Fighting Irish athletic tradition stacks up quite nicely amongst the 50 other OVAC schools.

St. John's has collected 92 OVAC championship pennants, 10th most in conference annals, one behind John Marshall. The Irish have the most OVAC titles in girls basketball (15) and girls track (17).

The remainder of the 92 championship banners are comprised by: football (6), boys cross country (10), girls cross country (6), golf (1), volleyball (4), boys basketball (3), wrestling (5), baseball (10), softball (10), boys track (4) and cheerleading (1).

Quite impressive.

While OVAC titles are sweet, they take a backseat to state championships, especially in Ohio. St. John's has acquitted itself quite nicely on the highest of athletic prep stages.

The Fighting Irish have collected three state team championships, more than any other school in Belmont County. They were girls track champs in 2007 and 2008 and boys cross country in 2008. Those state championships were preceded by state runners-up team finishes by the girls track teams in 2005 and 2006.

Individually, the school has produced nine state track champions (April Rotilio owning three of the gold medals and Natalie Perzanowski possessing a pair) and four in wrestling (John Ferguson, Eric Anderson, Joe Skoff and Derek Koch). Kenny Howell, state champion in the discus in 1999, still holds the all-time Ohio Valley record in that event with his 180-0 toss.

SJC has produced some legendary performers in basketball.

Allan Hornyak joins Bridgeport's John Havlicek and Weir's Ron "Fritz" Williams as one of the three greatest boys hoopsters in OVAC annals. He is legendary for his 86-point explosion against Warren Consolidated while averaging 42 points a game in both his junior and senior seasons. He nixed a scholarship offer to play at UCLA with Bill Walton to stay close to home and earn All-American honors at Ohio State.

Hornyak wasn't the only Irish hoopster to star at Ohio State. A decade earlier, Dick Reasbeck was the finest player on the Ohio Valley hardwoods, earning him to a chance to sparkle at Ohio State while rooming with Bobby Knight.

Prior to those two phenoms, Fred Burda was a SJC basketball icon. He matriculated to Steubenville College, helping to lead Barons to the small-college national championship.

When the topic of girls' basketball surfaces in the Ohio Valley, the discussion has to start with Stephanie Petho. The 5-7 guard owns the OVAC record for total points (2,667) and single game (57). She averaged 35.9 as a junior and 37.1 as a senior, earning her Division IV Player of the Year honors. She also finished second to the legendary Katie Smith as Ms. Basketball. Petho went on to be a two-year starter at Pitt.

Irish football enjoyed a 90-year run, spanning 1925 to 2015, producing great players and quality teams. The Green was OVAC

WHEELING HOSPITAL OVAC GIRLS BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS



BELLAIRE'S KAT
 Davis (2) splits a pair of Fort Frye defenders during Saturday's Class 3A final at the Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championships at Ohio University Eastern. Davis paced the Big Reds with 17 points en route to winning the John Howell Memorial Most Valuable Player Award. Bellaire won its eighth OVAC crown and first in 13 years.

Photo/PAUL KRAJNYAK

Big Reds break through

• Bellaire holds off Fort Frye for Class 3A championship

By RICK THORP
 Times Leader Sports Writer

ST. CLAIRSVILLE - After two years of knocking on the door to an OVAC championship, Bellaire finally broke it down Saturday morning.

The Big Reds - semifinalists two years ago and finalists last season - held off a furious fourth-quarter rally by Fort Frye in claiming a 36-34 victory in the Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championships Class 3A final, capturing the school's first conference crown in 13 years, first in the playoff era, and eighth overall.

"They've worked hard, not just this season, but in all the

offseasons to prepare for this," Bellaire head coach John Farrier said after spending almost five minutes posing for team

photos with his victorious hoopsters on the OUE Health, Physical Education and Recreation Center floor.

"Anything they've achieved they've worked for, and I just couldn't be more proud of a group."

"I've been with this group since eighth grade. I'm proud of the seniors, and the underclassmen are buying in and working hard, too."

After trailing by as many

as 10 in the second half, the Cadets (16-3) had an opportunity to tie or win the game in the closing seconds.

Inbounding the ball under the basket with 3.9 ticks left, Fort Frye got the ball to Morgan Borich on the right wing. But her shot failed to draw net, sending the Bellaire bench into a frenzy.

"We were right there," said veteran Cadets head coach Dan Liedtke, who's directed his program to five of its nine OVAC crowns, the last coming three years ago. "We were looking for a good shot from

our hot shooter. She's a senior and we put it in her hands.

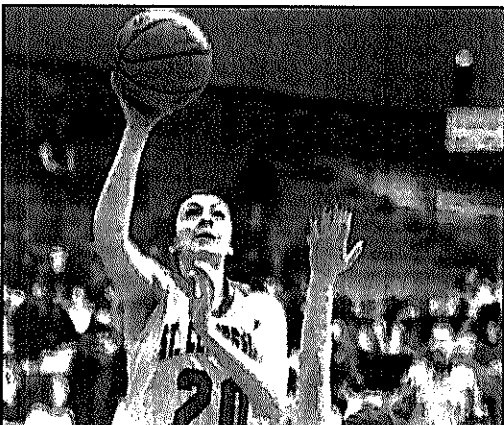
"She was a little off balance. They got close enough to her where she had to take a dribble to the side. But I would bet money on that shot."

"I knew this wasn't going to be a game where we'd come in a beat them by quite a bit. I knew it would come down to this type of ending."

Bellaire (18-2) jumped out to a nine-point, first-quarter lead behind eight points from senior Maci Crozier, who was feeling it from mid-range.

"She made some buckets there to kind of relax us," Farrier said of Crozier, who finished with 12 points. "She's

See, REDS, Page C2



Beaver Local pulls out 4A title against St. C.

By SETH STASKEY
 Times Leader Sports Editor

ST. CLAIRSVILLE - Beaver Local went into the locker room staring up at a 11-point deficit during the Class 4A Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls Basketball Championship Game.

There were absolutely no panic buttons hit

its first girls basketball crown.

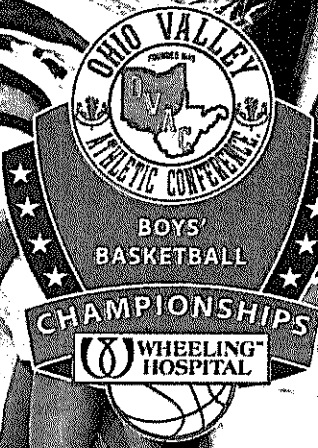
"This was one of our pre-season goals because we felt like when we dropped down (from 5A), we had a chance to be competitive," Coie said. "These kids have worked really, really hard to get here."

Having Riccardo on the interior certainly helped to make that goal attainable.

OVAC BOYS

Basketball Championships

2019



Saturday, February 16, 2019

A Supplement to The Times Leader

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ON THE COVER

Pictured is a standout player from five of the 10 schools taking part today. From left are Davis Black (Meadowbrook), Alex Vargo (Wheeling Park), Anthony Robbins (Wheeling Central), Luke Powell (Barnesville) and Craig Bober (St. Clairsville).

Photos by Seth Staskey, Paul Krajnyak, Jeff Harrison. Cover by Jesse Kovalski. Tab Design by Seth Staskey.

Barnesville, Shenandoah bidding for 3A title

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

Barnesville and Shenandoah are neighboring school districts.

However, for whatever reason, the schools have not met in boys basketball this season.

That will change Saturday morning at Ohio University Eastern in St. Clairsville. And the stakes will be much higher than just bragging rights.

The top-seeded Zeps and the third-seeded Shamrocks will meet in the Class 3A game of the Wheeling Hos-

pital OVAC Girls Basketball Championships at 10 a.m.

The Shamrocks and Zeps met twice last year with Shenandoah prevailing both times.

"They handled us pretty good last year," Barnesville head coach Matt Johnson recalled. "Obviously, it's a new season and we're excited for the chance to play them again in this game."

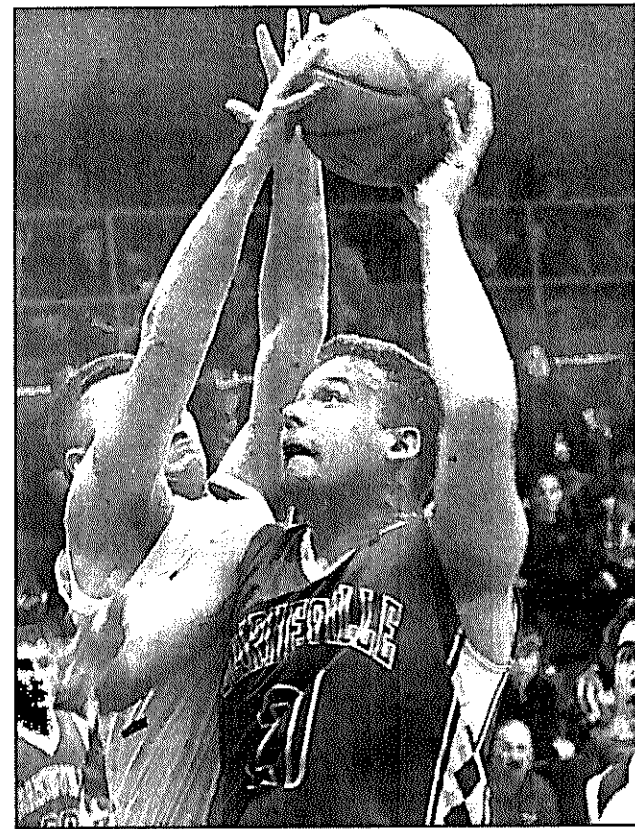
Shenandoah head coach Marc Smith, who is in his third season at the Zeps' helm, called the chance to play for a conference title for the ultimate for his

squad, which features only three seniors.

"This started three years ago when we decided to change the culture of accountability, toughness and discipline," Smith said. "We were lacking in those areas. And really in the last half of the 2016 season, the kids started to really turn the corner. We got into the OVAC Tournament last year and came up short of this game. Now, here we are."

This marks the second time that the Zeps have played for the title. They lost to Shadyside in the 2A final in 2010.

See, 3A, Page 3



T-L Photo/SETH STASKEY

BARNESVILLE'S AARON Marovich goes up for a shot during Tuesday's OVAC semifinal at Fort Frye.

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Continued from Page 2

"It's very, very rewarding for our kids and school," Smith said. "We had hit some hard times, but these young men have bought in to the system and our style of play. It's great to see them get rewarded after making steady progress over the last few seasons. It boils down to staying true to the process and our kids have done that."

The Shamrocks, meanwhile, are making their first venture to OUE for a championship game. Until this year, they'd only been in the top four of the event once. Taking it a step further, Barnesville has never won an OVAC title in boys basketball.

"It's hard to win an OVAC title in any sport and our kids have the chance in front of them," Johnson said. "We've been telling our kids they have a chance to do something that's never been done and accomplish something that won't be taken away from them. They call it history for a reason and that's because it only happens once."

Johnson was actually a player on the 1990 team that came the closest to winning the title. It fell a half-point short to Bellaire in the Class AAA standings.

"That half point still stings us," Johnson said.

The Shamrocks reached the championship game after Tuesday's come-from-behind win at Fort Frye. Barnesville erased a 12-point, third-quarter deficit in about six minutes and then fought off a Cadet spurt to pull off the upset.

"I honestly don't think we played a complete game (at Fort Frye)," Johnson said. "We played probably two good quarters. I thought we played well in the first half of the first quarter, the second half of the third quarter and the entire fourth. Though it's

nice to be able to go get a win like that in a tough place to play, we will not be able to do that (against Shenandoah)."

Shenandoah, meanwhile, has been taking care of its business basically all season. And Tuesday's 69-53 victory against Monroe Central was no different. The Zeps are 18-3 with two of their losses coming to Fort Frye and one to Cambridge.

"We're working to build a culture that we can and will compete with anyone," Smith said. "Our kids have bought into that, too. We work on creating in that mentality in the offseason."

Playing the Shamrocks is probably a little bittersweet for the Zeps. Obviously, it's a chance to meet a long-time foe, but a chance to make amends for their two losses to Fort Frye were there, too.

However, Smith had a feeling the Shamrocks would be his team's opponent.

"We've been preparing for Barnesville," Smith said. "We had film on them and I know they have film on us, too. Coach Johnson and I have a decent relationship and we're definitely not blind to what they bring to the table."

What the Shamrocks bring is a heavy dose of junior standout Luke Powell. Pouring in 31 points a game, Powell is the unquestioned go-to-guy for the Shamrocks. He scored 33 points and grabbed 17 rebounds against the Fort.

"No one has stopped Powell all year," Smith conceded. "We're not going into this game thinking we're going to stop him either. But, we do hope to make him really have to earn what he gets. We would like to come up with a plan to limit the other guys."

But, to hear Johnson tell it, the key for the Shamrocks are the other members



Photo/PAUL KRAJNYAK

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Barnesville boys basketball team. Front row, from left, are Jeremy Hunkler, Gage Hannahs, Aaron Marovich, Manager Eric Keylor, Tate Dowler, Hunter Carpenter and Colton Hines. Back row, from left, are head coach Matt Johnson, Jacob Burghy, assistant coach Johnny Hines, Evan Hudson, Luke Powell, Zack Thompson, Payne Johnson, assistant coach Jason Perkins, Aiden Hannahs and Kason Powell.

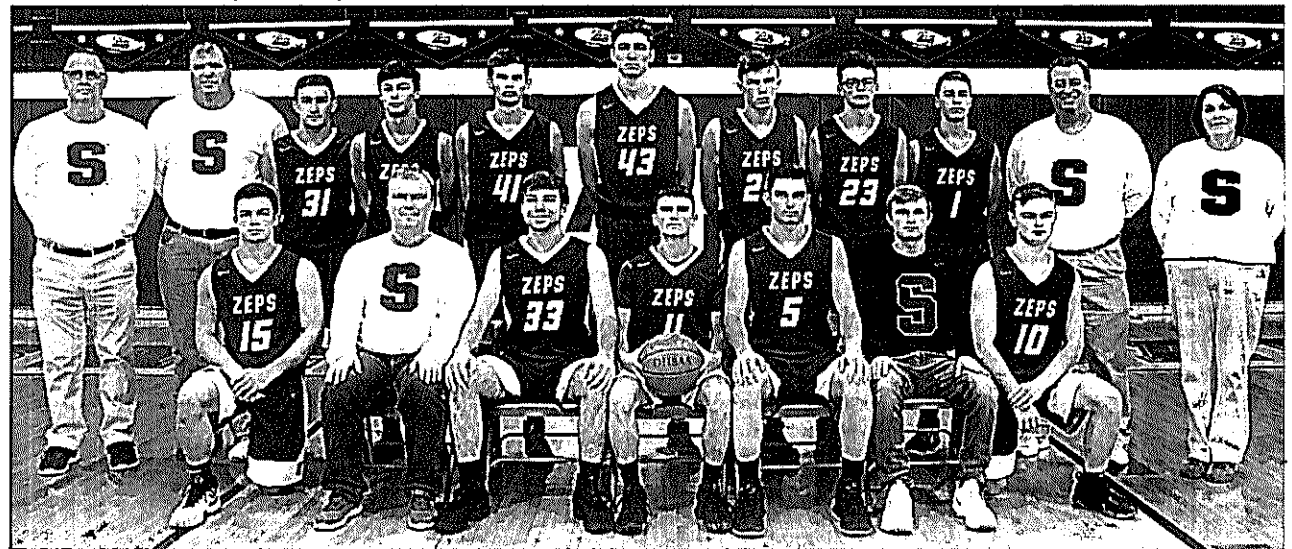


Photo Provided

PICTURED IS the Shenandoah boys basketball team. The team includes Kendal Sherman, Nickolai Wickham, Drew West, Boone Jones, Colby Farmer, Cade Denius, Kade Varhola, Max McVicker, Shakur Payton, Ayden Smith, Dayton Hill and Christian Duniver.

of their cast.

"It doesn't matter, from game to game, who it is, but we need to get other guys in double figures," Johnson explained. "We're usually able to come out on top when that happens. We know what Luke is going to give us, but we need the other guys to come through. They

did that at Fort Frye."

Seniors Aaron Marovich and Tate Dowler were the two who came up big against the Cadets, scoring 12 and 10, respectively. Ayden Hannahs has shown some flashes and is an adept 3-point shooter. Junior Payne Johnson - Matt's son - rounds out the start-

ing lineup. He's a glue guy and a defender.

"We're aware of their other guys," Smith said. "Their role players are playing well right now."

The Zeps, meanwhile, are much more balanced in the scoring column with two players averaging in double figures and another just un-

der 10.

Sophomore guard Christian Duniver is a savvy point guard. He's scores at a 14.8 points per game clip and also averages four rebounds and 2.4 assists a game.

Senior wing Nickolai Wickham checks in at 13.3 See, 3A, Page 7

St. C., Meadowbrook to meet in 4A final

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

A definitive contrast in styles is set to unfold Saturday at high noon in the Wheeling Hospital OVAC Class 4A Boys Basketball Championship game.

Top-seeded Meadowbrook brings a defensive-minded attitude into the game, while third-seeded St. Clairsville comes in with an offense that averages upwards of 77 points and relies heavily on the 3-point shot.

So, the age-old question, 'what's going to give?' is totally in play.

"We know St. Clairsville is good and quite capable," Meadowbrook head coach Lou "Scooter" Tolzda said. "We know they're really

good on their home court and we expect them to shoot it just as well at OUE. They're just a tremendous scoring team."

Meanwhile, the Colts are a tremendous defensive scoring team. They're limiting their opponents to just over 40 points a game and are coming off a semi-final win against East Liverpool in which they held the Potters to just 42 points, which is some 30 below their average.

"Meadowbrook's a really good team," St. C.'s first-year coach Ryan Clifford said. "They don't have the record they have, playing the schedule they do without being good."

The Colts come into the game at 15-4. Two of their losses came to

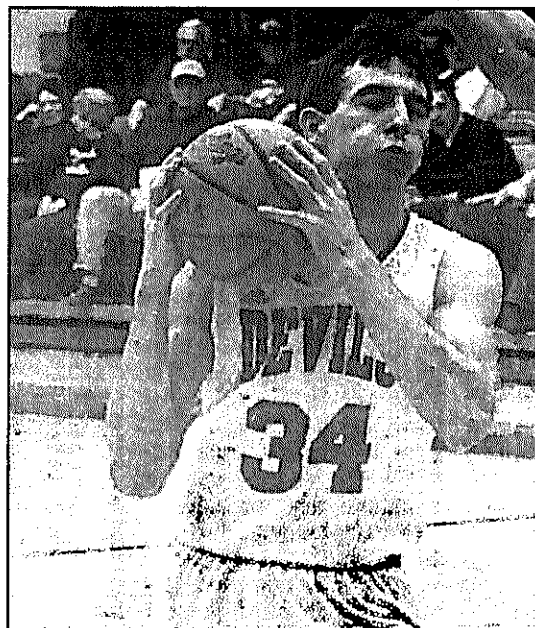
Division I Dover. Other setbacks were handed to them by New Philadelphia and Coshocton.

St. Clairsville, meanwhile, is 15-5 on the season. Its losses have come to Harrison Central, Wheeling Park, Wheeling Central, John Marshall and Steubenville.

Though the Red Devils and Colts do not meet during the pre-OVAC portion of the regular season, they're certainly no strangers to one another. They actually met in the OVAC title game in 2016 with Meadowbrook prevailing in what's started a string of three titles in a row.

Beyond that, however, the two met several times during the summer season.

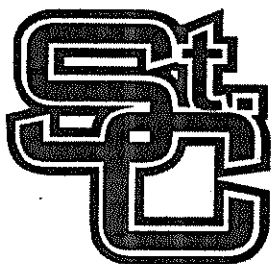
See, 4A, Page 5



ST. CLAIRSVILLE'S Justin Heatherington makes a move to the bucket during a game earlier this season. He and the Red Devils will take on Meadowbrook today at noon in the OVAC Class 4A title game.

T-L Photo/SETH STASKEY

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• 4A

Continued from Page 4

"We know them and they know us," Clifford said. "They have a lot to be concerned with. They're big, fast and physical. Plus, they're experienced."

Meadowbrook's experience has put a target on its back for much of the season. The Colts advanced to the Division II state semifinals in Columbus before falling to Trotwood-Madison.

"I feel like we're battle-tested and I feel good about the schedule we play, but what makes basketball a great game is that anything can happen on any given night," Tolzda offered. "Teams coming off successful years, the next year, often times, is hard. There literally hasn't been one game on our schedule that you could just point to and say, 'that's a win.'"

The Colts (15-4) used a late-season surge to ascend to the top seed. They defeated 5A powers Warren and Steubenville in their final games before the cut-off date to move to the top line.

This marks St. Clairsville's first time in the title game since that aforementioned 2016 loss to the Colts. The Red Devils didn't qualify for the top four each of the last two seasons.

"For a while it felt like we were (playing) in this game every year and now having been out of it for two years, it seems like forever," Clifford said. "It's exciting and fun for the kids. This is a good group that's really put in a lot of time, so they deserve this chance."

The Red Devils actually had a defacto three-game OVAC tourney. They had to beat Martins Ferry a night before the cut-off date to even secure a bid into the 'Final Four' of 4A. They then went on the road and defeated Oak Glen, 79-66.

"The (Oak Glen) game

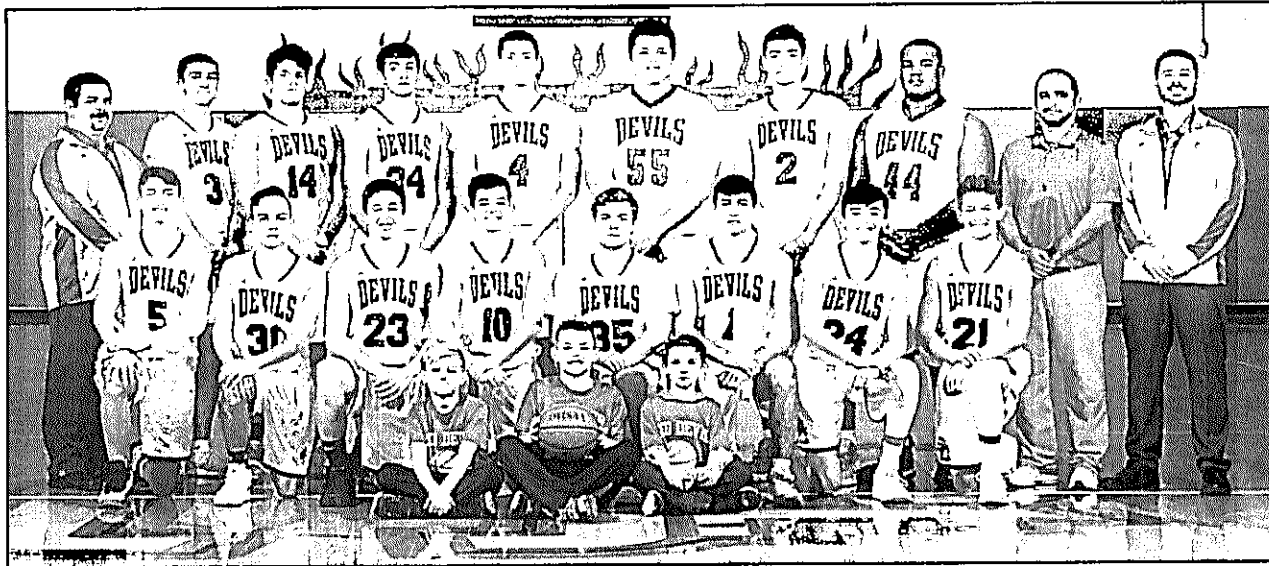


Photo Provided

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 St. Clairsville basketball team. Front row, from left, are managers Kaden Clifford, Nico Jacob and Kolby Clifford. Second row, from left, are Brett Vike, Broc Crist, Drew Sefsick, Cade Wolfe, Nate Harris, Matt Busby, Ryan McCort and Colin Oberdick. Back row, from left, are assistant coach Kevin Sacco, David Lane, Will Balgo, Justin Heatherington, Greg Norman, Avery Henry, Craig Bober, Javon Lyons, head coach Ryan Clifford and assistant coach Eric Gay.



Photo Provided

PICTURED IS the Meadowbrook boys basketball team. Front row, from left, are Johnathan McCall, Zach Rusnak, Boston Black, manager Brayden Stillion, Peyton Neff, Chance Carpenter and Elijah Chandler; back row, Dylan Webster, Davis Black, Logan Fox, Addy Black, Eric McCulloch, Davis Singleton and head coach Lou "Scooter" Tolzda.

had a different energy about it," Clifford said. "The OVAC Tournament is really a nice thing. We've had some struggles away from home at times, so it was nice to be able to go get a win against a good team."

The Colts' time in the

OVAC is shrinking. The school has announced its intentions to leave the conference and become sole members of the Muskingum Valley League.

Tolzda, a River High grad and long-time coach at Beallsville, values the

OVAC title.

"I don't care what anyone says, there's not a team in the OVAC that wouldn't love to be playing in their class' championship game (today)," Tolzda said. "I've heard naysayers talk about the OVAC not being a big

deal. It is a big deal. It's a nice event and we're excited to be there. This was one of our kids' goals - along with getting back to the regional - from the first day of the season."

The Red Devils not only score the ball quite effec-

tively, but they're also quite balanced in doing so.

Seniors Matt Busby and Craig Bober both check in at nearly 19 points a game. Junior Brett Vike pumps in nearly 13 points a game.

Seniors David Lane and Justin Heatherington contribute 9.2 and 7.5 points a game.

Junior Nate Harris is the catalyst at point guard and nets just under six a night.

"We're going to have to do another great job on defense," Tolzda said. "St. Clairsville has multiple guys who can score. I am really impressed with Bober's versatility."

"But, really, all of their guys can shoot the 3, but if you close out too hard, they're driving by you."

The Colts, meanwhile, are led by 6-5 swing player Davis Black. The recent University of Charleston football signee is a nightly double-double at 16 points and 11 rebounds.

He's complemented by his younger brother, Addy Black. He scores six points a game.

Junior Johnathan McCall runs the point for the Colts and is netting about 10 points a game. Senior Peyton Neff is "an important cog" according to Tolzda.

Senior Dylan Webster doesn't score much, but Tolzda said he's "worth 15 points because of what he does on defense."

Logan Fox, Zach Rusnak, Davis Singleton and Boston Black round out the rotation. All nine members of that rotation have started at some point this season.

"We have to defend," Clifford said. "There were long stretches at Oak Glen when we really sat down and guarded well. They're going to guard us and try to make it difficult for us to score, so we have to be able to do the same thing. This game is going to come down to who gets more stops."

Park, University set for rubbermatch in 5A final

By BUBBA KAPRAL
Executive Sports Editor

WHEELING — The monkey has been removed

from the back of the Wheeling Park boys' basketball program.

The monkey came in the form of Mohigans. The Pa-

triot's snapped a 13-game losing streak to Morgantown High Tuesday night, pocketing a cherished 57-46 win at The Palace On The Hill.

More importantly, the Patriots' 12th win in 17 starts propels them into Saturday's OVAC 5A championship game at OUE. Coach Mi-

chael Jebbia's charges will take on University High in the title tilt. The Hawks demolished Steubenville, 110-66, in Tuesday's other semifinal.

Park and University split a pair of regular-season games.

University, sitting third in the latest Class AAA state ratings, enters the championship game as the two-time defending confer-

ence champions. The 16-3 Hawks defeated Parkersburg South, 60-45, in last year's title contest, claiming their third OVAC hoop pennant.

The Morgantown-based squad is led by junior point guard Kaden Metheny. He was the MVP in last year's championship affair.

"Kaden is our leader. He has some Division I offers already," University head coach Jebbia said. See, 5A, Page 7

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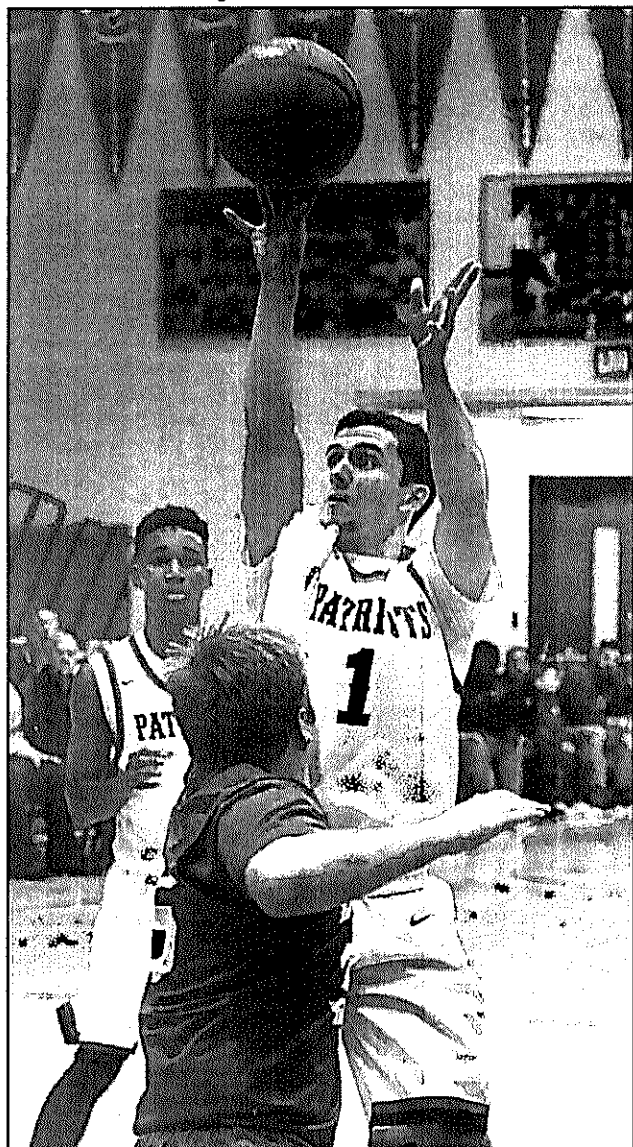
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T-L File Photo/SETH STASKEY
WHEELING PARK senior Jack Stakem goes up for a shot during the Patriots' game in December against St. Clairsville. Stakem had a big night in helping to get Park past Morgantown Tuesday. He and his teammates will take on University Saturday at 2 p.m.

• 5A

Continued from Page 4

Coach Joe Schmidle said, "We have been guard-driven for much of the year. But now our bigs are starting to contribute much more with scoring."

"Park, meanwhile, is the direct opposite. Their bigs were doing the bulk of the scoring for much of the year. Now their guards are really stepping up with scoring," he added.

"Park is a tough matchup for us. This will be a game of matchups."

Joining Metheny in the Hawks' backcourt is 6-3 junior K.J. McClurg. University's frontcourt is composed of 6-2 senior forward Rodney Bucklew, 6-2 sophomore forward Ryan Niceler and 6-6 junior center Mike Maumbe.

"We have really been working hard with our big guys. Our front line has really, really improved, and they've made us such a better basketball team," Schmidle said. "We knew those kids had the ability, and we were waiting for it to show. I think they realized they needed to step up for this team to reach our full potential."

Jebbia will bring a veteran bunch to OUE in Park's quest for its eighth OVAC crown.

The Patriots, ranked seventh this week in the Class AAA state poll, have pocketed conference championship trophies in 1977, 1998, 2000, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012. Park's last appearance in the title game came in 2014, falling to Morgantown.

"It feels good to be back in the OVAC finals. The biggest key was being able to play at home for the semifinal game," Jebbia said. "We are really happy for our six seniors. They have made huge strides over four years."

"University is a high-octane basketball team. They average 80 points a game, which leads our state. They



Photo PROVIDED

PICTURED IS the Wheeling Park boys basketball team. Front row, from left, are Trevor Thomas, David Croft, Donovan Goddard, De'Vaughn McWhorter, Jack Stakem and Keondre' King. Standing, from left, are Assistant coach Gene Ammirante, manager Milano Ammirante, head coach Michael Jebbia, Shaheed Jackson-Mayfield, Dustin VanSickle, Alex Vargo, Alex Dunlevy, Xavier Morris, assistant coach Terry Payne, manager Sarge Cordery and assistant coach Jerry Ammirante.



Photo Provided

PICTURED IS the University boys basketball team. The team includes: K.J. McClurg, Ryan Niceler, Kyle Smith, Kaden Metheny, Tyler Blohm, Javier Reyes, Rodney Bucklew, Mike Maumbe, Tyler Belt, Ryan Forbes and Aaron Forbes. The Hawks are coached by Joe Schmidle.

have two dynamic players in Metheny and McClurg. Metheny is one of the best players we have ever faced. He does it all. He is like a queen on a chess board. The best thing about him is he plays the game the right

way." Jebbia will trot out four seniors and a standout junior in his starting lineup.

Jack Stakem is a dynamo at point guard.

The 5-9 senior is coming off a huge effort in Park's

semifinal win. He tallied 17 points to go with a 10-of-10 showing at the free throw line in the fourth quarter. For good measure, he grabbed nine rebounds.

Seniors De'Vaughn McWhorter and Donovan

Goddard, both 5-10, are also quality guards.

Keondre' King and Alex Vargo bring size and potency to the Patriots frontcourt.

King is an explosive 6-4 senior, averaging 17.4 ppg. Vargo is a 6-5 power-packed junior, tossing in 20.8 ppg.

Jebbia, one of the greatest players in Park's glorious hoop tradition, is not afraid to use his bench.

His top reserves are senior Trevor Thomas, junior Alex Dunlevy, junior Xavier Morris, junior Dustin VanSickle and senior David Croft.

Today's 5A title tilt tips at 2 p.m.

• 3A

Continued from Page 3

and 8.1 rebounds a game. Senior Boone Jones has been a four-year regular for the Zeps. He scores 9.1 points a night and 7.6 rebounds.

Junior Kendal Sherman is next on the list at 7.1 points a game and sophomore Max McVicker scores 6.5 points a night.

Drew West is the Zeps' sixth man and scores 5.7 a game.

"They present some really (defensive) challenges in the post," Johnson said. "We're not blessed with great size, so we have to find a way to limit their touches inside. They have some kids who are extremely long and can score in multiple ways."

Toronto, Wheeling Central battling for 2A crown

By KIM NORTH
Times Leader Sports Writer

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — Wheeling Central is seeking

its unprecedented seventh straight Wheeling Hospital Ohio Valley Athletic Conference Boys Basketball championship. It is an aston-

ishing 8-0 overall in the title games, be it in Class 2A or Class 3A.

Saturday night the second-ranked Maroon Knights (16-4) will tip-off at 6 against No. 1 Toronto (19-1) in the fifth — and final — game of the day inside Ohio University Eastern's Health and Physical Education Building.

"Tradition has a lot to do with it. We've always been fortunate to have a pretty good nucleus (of players) coming back after we lose

a pretty good senior class," veteran Maroon Knights' head coach Mel Stephens said. "We lost two really good players in Brett Price and Owen Gainer. Both of those kids scored 1,000 career points, but here we are again."

To get to Saturday's title tilt, Wheeling Central had to dispatch No. 3 Wellsville, 83-60, Tuesday night in East Wheeling, while the Red Knights will be making their championship debut after topping fourth-ranked

Shadyside, 64-55, in the Gem City.

"It feels very, very good. We told the kids that if they put in the time, good things are going to happen, especially for our seniors," third-year Toronto head coach Sean Tucker revealed. "Outstanding things are happening this season."

Toronto is ranked third in Division IV in the Buckeye State. It's the first time a Red Knights boys' basketball team has been state ranked. The lone loss is

6-point setback to Division II Marlinton during a Holiday Tournament in Steubenville.

"The dedication is really paying off," Tucker continued. "The kids have really bought in to what we have been preaching to them."

While the two squads haven't met on the hardwood in recent history, Tucker has coached against the Maroon Knights when he was at Steubenville Catholic.

"Wheeling Central has a
See, 2A, Page 9

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Principal Betsy Jones

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Toronto High School Athletic Department



Photo Provided

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Toronto basketball team. The team includes: Trillion West, Kobe Herrick, Nate Karaffa, Caleb Leasure, Trent Wright, Brendan Matyas, Jay Hanlin, Lucas Gulczynski, A.J. Clegg, Bryson Anderson, Ryan Matyas, Nick Sninchak, Anthony Myslinsky and Zac Beger.

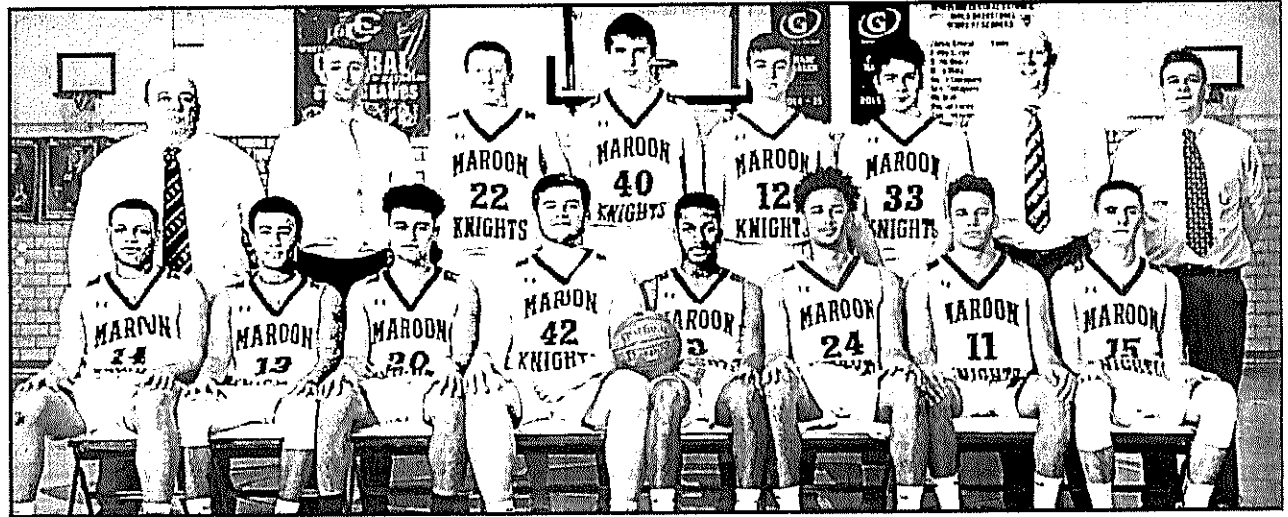


Photo Provided

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Wheeling Central basketball team. The team includes: D.J. Saunders, Avery Lee, Jalen Creighton, Dom Mills, Bray Price, Anthony Robbins, J.C. Maxwell, Luke Rohmann, Clayton Abate, Ryan Reasbeck, Josh Custer and Michael Toepfer. The team is coached by Mel Stephens.

Continued from Page 8

great program. I have a lot of respect for them and I think that's mutual," Tucker said. "There's never an easy game against them. They never have a down year."

The Maroon Knights won their 11th game in a row Wednesday with a 94-56 triumph over Magnolia.

Ryan Reasbeck, a 6-foot freshman, leads a balanced Wheeling Central attack with a 13-point-a-game norm. He is joined in twin figures by 6-2 sophomore J.C. Maxwell and 6-3 senior Anthony Robbins with 12.9 and 12.6 marks, respectively. Seniors Bray Price (6-0) and Dom Mills (6-3) also lend support, as do juniors Clayton Abate (6-4) and Jalen Creighton (6-0); and sophomores Avery Lee (5-11) and D.J. Saunders (6-

0). Juniors Luke Rohmann (6-0) and Josh Custer (6-0) round out the roster. Robbins and Abate are the top rebounders.

"We've basically done it offensively by committee," Stephens admitted. "We've got three guys in double figures and that is what it takes."

When asked if he has been surprised by Reasbeck's play at the varsity level, the veteran head coach didn't hesitate in answering.

"No. Not at all. I've watched him play since he was in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades," Stephens noted. "He's a good player with a lot of experience. He handles the pressure really well."

The Red Knights have

four twin-digit scorers in 6-2 senior Nate Karaffa (19.7); 6-1 senior Trillion West (14.6); 6-3 junior Lucas Gulzynski (11.2) and 6-2 senior Nick Sninchak

(10.1). A.J. Clegg, a 6-2 senior, is at 9.2. Brendon Matyas, a 6-0, senior; Trent Wright, a 6-1, senior; and Colby Herrick, a 5-11 senior, complete the roster.

Karaffa has verballed to Ohio State for baseball, while Gulzynski, Sninchak and Clegg are also standouts on the baseball diamond.

"A lot of these kids have

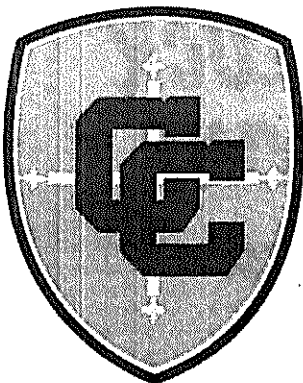
been extremely successful in other sports," Tucker said. "They are accustomed to pressure situations and they feed off of the energy. They go out and play."



Photo Courtesy/WHEELING HOSPITAL

WHEELING CENTRAL'S Ryan Reasbeck has been a key contributor during his freshman season for the Maroon Knights. Reasbeck and the Knights will take on Toronto this evening in the OVAC Class 2A championship game.

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Cameron, Trinity set for 1A title-game rematch

By RICK THORP
Times Leader Sports Writer

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — It's been a month and one

day since Cameron and Trinity last locked horns on the hardwood. But neither Tom Hart nor John Fowkes — the two head coaches

— are using that contest as a barometer for today's rematch in the Wheeling Hospital OVAC boys 1A championship game.

"They played like a state championship-caliber team that night," Hart said regarding the Warriors' 88-57 triumph in Morgantown.

"They played good defense and they were shooting the lights out. They're one of the contenders to win it all in West Virginia (Class A) and, that night, they played a heckuva ballgame."

That might be true, but Trinity played that night without the services of 6-5 senior Daniel Woods. Woods, who earned the John Howell Memorial Most Valuable Player Award last February in Trinity's 52-40 victory against the Dragons in the

1A title tilt, has missed most of the season with an injury.

But he returned six games ago and hopes to lead the Warriors to a repeat performance today at 4 inside Ohio University Eastern's Health, Physical Education and Recreation Center.

"Not only can he play inside," Hart said, "but he can step out and shoot."

Since his return, Woods has averaged nearly 18 points per game.

"It's nice when you can throw it down to that kid,"

See, 1A, Page 11

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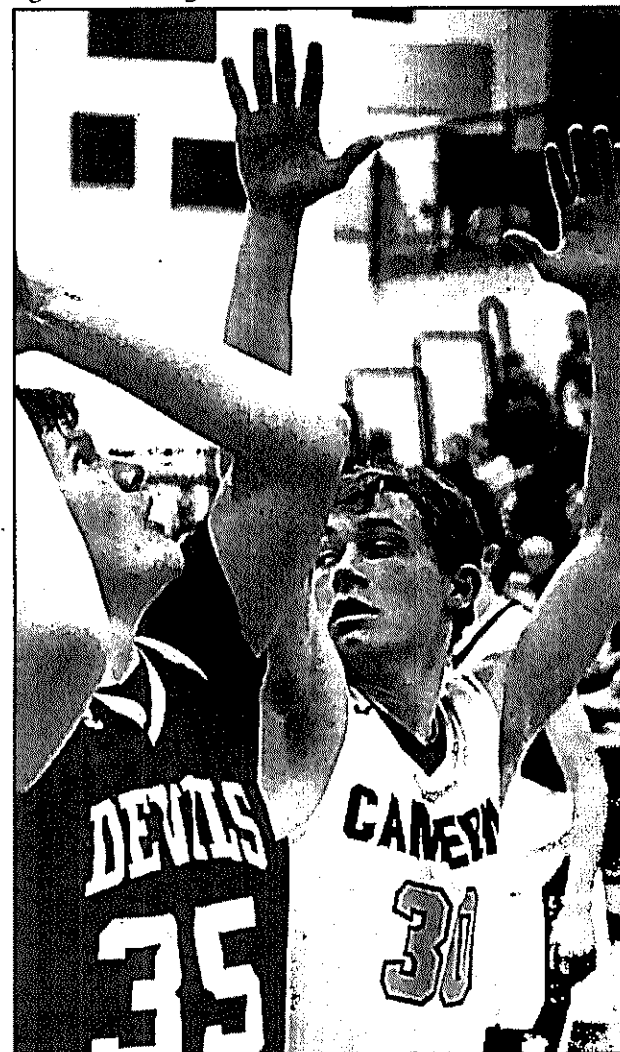


Photo PROVIDED
CAMERON'S NOAH Neely defends a Beallsville player during their OVAC Class 1A semifinal on Tuesday. Neely and the Dragons are back in the OVAC championship game and will take on Morgantown Trinity today at 4 p.m. at OUE.

Continued from Page 10

said Fowkes, Trinity's second-year head coach. "It makes it easier for our guards."

Even without Woods against Cameron earlier this year, the defending Class A semifinalists got plenty of production from its guards, including senior Joel Robertson, who exploded for 36 points.

"He's a great shooter," Hart said. "Then they have (senior Josh) Hart (no relation) on the point. He's an excellent ballhandler and passer, but he's a nice shooter, as well."

Robertson is averaging 18 ppg, while senior Briston Bennett is dropping in close to 12 ppg. Senior Logo Zervos rounds out the starting lineup.

Junior Fletcher Hartstock, who filled in for Woods when he was out, is usually Trinity's first sub. Others off the bench include seniors Caleb Rice, Jon Morley and Mark Spruill.

All told, the Warriors (14-5) have 11 seniors, most of whom see game action.

"John is a very good coach," Tom Hart said. "He hasn't been there very long, but he's done a very good job with that program. They have length and they're very athletic and quick."

The latter two attributes were on full display in the teams' last meeting, according to Tom Hart. He said the Warriors have kicked it up a notch as far as offense goes.

"This year, they're more of a full-court team," he said. "They're much better in pushing the ball in transition. They like to get up and down the floor."

Fowkes agreed.

"The kids are pushing the ball better than they ever have," he said. "We don't really look to set up an offense, and when we do we shoot the 3 pretty well."

"When we push the ball,

we're a pretty good team." As Trinity has a different look from a season ago, so do the Dragons (15-3). Gone are the days of dropping the ball into a dominant post presence.

"Last year, we had two big guys we could pound the ball into, and one that could step out and shoot the 3," Tom Hart, in his third year guiding Cameron, said. "This year, we're a little more guard-oriented. Most of the time we could have three guards on the floor. We don't have the thickness we had last year, but we still have our share of athleticism and quickness."

Cameron has three seniors in its starting lineup - Aiden Lucey, Dillon Meintel and Travis Mickey. Meintel is averaging 18.5 ppg, while Lucey and Mickey are averaging 10.6 and 10.4 ppg, respectively.

"They have a tough group of kids," Fowkes said. "Especially the Lucey kid. He's been tough for us to handle."

Juniors Zane Clutter and Noah Neely round out the Dragons' starting five.

"We've had seven different guys start for us this year," Tom Hart noted. "We may change things up (today)."

Juniors Garrett Scott and Jessop Broughton provide Cameron, seeking its first OVAC crown, strength off the bench.

"I've been blessed with good athletes and some good kids," Tom Hart said. "My first year we won 14 games and we won 19 last year. We lost a lot from last year, so we're still fairly young. But we've improved during the season and we've made strides."

"We've had a few bumps in the road, but I'm proud of the kids and how they've responded."

"We're not done yet."

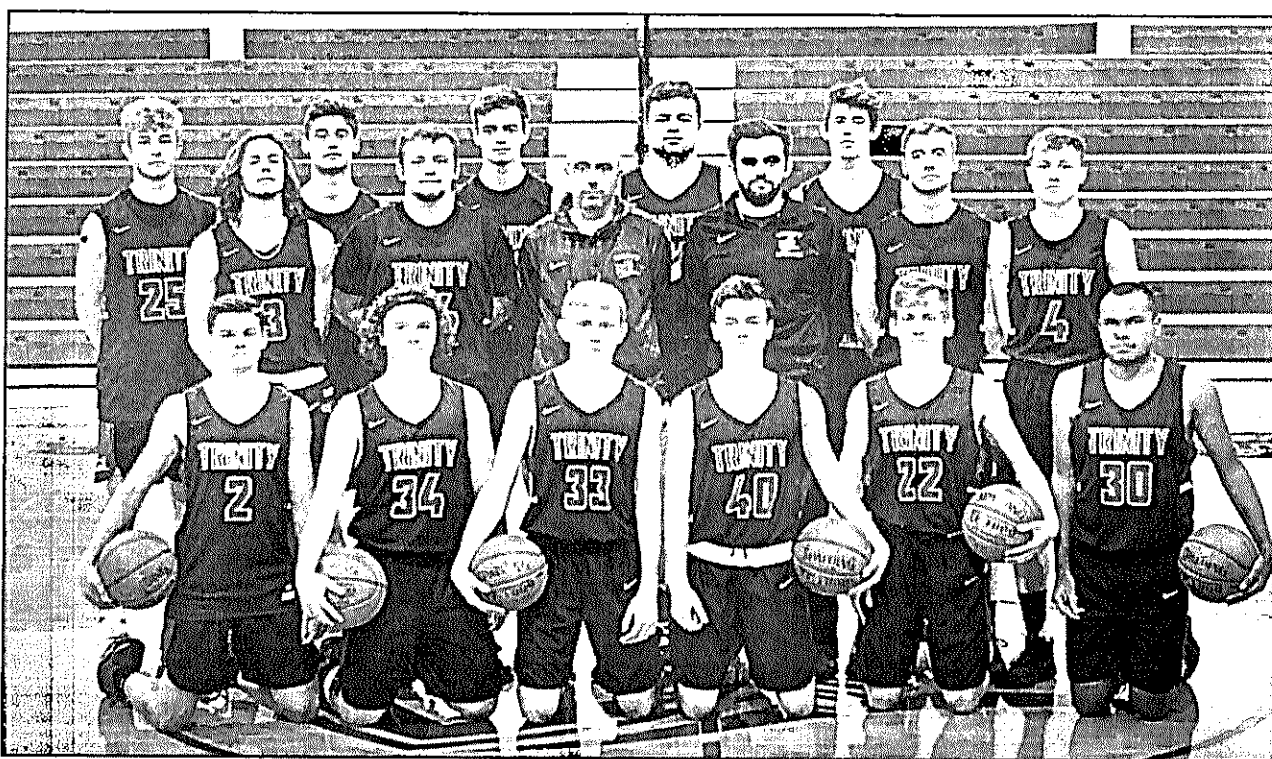


Photo Provided

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Morgantown Trinity basketball team. Front row, from left, are Caleb Rice, Jack Barnett, Carter Anderson, Mason Steptoe, Nick Beimel and Dakota Shepherd. Middle row, from left, are Jon Morley, Jalen Wimer, Head Coach John Fowkes, Assistant Coach Brandon Staley, Briston Bennett and Josh Hart. Back row, from left, are Joel Robertson, Logo Zervos, Mark Spruill, Daniel Woods and Fletcher Hartsock.



Photo PROVIDED

PICTURED IS the 2018-19 Cameron basketball team. The team includes: Dillon Meintel, Aidan Lucey, Travis Mickey, Conner Powell, Garrett Scott, Clayton Bryan, Maliki Martin, Landon Van Tassell, Zane Clutter, Logan Burkett, Hank Bogard, Austin Day, Conner Howard, Trevor Beresford, Scott Pekulia, Nathan Haberle, Noah Neely and Chris McCauley. The Dragons are coached by Tom Hart.

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Pairings finalized for boys' OVAC hoops event

• Wheeling Hospital championships begin Tuesday, with finals set for Ohio University Eastern

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor**BELLAIRE** – The brackets are officially set.

After one of the most competitive and interesting pre-OVAC portions in the history of the tournament, the dust settled Tuesday evening.

The OVAC Basketball Championship committee met Wednesday morning at the OVAC office to finalize the pairings and set the consolation matchups for the

teams that didn't finish in the top four.

The boys tournament begins on Tuesday, Feb. 12 and the championship finals will be staged on Saturday, Feb. 16 at Ohio University Eastern in St. Clairsville.

Here's a look at each class:

CLASS 5A

Wheeling Park earned the top seed with an 11-2 record. Coach Michael Jebbia's Patriots are bidding for their eighth conference title overall and first since 2012.

Standing in the way of the

Pats and a trip to Ohio University-Eastern is fourth-seeded Morgantown. The Mohigans (10-6) darted by Weir in the final days prior to the cut-off date to grab the fourth spot. Coach Dave Tallman's squad won three consecutive titles from 2014-16.

In the other half of the bracket, University – which is the two-time defending big-school champion – earned the

second seed and will host Steubenville.

University is 14-3 on the season.

Big Red spent most of the season in one of the top-two spots, but lost their grip on a home game thanks to a loss Tuesday to Meadowbrook. Coach Mike Haney's team is 13-3. Steubenville last won the OVAC in 2014 and it owns seven 13 hoop crowns, all told.

CLASS 4A

Meadowbrook – in its final year as a member of the OVAC before it joins the Muskingum Valley League – is once again the top seed.

Coach Scooter Tolzda's Colts posted wins over 5A powers Warren and Steubenville earlier this week to move onto the top line. Meadowbrook has won four OVAC titles, including the last three.

Next up for the Colts is a game with East Liverpool. The Potters See, **OVAC**, Page B2• **OVAC**

Continued from Page B1

knocked off Harrison Central in a de facto play-in game on Tuesday to clinch the final bid. Coach Nate Conley's team is bidding for the school's first conferecer crown since 1999 and fifth overall.

In the other half of the bracket, Oak Glen locked down the second seed with a win over Wellsville on Tuesday. The Golden Bears are an impressive 14-3.

To get to their first OVAC title game, Oak Glen will have to knock off St. Clairsville, which is back in the championship bracket after a year's absence.

First-year coach Ryan Clifford has directed the Red Devils to a 14-4 record and locked down their spot in the field with a win at Martins Ferry on Monday. St. Clairsville won its only two OVAC hoop titles in 2012 and 2013.

CLASS 3A

A new champion is promised in this class reigning champion Wheeling Central has dropped down a division.

Shenandoah was the wire-to-wire leader in this class. The Zeps, who own three OVAC titles, but nont since 2001, finished the pre-OVAC portion of the season an impressive 17-3 record.

Next up for the Zeps is a third meeting with Monroe Central. The Seminoles – by virtue of their win over River and Union Local's loss to Barnesville on Tuesday – squeezed into the field with a 9-9 record.

Coach Jon Perkins' team is trying to become the first in Monroe Central history to win an OVAC hoop title. Woodsfield and Skyvue, which formed Monroe, won a combined five titles.

The other 3A semifinal finds second-seeded Fort Frye (11-6) taking on Barnesville (11-7) in Beverly.

The Cadets have been consistent members in the championship bracket and are vying for their eighth title overall, fourth in the playoff format, but first since 2014.

Barnesville, meanwhile, locked down its second-ever bid to the championship bracket with a victory against UL. Coach Matt Johnson's Shamrocks have never won an OVAC boys basketball title.

CLASS 2A

A new champion is guaranteed in this division after River failed to qualify

Toronto, a team that River beat in last year's semifinal, garnered the top seed. Coach Sean Tucker's Red Knights, who are ranked third in Ohio Division IV, are 17-1 with their only loss coming to Alliance Marlington in a holiday event at Steubenville.

The Red Knights own two OVAC boys titles in their history, but haven't hoisted the trophy since 1992.

To get to the title game, Toronto will have to deal with a Shadyside squad, which has seemingly turned the corner of late. Despite its loss at Wheeling Central on Tuesday, the Tigers hung on to the fourth spot.

Coach Ed Andes' team is 11-8 and bidding for the school's 14th OVAC basketball crown, but first since 2010.

In the other bracket, Wheeling Central – a perennial entrant – is the second seed. The Maroon Knights own an OVAC-best 26 boys hoop titles, including six championships in a row.

To have the opportunity to play for a seventh, they'll have to deal with third-seeded Wellsville. The Tigers haven't won an OVAC title since 1996 when they claimed their seventh overall. They enter this year's event with a 12-4 record.

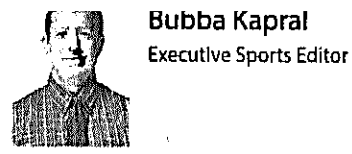
CLASS 1A

Trinity Christian – by virtue of its 12-3 record – was awarded the top seed in the small-school class. The defending champions will await a visit from fourth-seeded Frontier, which enters with an 8-9 record.

The Cougars of Coach Roger Kirkpatrick have won five OVAC titles in their history, but none since 2004.

Cameron, which fell to Trinity in last season's OVAC title game, is the second seed. The Dragons of Coach Tom Hart will welcome Beallsville as they seek a return trip to OUE to play for the school's first title in hoops.

Coach Rick Jarrett's Blue Devils are one of the area's most improved teams with its 10-9 record. The Devils own just one OVAC title in basketball and it came in 2003.



Bubba Kapral
Executive Sports Editor

River grad Bell reaches coaching with 500 victories

WHEELING - Forty-eight years is a long time. In prep coaching circles, it is an eternity.

But for Bob Bell a near half-century of coaching high school basketball as flown by with no end in sight. The former River High hoop great reached a major milestone recently.

Bell collected his 500th varsity coaching win via a 55-46 triumph over Notre Dame-Cathedral Latin. He began his coaching career as jayvee mentor for Kent State High School, shortly after finishing his collegiate playing career for the Golden Flashers. His first head coaching position was with Skyvue in 1975.

"Reaching 500 wins is a wonderful experience. That plateau places you with some of the coaching greats across the state, including my high school coach Dick Potts," Bell noted. "I loved playing for him. I miss him to this day. He had a great sense of humor and was the best story-teller ever. Coach Potts was the Will Rogers of basketball coaches.

"I have loved my 18 years at Kirtland. It has been a great ride," he continued. "Kirtland is a wonderful community. It reminds me of River High."

Bell, 1967 River High grad, was an all-OVAC honoree as a senior and all-Eastern Ohio selection as a junior and senior. He also played football and baseball for the Pilots.

This marks the second straight season Bell has realized a tremendous achievement.

Last winter, Bell guided Kirtland to a perfect 22-0 regular season and a school-record 23 wins. It was the Hornets' 10th Chagrin Valley Conference title in the last 14 years as they also collected a 14th sectional title in Bell's 17 years at the school.

Such an impressive campaign landed Bell some half-dozen coach-of-the-year awards, topped by the AP Ohio Division III Coach-of-the-Year plaque.

"Last year was a very special season. We had a group of talented and committed players," Bell said.

The Hornets are working on another successful campaign this winter. Kirtland, located some 20 miles east of Cleveland, is currently 16-5, earning the No. 3 seed in the district tournament.

Bell's 500 wins are somewhat of a novelty. He amassed 212 while coaching boys.

His coaching resume is one of a Buckeye State roadmap.

After his maiden voyage in the coaching ranks at Kent State High School, Bell moved to Ravenna Southeast High, serving two years as frosh coach and a third as jayvee mentor. Bell then returned to his Monroe County roots, taking the head boys job at Skyvue High in 1975. He led the Golden Hawks to the PVC championship in 1978 and into the district tournament in 1977 at St. John Arena in Steubenville. The Hawks dropped a close encounter to the Terry Snively-coached Shadyside Tigers who featured the legendary Ed Andes.

Bell moved onto the head varsity boys job at Riverside High in 1979, taking his wife closer to her hometown of Willoughby South. Six years later, he accepted the head boys post at his wife's alma mater, winning sectional crowns in 1989 and 1992.

In 1998, Bell found his way to his current home at Kirtland High. He guided the Hornets' jayvee girls for three years before assuming the head post in 2001, and a successful and lengthy marriage was formed.

Bell, now age 69, has won nearly 300 games as Kirtland's head man. In addition, his Hornets have pocketed 12 sectional crowns and a district title in 2005.

"Looking back, there are a lot of great memories. The district game with Shadyside is one. Andes shot the ball amazingly," Bell noted. "Our 2005 Kirtland team also stands out. We went to the regionals and lost to Lowellville in double-overtime.

"It has been great times at Kirtland. This is a great place with an administration 100 percent behind us with super youth programs," he added. "I also have really enjoyed coaching girls after coaching boys for 27 years. I find girls more eager to learn and more coachable with less attitude problems."

Bell also played baseball at Kent State, in addition to hoops. One of his diamond teammates has turned into a legendary coaching figure.

"Nick Saban was our shortstop. He was a good defensive back on the football team," Bell said. "But he was also a pretty good shortstop. Nick was a great competitor."

Bell met his wife Cindy at Kent State. They have five daughters and 12 grandkids.



BARNESVILLE'S LUKE Powell splits a pair of Shenandoah players as he sails to the basket Saturday morning during the Class 3A championship game at Ohio University Eastern. Powell scored a game-best 33 points as the Shamrocks held off the Zeps, 58-54, for the title.

Photo/PAUL KRAJNYAK

'Rocks stave off Zeps

• Barnesville captures first-ever boys basketball championship

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — History has been made.

For the first time in school history, the Barnesville Shamrocks are celebrating an OVAC Championship in boys basketball.

Like head coach Matt Johnson expected, it wasn't easy either.

Barnesville watched a 13-point, fourth-quarter lead dwindle to as few as two twice in the final two minutes, but managed to hit just enough foul shots to pull out a 58-54 victory over top-seeded Shenandoah in Saturday morning's opening game at

Ohio University Eastern.

"I am glad to see this group do it," a relieved Johnson said.

"These kids have embraced everything we've done and we talked — since day one — about getting into the top four and then if we could get in, we felt like we had a good chance."

The Shamrocks' path to the title was by no means an easy one. Barnesville didn't lock up its bid until it defeated Union Local on the cut-off day. It then went to Fort Frye on Tuesday for a win in the semifinals and then had to

deal with a Zeps' team that is now 18-4.

"That's not an easy path to take, but we always like our chances," Johnson said.

A reason for that optimism is because Barnesville has junior standout Luke Powell on its team. The all-

Ohio candidate delivered in a big way once again After scoring 33 points and grabbing 18 rebounds at Fort Frye, Powell was huge once again. He scored 32 points and yanked down 11 rebounds en route to winning the John Howell MVP Award.

"We came out, did what we needed to do and took care of business," Powell said. "I couldn't be more proud of these guys."

While Powell had the hot hand in the first and third quarters when he scored 28 of his total, it was senior Tate Dowler who delivered late. In the second quarter, Ayden Hannahs buried a pair of corner treys that knotted the game at 27 at halftime.

"Those threes that Ayden hit were huge to get us tied because if those don't go in, it might have slipped away from us a little bit," Johnson said. "Tate came through down the stretch, too."

See, 'ROCKS, Page C5



ST. CLAIRSVILLE'S Craig Bober shoots during Saturday's game at OUE.

Photo/PAUL KRAJNYAK

Meadowbrook defeats St. Clairsville for 4-peat

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — The four-peat is complete.

Meadowbrook used its stingy defense and plenty of timely plays from leaders Davis Black and Johnathan McCall in the fourth quarter to hold off third-seeded St. Clairsville to claim the 4A title, 58-48, Saturday afternoon in the Wheeling Hospital OVAC Boys Basketball Championships at Ohio University Eastern.

"There was some pressure (to win the fourth straight)," Meadowbrook head coach Lou "Scooter" Tolzda said. "It's hard to do. I am an OVAC guy and this is important. We didn't jump up and down and celebrate a whole lot because it's kind of like business as usual for our guys, but this never gets old."

Meanwhile, the Red Devils are now 2-6 in the conference title game in the 12-year history of the event.

"We knew what we were up against here," St. C. rookie head coach Ryan Clifford said. "For the most part, I thought we played well, but a couple of bad spurts really hurt us."

Like they have for much of the season, the Colts did it their way and that's with defense. The Red Devils were held 29 points under their average and shot 16-of-53 from the field.

"We locked in (defensively)," Tolzda said. "Hats off to our guys. We used a tweet we saw as motivation. I kept repeating to our kids 'what's going to give in?' We

As St. C. head coach Ryan Clifford pointed out, the Colts don't only play defense with their defense. Their more patient offensive approach also helps

See, 4-PEAT, Page C5

OHIO VALLEY UNSUNG HEROES

Bowling truly a labor of love for Holubeck family

By **RICK THORP**

would he have been [redacted] the nitty, gritty weeds, smoothly. It's a labor of love.

• 4-Peat

Continued from Page B1
to hold the tempo in their favor.

"Their defense is good and they slow you down on offense," Clifford said. "They actually guard you with their offense, too. The few times we were able to get the game going up and down, we spurted, but it seemed to always revert back (to their pace)."

Indeed, Meadowbrook grabbed a 17-11 lead after one quarter and was seemingly in control throughout. The lead was 10 at half and nine after three.

It swelled to as many as 16 in the fourth thanks to McCall, who earned the John Howell MVP honors. He scored seven consecutive points to really put the Red Devils in a bind with the score at 48-32.

"They made every big basket that they needed," Clifford said. "They're good players with a lot of experience. They stretched it out on us to 10 at half and we just really couldn't get it any closer."

If McCall wasn't scoring, it was senior Davis Black. The future University of Charleston football player led all scorers in the game with 24 points.

He had nine of those in the fourth.

"We were able to take advantage of some mismatches," Tolzda said. "Putting Johnathan down low was big for us. We got the 10-point lead and couldn't get over the hump to break them, but we were in control. When we needed a bucket, we got a bucket."

The Colts' offense was

greatly enhanced by the aforementioned defense which almost limited the Red Devils to just three bonus goals.

"We knew we couldn't fall asleep on their shooters," Tolzda said. "They have guys who can knock them down and it's boom, boom real quick."

The Red Devils were led by senior standout Craig Bober.

He had yet another double-double with 19 points and 11 rebounds. Brett Vike added 14.

"I thought we fought hard and put some pressure on them in the end, but they made a few more plays than we did," Clifford said.

The Red Devils, who are now 15-6, will close out their regular season at Indian Creek on Tuesday.

• 'Rocks

Continued from Page B1

The Shamrocks saw their lead swell to 49-36 with about four minutes to play, but the Zeps - over the next two minutes - scored nine in a row.

Barnesville obliged the Zeps' run by missing its first seven foul shots of the fourth quarter.

"I was thinking to myself, 'both teams have worked so hard and something like

free throws could cost you something you've dreamed about,'" Johnson confessed. "Luckily, we made enough down the stretch."

Dowler finally stopped the bleeding, but Shenandoah's Kendal Sherman connected on a trey, making it 52-50. Dowler got an easy one going to the bucket, but Cade Denius answered that. Shenandoah actually got

as close as one when sophomore Christian Duniver drove to the bucket for another easy one, but Dowler iced the game with two foul shots and then the final bucket of the game.

Dowler finished with 16 points to complement Powell's production. Hannahs added eight.

Shenandoah was led by Boone Jones' 15.

Central Claims 7th Straight OVAC Championship

Maroon Knights Hold Off Toronto Rally

By JOSH STROPE
Sports Editor

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — Winning OVAC titles has been a staple at Wheeling Central.

Saturday's 63-53 victory against Toronto at Ohio University Eastern in the Class 2A championship was the school's seventh straight.

The real story was how the Maroon Knights did it and just how far this team has matured.

Wheeling Central (17-4) was dominant from the opening tipoff, racing out to an 18-3 advantage after one quarter against a talented Toronto squad.

But the Red Knights didn't go away. They chipped at the lead. Made big runs and put the Maroon Knights on their heels.

When Toronto (19-2) had the deficit cut to one early in the fourth, the Maroon Knights didn't panic. They stuck together and made play after play down the stretch.

"We just have a bunch of kids that are willing to do whatever it takes," Wheeling Central coach Mel Stephens said. "It doesn't matter who get the points. They just want to be successful. They feed off each other."

"I thought Ryan (Reasbeck) made some big shots. Anthony (Robbins) made a big difference. We knew coming in that Toronto was a very tough team, well-coached and they have come from behind a lot this year. I kept telling the kids that it doesn't matter what kind of lead we had, (Toronto) was going to come back and make a run."

"They did and we never relinquished that lead. We were able to make some big plays when we really needed to down the stretch. I think it shows we have matured through the year. We have been in some big games and the kids had that confidence in each other."

Wheeling Central, which won its 27th OVAC boys' basketball title in school history, never trailed.

Please see Central, Page C3



Photo by Paul Krajnyak
Wheeling Central's Anthony Robbins drives to the basket while Toronto's Lucas Gulczynski defends during the OVAC 2A title game Saturday evening at Ohio University Eastern.

ONLINE EXTRA

See more photos of the OVAC boys championship matchups at www.theintelligencer.net

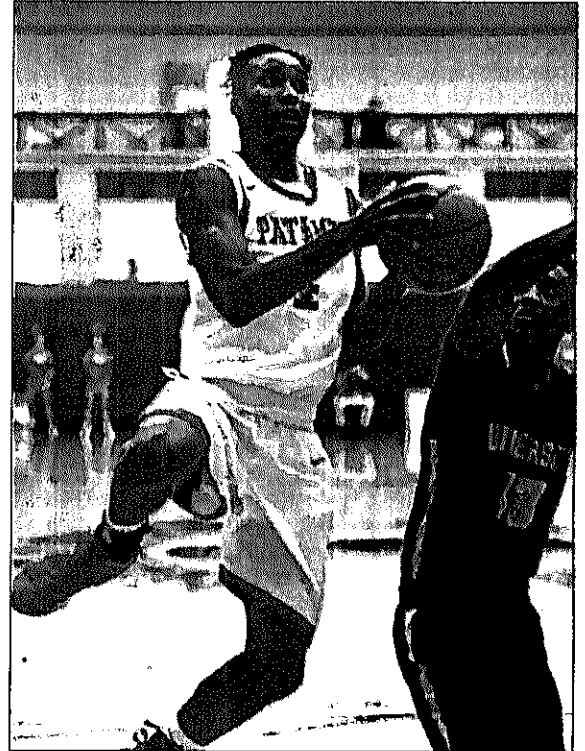


Photo by Paul Krajnyak
Wheeling Park's Keondre' King attempts a shot while University's Mike Maumbe defends during the 5A title game at Ohio University Eastern.

Park Comeback Attempt Falls Short in 5A Tilt

Hawks Capture 3rd Straight

By JOSH STROPE
Sports Editor

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — After having split the previous two meetings, the rubber match between Wheeling Park and University was Saturday at Ohio University Eastern for the OVAC Class 5A title.

Wheeling Park (12-6) found itself down by as many as 15 in the second half, rallying to cut it to five.

But in the end, University made the plays it had to, winning its third straight OVAC championship with a 63-53 victory.

"Hats off to University, they are obviously one of the best teams in the state," Wheeling Park coach Michael Jebbia said. "We got into some foul trouble in the first half and that got us into a little bit of a hole being down 12. Our guys kept fighting, hustled all over the floor. We didn't have our best offensive game but we finally got a few shots to go down."

Please see Park, Page C2

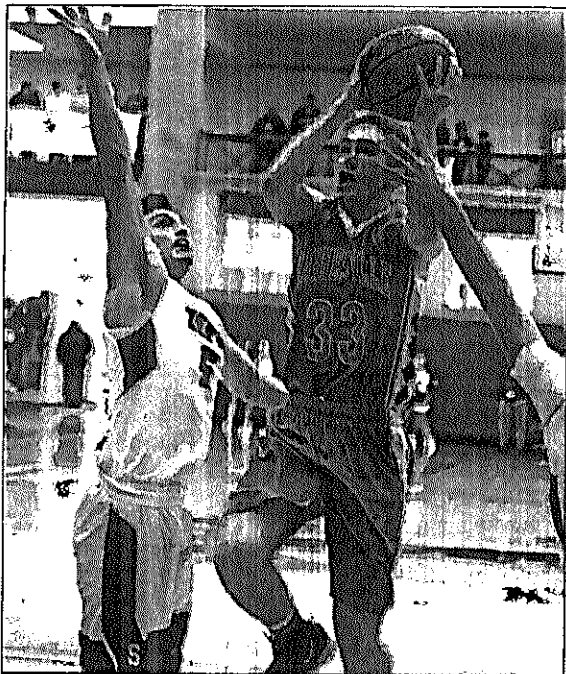


Photo by Paul Krajnyak
Barnesville's Luke Powell (33) goes in for a layup while Shenandoah's Boone Jones defends.

Barnesville Secures 3A Title

First Championship For Boys Basketball

By SETH STASKEY
For the News-Register

ST. CLAIRSVILLE — For the first time in school history, the Barnesville Shamrocks are celebrating an OVAC Championship in boys' basketball.

Like Shamrocks coach Matt Johnson expected, it wasn't easy either.

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Please see Barnesville, Page C3

Knights in Tourney Driver's Seat

By CODY TOMER
Staff Writer

WHEELING — Wheeling Central put itself in the driver's seat on Saturday.

the rest of the game. The forward finished with four goals and an assist.

In the crease, it was senior Jacob Laurine making



Morgantown Makes Statement Against Linsly

By CODY TOMER

Quintin Smith paved the

CONTINUING THEIR CAREERS

Local student-athletes recently signed their letters of intent to continue their football careers/11

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OVAC Boys' Tourney Has Tough Act to Follow



JOSH STROPE
SPORTS EDITOR

The Wheeling Hospital OVAC Girls' Basketball Championships concluded Saturday at Ohio University Eastern with four exciting finals filled with incredible performances.

Congrats to University, Beaver Local, Bellaire, River and Beallsville on capturing titles.

Now it's your turn, fellas. Good luck following that act!

The boys' tournament tips off at gyms across the Ohio Valley on Tuesday for semifinals. The finals are Saturday back at OUE.

Like last week, The Intelligencer,

Times Leader and Herald Star will have you covered on all the action this week.

You can also check out photos from the action on our slideshows at www.theintelligencer.net.

Now, I hate to toot my own horn, but last week, I correctly predicted four of the championship games, as well as four champions.

So naturally you are on the edge of your seats to see who I am predicting to win the boys' titles.

Despite my predictions, good luck to all the teams!

Class 5A

Morgantown at Wheeling Park. Steubenville at University.

Talk about big-time programs playing big-time games. This is going to be an interesting bracket.

If you would have asked me last week, I would be big time riding the Wheeling Park train. The Patriots were on a roll, but suffered three losses in four days last week.

One of those losses was a road setback to Morgantown in overtime.

The rematch takes place at the Palace on the Hill and Coach Michael

Jebbia will have to get his reeling Patriots ready to take on a Mohigans team that could possibly also stand in their way of making the trip to Charleston for the state tournament.

This is a hard one to predict, but Wheeling Park is too talented to not get it together. Alex Vargo, Keondre King and De'Vaughn McWhorter make up a solid trio. I am going to pick the Patriots to get off the schneid, hold home court and earn a victory against the Mohigans.

Please see **STROPE**, Page 11

STROPE

(Continued from Page 9)

University better be ready for a physical battle when it welcomes Steubenville. Coach Mike Haney's team was at the top of the conference for most of the year before slipping down to the No. 3 seed. And it is not like Big Red went on a free fall. Losses to Wheeling Park and Meadowbrook are nothing to be ashamed of.

Still, University is a state title contender and I will go with the home team.

That puts the Hawks and Patriots into the middle game Saturday and a rubber match at that. The teams split their meetings with each winning on their home court. This one will be on a neutral court (although much closer for Wheeling Park).

Often when I make these predictions, I go with the best player on the court. That is University's Kaden Metheny.

And if you know how good Vargo and King are, that should tell you something about Metheny. If you haven't seen this young man play, be at OUE at 2 p.m. I predict he takes over in the fourth quarter and the Hawks earn a third straight championship.

Final: University 73, Wheeling Park 64

Class 4A

Of all the semifinal matches in the tournament, the one I am most interested in is St. Clairsville at Oak Glen.

These are two of the most balanced teams in the valley. Both feature players that can take a game over (St. Clairsville's Matt Busby and Craig Bober, and Oak Glen's Ethan Travis and Sean Smith), as well as extremely talented second options.

I have gone back and forth on this one probably five times. I expect this to come down to one possession, a buzzer-beater, overtime.

When in doubt, go with the home team. Oak Glen escapes.

On the other side, Meadowbrook begins its swan song in the OVAC against East Liverpool. The Colts are leaving the conference after this season and are the three-time defending champions.

They have wins against Steubenville and Wheeling Central. They made a run to the state tournament last season and looked poised to do so again.

The Colts walk out the door with one final trophy.

Final: Meadowbrook 79, Oak Glen 65

Class 3A

One of the hard things as a re-

porter is there are so many teams in the OVAC to keep track of. Especially some of the ones that are a little farther away that don't report scores to us. That being said, I know very little about Shenandoah and Fort Frye, the top two teams in Class 3A.

I haven't even come across them during my referee travels.

That makes picking the winner of this tournament a little tough.

Barnesville will oppose Fort Frye in one of the semifinals, while Monroe Central gets top-seeded Shenandoah.

The Shamrocks' Luke Powell is a dynamic scorer. Barnesville athletics director Mark Cook is as good as they come and a Notre Dame fan. And honestly, if I went chalk for every bracket, what fun would this be?

This is my upset pick of the tournament. Barnesville wins its first OVAC title.

Final: Barnesville 59, Shenandoah 57

Class 2A

I think most people would be shocked if top-seeded Toronto and No. 2 seed Wheeling Central weren't playing in the nightcap come Saturday night.

These are two of the more balanced, well-coached teams in

the valley.

Still, don't sleep on Wellsville or Shadyside.

I had a chance to referee a game featuring Wellsville this season, and let me tell you, these guys are as athletic as they come and can jump out of the gym.

Shadyside is Shadyside and most nights they are going to have a chance to win just because of veteran Ed Andes' coaching. (On a side note, congrats to Coach Andes on recently earning win No. 300, joining Wheeling Central's Mel Stephens, who also reached that mark this season).

Not to be boring and like everyone else, but Toronto and Wheeling Central just seem to be on a collision course.

Wheeling Central has won six straight OVAC championships (last year's 3A title, the previous five in Class 2A). It is the defending state champion and looks poised to make another run. In fact, the Maroon Knights just hammered the top-ranked team in W.Va. Class A Notre Dame by 19 points.

No one knows how to prepare his team for big game situations like Stephens. And until someone in the OVAC knocks them from that perch, it is hard to go against

them. A wise man once said, "to be the man, you have to beat the man."

Final: Wheeling Central 61, Toronto 50

Class 1A

Last season, Trinity denied Cameron its first boys' basketball championship with a 52-40 victory.

Trinity should have no problem with Frontier, while Cameron must play a game Beallsville squad that will be playing with a lot of emotion following the girls' team's win.

Still, I expect Coach Tom Hart's Dragons to pull through and set up this rematch with the Warriors.

Trinity has won two of the past three titles. The Warriors have an impressive resume this season with a win over Wheeling Central at the Undo's Tournament. Of their five losses, two have come to top-ranked Notre Dame, two to No. 2 Greater Beckley Christian and one to No. 3 and undefeated Webster County.

Another thing the Warriors have is an 88-57 win against Cameron.

Final: Trinity 80, Cameron 67
Josh Strope can be reached at jstrope@theintelligencer.net