

ROUGH WEEK FOR HIGHLANDERS, RED DEVILS KEEP PACE: After playing most of the season with just one blemish on their record, Eric Nagel's Cambria Heights Highlanders had a rough week and went 0-3 as they lost to Central Cambria, Bishop Guilfoyle and Penn Cambria. This, coupled with a 3-0 week from Central Cambria and 3-1 weeks from Bishop Guilfoyle and Forest Hills tightened things up just a tad in Section 1 play.

With an overall record below .500, the defending district champs at Class AAA Central Cambria have been having an off season to this point, but behind three monster games from Jordan Miller (the best of which we'll touch on in a later bullet point), they put together their best week of the season. Steve Traino's club defeated Cambria Heights 76-61, Bedford 80-54 and Forest Hills 90-84.

Moving a little further east on US-22 we head to Altoona and Bishop Guilfoyle and Josh Baker's Marauders. After losing to Somerset early in the week, they won three in a row to finish off the week strong. BG took care of a tough Cambria Heights team 62-59. Matt Roesch and Nick Johnston each contributed 17 points in the win over the Highlanders. Johnston dropped 15 while teammate Chris Brown had 11 as BG took care of their next victim, Penn Cambria, 51-43. Finally, the Marauders played a make-up date Saturday with Bedford and edged the Bisons by one point, 53-52. Brown led the way for BG in that contest with 17 points.

Coach Baker reflected on the successful week: "The physical and mental toll of playing four games in six days is difficult, but our kids responded very positively. We displayed a lot of poise and maturity winning a 2 overtime game on the road and finishing off the week with another overtime win at home. The players are continuing to progress in a positive manner as we move towards the playoffs, and anytime that can occur it makes this time of year very exciting."

Forest Hills will round out our discussion of Section 1 and although they won't be making the trip to the postseason, they finished up strong and should be commended for the effort. Coach Lance McGough agrees: "We have finished the season very strong. Our team is starting to peak at what I feel is the perfect time, unfortunately it is a little late. As for last week our kids played excellent pressure defense that led to a lot of transition opportunities. Our team is at its best when we are pushing the ball up the floor and as the season went on we got better each week."

The Rangers defeated Penn Cambria 76-66 thanks in part to 20+ point contests from Luke Gallaher (25) and Brett Oswalt (22). Gallaher had a 35-point performance against Bedford as FH took care of the Bisons 71-63. The Rangers and Panthers squared off a second time that week and Forest Hills got the better of them then too, this time by the score of 56-46. Gallaher again paced his squad with 16 points.

SECTION 2 HAPPENINGS: The top three teams in Section 2 all had great weeks with Bishop McCort going 2-1, Johnstown going 2-1 and Somerset going 3-1. The Crushers lost to Johnstown 62-39 but defeated Somerset 79-70 and Richland 62-50. In the win over Somerset, Josh Penrose scored 25 while Jim Spisak had 21. Jack Schrey led the way for Pat Hollern's squad in their victory over the Rams with 18 points.

The Trojans, also 2-1 on the week, won the above mentioned contest with McCort and beat Bishop Carroll as well. They ended the week on a damper by losing to Somerset on Saturday afternoon in a game that knocked them out of the running for a berth in the LHAC title game. Richard Agurs and Cliff Eddins both had 16 points in the 58-38 win over Bishop Carroll while four players got double digits in the victory over McCort. Paul Weatherly and Carlton Wyatt had 15, Agurs had 13 and Quadir Christian had 11 in a well-balanced attack.

Trojans' Head Coach Dave Roman, Jr. reflected on the week: "It was a great week in that we were able to beat two teams that had beaten us before. We were able to do it in convincing fashion. Most importantly we won two games that had a playoff feel to them in regards to what was at stake in Section II. We had a real good road win in a very tough place to play at Bishop Carroll. It was a close first half and then the guys responding to the adjustments at halftime and we were able to open up a comfortable lead in the second half.

The McCort win meant a great deal to this program. Going into Friday's game, we have lost 5 straight to McCort. To play the way we did Friday, got us over that hump and let everyone in the city know that we are back.

The Somerset game will go down as one of the toughest losses in my coaching career because of what was at stake and because we let a lead slip away. We will learn from this game and it will help us in the District Playoffs."

Scott Close's Golden Eagles played four games in six days and had a great week, only falling to McCort as referenced above. The squad started off the week on Monday by defeating Section 2 Bishop Guilfoyle 54-48 with Ryan Fisher leading the way with 19 points. After losing to the Crimson Crushers, Somerset rebounded and defeated Westmont 82-76. Cody Hemminger and Anthony Papini each had 20 points for the Golden Eagles. Last but not least, the team ended the week as the feature presentation in a great quadruple-header of make-up basketball that started an 8th grade game and went all the way through the programs to varsity. In the nightcap, Somerset defeated Johnstown 63-62 on a three-pointer as time winded down. Hemminger had 25 to led the Eagles while Paul Weatherly's 27 points led all scorers.

Close and Roman may be pondering a rematch in the D6 title game, but as Close cautions, both his Eagles and the Trojans have a tough road in front of them, "It is always nice to finish a 4 game week at 3-1. The Johnstown game was one of the best high school basketball games I have been involved with. Both teams played incredibly well over the last 3:00 of the ball game. It was a great game to get the players and fans ready for playoff action. It would be great to have a rematch in the D6 title game, but we both have some work to do with the tough Mountain League teams."

A MATTER OF TIME: Each week it seems Central Cambria's Jordan Miller is referenced in "Hot Shots" but he had come short of the 50-point mark. Such is not the case anymore as the UPJ-bound Miller dropped 51 on Forest Hills as he led Steve Traino's club to a 90-84 win over the Rangers.

At last week's end, the senior was averaging 34.4 points per game. Cambria Heights (15) and Shade (16) are the only teams to keep him under 20 points this season.

MILESTONE FOR A BISON: Bedford's Mark Scott notched his 1,000th career point in a 80-54 loss to Central Cambria last week. Scott's coach, Mark Anderson, reflected on the accomplishment.

"I am very proud of Mark and what he has done for our program. He has changed his game completely for the better of the team. I just feel bad that our team record wasn't better. As a freshman, he was just a shooter. He scoring went down his sophomore year but his other stats picked up. He now is our team leader in scoring, assists and steals. He is currently in the top 5 in the LHAC for assists, steals and scoring.

Scoring 1,000 points is quite an accomplishment, but how Mark did it, and the fact that he did it playing in the LHAC makes it that much more special. He is a great kid who has matured alot over the years, on and off the court. He is very deserving of this and I only hope that he gets recognized at the end of the year when the different all star teams are announced/selected. I feel that he can play with the best from Cambria and Blair counties."

HOT SHOTS:

- Richland picked up two wins on the week, first defeated Conemaugh Township 49-40 then taking care of Westmont 54-45. In the win over CT, Jordan Rozich had 16 points while Mike Rudnac dropped 11 on Westmont.
- Joe Dziabo scored 20 en route to a 70-60 Penn Cambria win over Cambria Heights last Friday.
- Luke Paronish and Matt Repko each scored 17 points for Bishop Carroll as the Huskies defeated Richland 52-39.

ON THE HORIZON: With this being the final week of regular season play, just about all sectional contests are complete (one is remaining). Let's take a look at the top match-ups on the week:

- Johnstown at Cambria Heights on Wednesday (an OUTSTANDING inter-sectional match-up). The Trojans also hit the road to take on former Mid Alleghenies Conference member Quad-A State College on Thursday.
- Somerset at Central Cambria is another top notch inter-sectional game. Scott Close's squad hits the road to take on the Red Devils on Wednesday night.
- Bishop McCort at Forest Hills on Wednesday is a contest between two teams that are rivals on the gridiron and with many of those guys playing basketball too, old grudges may run deep. Both squads are coming off great weeks and this could be a very spirited clash.

DISTRICT OUTLOOK: The LHAC is extremely well represented in the upcoming District 6 playoffs in Classes AAA, AA and A. Individual match-ups with some coaching analysis will hopefully be included in next week's installment of the blog, for now, let's take a look and see what member schools are seeded where.

Class AAA: Johnstown is seeded second while Somerset is fifth.

Class AA: Cambria Heights is the top seed while McCort is second. Also in the bracket are Richland (7th) and Central Cambria (10th).

Class A: Bishop Carroll is top dog here while Bishop Guilfoyle will also participate as the 8th seed.

RANKINGS: Only Bishop Carroll's Honorable Mention in the Class A rankings to report this week on LHAC teams ranked statewide this week by the Harrisburg Patriot-News. Hopefully more teams will be added to these lists as member schools advance through their district and state playoffs.

LHAC TITLE GAMES: Both the boys' and girls' conference championship games will take place at Richland High School on Saturday. The girls are scheduled to tip off at 6:00PM while the boys will follow at 8:00PM.