

BOYS BASKETBALL

Hillsboro boys see comeback bid fall short in road loss to Royall

By ZACH RASTALL
HSE Sports Reporter

The Hillsboro boys' basketball team looked dead in the water when they trailed Royall by 16 at halftime earlier this week. The Tigers fought back valiantly in the second half, but ultimately their comeback bid fell short.

The Panthers (15-9 overall, 8-6 Scenic Bluffs) staved off Hillsboro (13-10, 8-6) to capture a 56-52 victory in conference play when they squared off Monday, February 21 in Elroy. With that result, the two teams will finish tied for fourth in the Scenic Bluffs standings.

The Tigers had beaten Royall 57-48 in Hillsboro in their first meeting back on January 20, but the Panthers fared better from the start the second time around.

Royall raced out to a substantial lead in the first half and was eventually up 35-19 when the game reached halftime. The Tigers whittled down the deficit in the second half all the way down to one possession, but the Panthers held them off to secure the win despite being outscored 33-21 after the break.

Hillsboro was led by junior guard Noah Burmaster with 16 points and 5 rebounds, sophomore guard Isaiah Stokes with 14 points, 7 rebounds and 5 steals, senior forward Hayden Stahlke with 9 points and 6 rebounds and senior guard/forward Kasen Bloor with 7 points and 8 rebounds.

As for Royall, senior guard Bryce Gruen tallied a game-high 19 points to go along with 5 assists and freshman small forward Carter Uppena finished with 15 points and 5 rebounds.

Prior to Monday night's loss to Royall, the Tigers had beaten the Brookwood Falcons (6-18, 3-11) 59-41 Thursday, February 17 in Hillsboro. After leading 21-17 at halftime, Hillsboro outscored the Falcons 38-24 in the second half.

Burmaster led the way for the Tigers with 15 points, Stokes recorded 14 points and 7 rebounds and Stahlke nearly got a double-double with 9 points and 9 rebounds. For the Falcons, senior guard Austin Frye and sophomore guard Brady Hansen scored 16 and 9 points, respectively.

The regular season is now in the books and focus moves toward the playoffs. The WIAA released postseason brackets for boys' basketball this past Sunday.

Hillsboro is a No. 5 seed and will welcome in No. 12 seed New Lisbon (7-16) for a regional quarterfinal matchup Tuesday, March 1 at 7 p.m. in Hillsboro. Royall is a No. 3 seed and at the same date and time will face No. 14 seed Eleva-Strum (3-18) in Elroy.

Hillsboro's Noah Burmaster and Hayden Stahlke and Royall's Carter Uppena and Jacob Ceizyk all come up empty handed after trying to pull in a rebound in the Tigers' front court in the second half of Monday's Scenic Bluffs Conference game. HSE photo by Nate Berier/GX3

ROYALLY UPSET

Royall boys bring end to Bangor's 81-game conference winning streak

By ZACH RASTALL
HSE Sports Reporter

For six years, the Bangor Cardinals have ruled over Scenic Bluffs boys' basketball with an iron grip.

Since suffering a 64-61 loss to eventual Scenic Bluffs champion Hillsboro on February 18, 2016, Bangor had been untouchable in conference play. The Cardinals would win their last two league games of the 2015-16 season and never looked back, collecting 81 consecutive wins in Scenic Bluffs play — a run that became the longest active conference winning streak in all of Wisconsin high school boys' basketball.

If you include postseason games, Bangor had won 88 straight against its Scenic Bluffs counterparts.

That all came to an end late last week against an opponent that has consistently been one of the Cardinals' toughest matchups in conference play over the past several years: the Royall Panthers.

Back on January 14 of this year, Bangor narrowly made it out of Elroy with a 51-45 road win over the Panthers. In that game, Royall led by as much as 12 late in the first half and made a run in the game's final minutes after the Cardinals asserted control in the second half.

In their second matchup of this season, the Panthers would not let the opportunity slip through their grasp.

Late free throws from Royall

sophomore guard Savon Wainwright helped guide the Panthers (14-9 overall, 7-6 Scenic Bluffs) to a dramatic 47-45 victory over the Cardinals (17-4, 11-1) to snap that historic winning streak Thursday, February 17 in Bangor.

Royall led by as much as eight midway through the first half before the Cardinals went on a little run and the score wound up being knotted at 26-26 come halftime.

The grinding, defensive affair continued after the break, which turned into a tight, back-and-forth battle where neither team led by more than four in the second half.

The score sat deadlocked at 43-43 when Wainwright was fouled and sent to the line for a 1-and-1 opportunity with 32.1 seconds remaining. Wainwright successfully converted a pair of free throws to give his team the 45-43 advantage.

On the ensuing Bangor possession, junior guard Tanner Jones lost control of the ball and it was eventually fallen on by Wainwright, who the refs ruled was fouled in the scrum. The Royall sophomore coolly drained two more free throws to extend the lead to 47-43 with 19.7 seconds left.

Jones made a pair of free throws of his own down on the other end, Wainwright proceeded to miss the front end of another 1-and-1 chance and Bangor senior guard Gunner Ellenburg corralled the rebound. After a timeout with seven seconds to go, the Cardinals brought the ball up and got a solid look at a potential game-winning 3-pointer courtesy of junior forward/guard Dustin McDonald.

However, McDonald's shot hit back iron and bounced away as the final buzzer sounded, completing Royall's upset win on the road.

"What I liked was that our kids kept their composure on the floor. Winning with class and losing with class, those are things I want our teams to be able to display, regardless of what happens," said Royall

head coach Scott Uppena. "But when we got in the locker room, it was like a big burden had been lifted. It was a win that these kids worked hard for and, as far as I'm concerned, they certainly deserved it."

Wainwright led the way for the Panthers with a game-high 15 points and 5 rebounds, sophomore guard Jacob Ceizyk finished with 9 points and junior forward Gabe Keenan chipped in 8 points in the victory.

Meanwhile, for Bangor, senior guard Will Reader set the pace with 14 points and 8 rebounds, Ellenburg added 10 points and 8 rebounds, Jones had 9 points and 6 rebounds and McDonald tacked on 7 points.

With their two-point win and six-point loss this season, Royall has unquestionably been the Cardinals' thorniest challenge in the Scenic Bluffs. No other conference opponent has done better than a 17-point loss to Bangor on the year. But this isn't the first time the Panthers have proven to be a tougher test than most.

During their 81-game Scenic Bluffs winning streak, the Cardinals finished the season with a perfect conference record on five separate occasions. Royall had the slimmest margin of defeat of any league foe in three of those years.

On January 9, 2018, against a Bangor team that would go 27-1 and win a Division 5 state title, the Panthers led 30-28 at halftime before eventually falling 66-56 in a game played in Elroy.

Almost exactly a year later in the same location on January 8, 2019, Royall led by one with just over a minute to go before the Cardinals escaped with a 52-49 victory. No other conference opponent did better than a 9-point loss to that 25-2 state semifinalist Bangor squad.

Last season in Bangor on January 21, 2021, the Cardinals — who finished the campaign 19-3 — fended off the Panthers for a 59-51 win. It was their only single-digit margin of victory in Scenic Bluffs play for the year.

"Over the past four to five years, we've given Bangor some really solid games," Uppena said. "We always came up short, they always found a way to win in those games."

Royall's methodical play style that puts an emphasis on slowing the game into a half-court contest has proven to be more effective than most against Bangor, who likes to get out in transition and turn defense into offense when it can.

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“Winning with class and losing with class, those are things I want our teams to be able to display, regardless of what happens,”

— Scott Uppena, Royall head coach



GIRLS BASKETBALL

Playoffs postponed

Girls' basketball post-season delayed by one day

By ZACH RASTALL
HSE Sports Reporter

Treacherous winter weather conditions delayed the start of the high school girls' basketball playoffs around the area, but fans won't have to wait long for play to get underway.

A blanket of snow and icy roads led to postponements of many regional quarterfinal games scheduled to be held Tuesday, February 22 on the heels of school

closures earlier in the day.

Instead, those opening round contests will be held Wednesday, February 23 at 7 p.m.

Those include area Division 5 matchups: No. 4 seed Hillsboro hosting No. 13 seed Gilmanton, No. 5 seed Royall welcoming in No. 12 seed Alma/Pepin and No. 7 seed Wonewoc-Center hosting No. 10 seed New Lisbon.

If Hillsboro and Royall both win, they will meet up in Friday night's regional semifinals. If the Wolves advance to the next round, they will take on No. 2 seed Blair-Taylor or No. 15 seed Brookwood Friday evening.

Regional final matchups are scheduled to take place Saturday, February 26 at 7 p.m.

BOYS BASKETBALL

Wonewoc-Center boys drop final three games of regular season

By ZACH RASTALL
HSE Sports Reporter

The Wonewoc-Center boys' basketball team ran through a tough gauntlet of the top three teams in the Scenic Bluffs Conference over the last week, going 0-3 during that stretch.

It started with the Cashton Eagles (17-6 overall, 10-3 Scenic Bluffs) scoring a 74-42 victory over the Wolves Thursday, February 17 in Wonewoc.

Cashton wound up with four double-digit scorers on the night: sophomore guard Connor Butzler with 18 points, senior guard Jack Hilden with 14 points, sophomore guard Noah Hemmersbach with 12 points and junior forward Zach Mlsna with 10 points.

Senior center Ashton Spencer led his team with a game-high 28 points, though no other Wonewoc-Center player finished with more than 5 points.

Next up, the Scenic Bluffs champion Bangor Cardinals (19-4, 13-1) raced past the Wolves for an 86-40 win Friday, February 18 in Bangor.

Leading the way for the Cardinals were junior forward/guard Dustin McDonald with 18 points, senior guard Will Reader with 17 points, junior guard Tanner Jones with 16 points and senior guard Gunner Ellenburg with 15 points.

Spencer led all scorers with 21 points to set the pace for Wonewoc-Center.

Finally, the Necedah Cardinals (15-5, 10-4) bested the Wolves (3-17, 0-14) 42-21 to close out the regular season when the two Juneau County foes clashed Monday, February 21 in Necedah.

Senior guard Noah Blum led the Cardinals with 13 points in the win, while junior forward Jon Preuss and Spencer had 9 and 4 points, respectively, for the Wolves.

Now attention turns to the postseason, with brackets having been released this past Sunday.

Wonewoc-Center was given a No. 16 seed and will once again face conference counterpart Bangor, who earned a No. 1 seed, in the Division 5 regional quarterfinals Tuesday, March 1 at 7 p.m. in Bangor.

as young as the Panthers. Uppena noted he got a flurry of congratulatory texts and emails afterward that punctuated the gravity of the accomplishment.

But as much as they celebrated the victory and appreciated the significance of it, Uppena stressed the importance of using it as a building block for continued growth and success down the line, and not letting the Bangor win be the peak for this group of players.

"One thing I don't want to have happen is to have the kids rest on this and have it be the high point of what they wanted to do," Uppena said. "That was my message last night. We need to celebrate this, obviously. Those are important things to do. But when we get back to practice tomorrow, it's back to work."

SECTIONAL WRESTLING

MAKE WAY FOR MADISON



McKittrick, Wopat punch tickets to state meet

By NATE BEIER
HSE Sports Correspondent

Royall's Gunnar Wopat and Colin McKittrick both qualified for the WIAA state wrestling tournament which starts Thursday, February 24 and runs through Saturday, February 26.

Wopat and McKittrick join a lengthy list of state qualifiers from the Royall wrestling program as they each will make their state debut Thursday in the opening round of wrestling action.

Wopat (35-4) opened the day with a pin and then won his semifinal match with a 5-2 decision to guarantee his spot at the state meet.

The sophomore will kick off state competition Thursday against Random Lake's Jackson Averill (30-14).

In the 120 pound championship, Wopat built an early lead against Fennimore's Brecken Muench and seemed to be on track

Royall's Colin McKittrick attempts a head throw against Mineral Point's Lucas Sullivan in the 1st period of the 120 pound sectional championship match Saturday at Westby. HSE photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

to a sectional title. However, Muench scored late to send the match into overtime where he scored a takedown to win 6-4.

Wopat held onto second place as he had already wrestled the third place finisher.

McKittrick (35-8) opened sectional action with an 8-6 decision in the quarterfinal round, then pinned Ithaca/Weston's Gavin Templen in 30 seconds in the semifinals. McKittrick lost a 10-5 decision to Mineral Point's Lucas Sullivan in the final and then fell to Fennimore's Brett Birchman 16-2 in the wrestleoff for true second place.

McKittrick will face Coleman's Brady Gross (41-9) Thursday in the opening round of the WIAA state tournament.

HILLSBORO

Hunter Osorio and Denver Hill both lost their opening round matches at the Division 3 sectional in Westby on Saturday.

Osorio (12-15) lost his 160 pound quarterfinal match to Viroqua's Austin Winker (28-13) by way of fall.

Hill (14-12) wrapped up his career on the wrong end of a 16-1 tech fall by Ithaca/Weston's Jed Scallon in a 195 pound quarterfinal.

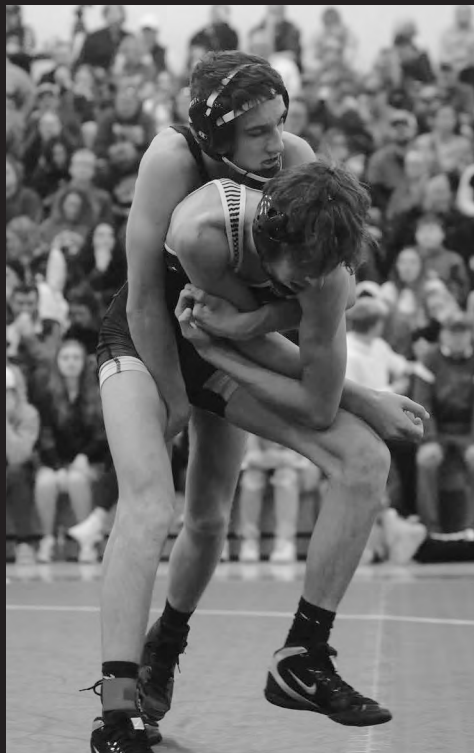
AROUND THE SBC

Cashton's Colin O'Neil (34-12) finished third and qualified for the WIAA state meet for the first time in the 152 weight class.

Austin Culpitt (35-13) finished fourth and just missed qualifying for state.

New Lisbon's Reid Sawyer (27-8) also just missed out on a trip to Madison. Sawyer finished fourth at 113.

Bangor's Evan Wolfe (42-6) was the lone state qualifier for the West Salem/Bangor co-op. Wolfe was second at 138 in the Amery sectional.



Royall's Wopat works to keep Fennimore's Muench from escaping in the 120 pound championship match at the D3 sectional in Westby. HSE photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

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Since even the best of winning streaks all must come to an end eventually, perhaps it was only fitting that it was the Panthers who finally got over the hump and took down the Cardinals.

"They do a very good job of getting us to play the style they want to play," said Bangor head coach Jacob Pederson. "We struggle sometimes to be able to get ourselves out of that funk and understand that we need to slow ourselves down and concentrate on a few smaller things."

There is obviously no denying how monumental a win this is for the Royall boys' basketball program, especially for a team