

**FIVE TEAMS REMAIN:** Five teams from the LHAC qualified to go to the state playoffs. This is quite the feat as it's nearly half of the 12-team league. I was able to catch up with all five coaches and get their thoughts on things as the PIAA playoffs are set to open Friday.

Two teams each represent Class AAA and AA while one will represent Class A.

**JOHNSTOWN DEFEATS SOMERSET FOR 6-AAA TITLE:** On the heels of a 20-point performance from senior Paul Weatherly and great contributions from Carlton Wyatt (19) and Cliff Eddins (15), the Trojans were able to defeat the Golden Eagles 70-54. It is Johnstown's first district title since 2006 and it's Coach Dave Roman Jr.'s fifth district title overall but first as Head Coach of the Trojans: "As a new coach, you feel a little pressure to justify you being hired and in my case justify leaving an outstanding program in which we built. You want to make a mark the first season. I wasn't sure it was going to happen this year but I thought if things came together that we would have a chance. Things did come together and the kids bought into our system. It reminds me a lot of our first year at Westmont when we won the district title."

Regarding the game, Roman added, "When Somerset jumped out to the 9-2 lead, we didn't panic. The coaches didn't panic and more importantly the kids didn't panic. Sometimes in that situation kids will try to make up the deficit in one possession and start jacking up three pointers. We stuck to the game plan and kept attacking their zone and getting to the rim. Eventually shots started to fall which allowed us to get into our full court pressure."

Johnstown advances to the PIAA playoffs to take on Lancaster Catholic in a game that will be played Friday night at Richland High School at 7:30PM. The break between playoff games gave Roman and his staff a chance to look at LC: "Fortunately with our championship game being last Wednesday, we were able to travel east on Thursday to watch Lancaster Catholic play Steel High at Hempfield. They are a real solid and disciplined team. They have two outstanding shooters in #5 Markel and #23 Purvis. Purvis comes from good blood lines as I believe his brother plays football at Boston College. They have a real solid big man in #50 Hall. They don't have anyone over 6'4" but all of their starters are over 6'0" so they have good overall size. The point guard #11 is real efficient. He doesn't score much, but he does a great job of running his team. They play man to man defense as well as a 2-3 zone and some match up zone as well. They do press some running a 2-2-1, 1-2-1-1, and full court man. We have to try speed them up and wear them down. We must take them out of their comfort zone."

Despite the loss, Scott Close's team advances to the PIAA bracket as well. They will take on Highlands of the WPIAL, also on Friday night at Gateway High School in Monroeville. Close reflected on both the JHS game and looked ahead to Highlands:

"Johnstown played a very solid game in the District Championship. We did some things that we normally don't do, which caused us to be out of sync. Dave and his players did what they had to do, and deserved the District Championship on that night. The Highlands matchup is a good matchup for us, sort of like looking in the mirror. I think Friday's game will be an exciting game to watch. Both teams love to push the ball and shoot the three. Whichever team has a hotter shooting night and makes fewer mistakes should walk away with the victory."

**HIGHLANDERS DEFEAT RED DEVILS FOR 6-AA GOLD:** Eric Nagel's Cambria Heights Highlanders continued their fantastic season by defeating Central Cambria 61-50 to win the district title. "We knew going into the game it was going to be a battle and it was. It came down to the last two minutes of the game and our kids responded. All the players played well and as a team that is the main reason we came out on top and has been that way all year. These kids do not care who scores as long as we win. Winning the District 6-AA title was an unbelievable experience, the kids were excited. We talked about this from the beginning of the year that this was our goal. We always talked about being apart of history and putting a banner in the gym and no one can take that away from you."

Ian Vescovi's 25 points and 16 rebounds led the way for CH en route to their first district title since 1986.

Steve Traino, head coach of the Red Devils, reflected on the loss: "We did not shoot the ball very well

(18-for-63). Heights made the plays when they had to."

Both teams advance to the state playoffs though, CH will play Beaver Falls of the WPIAL (Saturday at Central Cambria High School at 2:30PM) while CC will take on another WPIAL school in Monessen (Saturday at Noon at Chartiers Valley High School).

Traino added, "Monessen is very athletic. This will create some match up problems."

**BISHOP CARROLL FALLS TO HOMER CENTER IN 6-A FINAL:** Bishop Carroll, the top seed in the Class A Bracket fell victim to second seeded Homer Center in the championship game, losing 48-36. BC Coach Cosie Aliquo reflected on the loss: "The loss to Homer Center for us is in the past. It's not what Homer Center did to us it was just that we didn't take care of the opportunities when given. We didn't put the ball in the hoop and it wasn't anything they did to us it was we just didn't play well offensively. This team has had a great ride the past two years and I'm not sure there is a team in our area that come as far as this group has in the past two years."

The good news is the Huskies get to advance to the states and that has Aliquo excited, "Scotland is a very tough opponent for us one that we respect very much. They have some good size and a lot of quickness. They won the state title before so you know they have good tradition. But once again it's Bishop Carroll basketball back in the state playoffs and I'm loving it. This is why I want to be the head coach at BC."

The game with Scotland School is Friday at IUP at 6:00PM.

**RANKINGS:** With the BC loss to Homer Center in the 6-A title game, they dropped out of the state rankings. As this point in time there are no LHAC teams state ranked.