

Jackets' emotions high in district

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"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to tonight's game between the Nicholas County . . . (long pause) . . . Bluejackets and the Harrison County Thorobreds."

It appears the announcer had little trouble remembering the mascot for the Harrison County quintet, but for Nicholas County it was almost as if the Jackets had never played in Bourbon County. The game, actually, is something which cannot be put into words.

Yes, there's a full report on the game in this week's Mercury, with scoring and quarter by quarter results. But, that's not what I mean.

You absolutely had to be there to understand. The team executed as well or better than it had all season long. Each trip up the floor was marked by an urgency not visible at many times throughout the season.

For the seniors on the floor and sitting on the bench, this was a final chance. With the score knotted . . . 31 seconds on the clock in regulation . . . both teams huddled at the benches for a timeout . . . it was evident someone's season would be over in a very short time.

Regulation time came and it was overtime. Oh, no, not overtime. Yes, it was true. Another overtime for the Jackets. Nicholas County had not won in overtime all season . . . so why should this be different?

Playing much like it was the finals of the region or state tournament, and for all practical purposes it was, Nicholas County continued to battle. Swaying and swooping for rebounds, fighting to run an offense, which at times had failed the Jackets in execution during the season, the three minutes of extra play moved as slowly as a loaded freight train.

Each whistle, each turnover

continued to bear on the players. But, the Jackets finally refused to take themselves out of the game.

Faking and probing throughout the game and especially in the overtime, Nicholas County's assembled unit on the floor began to overcome obstacles.

If the offense failed to score, or if a turnover cost the Jackets possession, on defense the well meshed unit would come up with the rebound or turn an errant Harrison County pass into a turnover.

Heads held high the Jackets on the floor didn't allow an official's call or a bad play to stop the quest and challenge at hand . . . the regional tournament.

When the final horns sounded and Nicholas County had prevailed fans, cheerleaders, parents and players emptied onto the floor in celebration. The band exploded into music and the Jackets were on the way to Maysville.

In the lockerroom, Lee Cruse had nothing but praise for his Jackets.

"The Lord has rehearsed us for this kind of game all season. We have had the one and two point losses, but we have carried on. You have met the challenge."

Senior Todd Day hugged the coach and said, "This one was for you coach!"

As the players made ready to leave the lockerroom and make their way to the bus waiting outside . . . fans continued to gather in the gym.

As the players made their way to the Bourbon County gymnasium the followers there broke into cheers and obviously lifted the players' spirits, and showed appreciation for a job well done. "We can only take them one at a time," Cruse said. Indeed, but this was a BIG ONE.

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Reviewing the Bluejackets' 1987 - 88 season

Jackets find road bumpy

By Chip Miller
Of The Carlisle Mercury Staff
The 1987-88 basketball season has been one filled with anguish, frustration and triumph for the Nicholas County varsity Bluejackets. The Nicholas boys saw frustrating losses, many turnovers and too many official's calls not go their way in 87-88. Yet, the NCHS Bluejackets are on the road to Maysville. In Nicholas County Head Coach Lee Cruse's own words, the Jackets team members have "showed a lot of poise, had more heart," and are on the road to the 10th Regional tournament with a 8-16 regular season record.

The Jackets opened the season December 1 with a stunning upset victory over neighboring Bourbon County, 73-59. Three days later the Jackets fell to Paris by nine, 86-77. Then on December 5 Nicholas' Big Blue stomped Richmond Madison in Carlisle, 94-66.

The next three consecutive games saw the Jackets on the road. In the first, the Jackets were met with a loss to Deming, 77-68, on December 11.

The Jackets followed up with an easy victory at MMI the next night, 86-41, and enjoyed a 3-2 mark for their infant season. Frankfort proved to be tough competition three days later, on December 15, for the Jackets. Frankfort pulled out the win, 76-67, and tied Nicholas' record at 3-3.

The Bluejackets' roller coaster record continued with a fourth win December 18 against Mason County, 44-41, and a fourth loss to the Vikings of Rowan County in the Montgomery County tourney, 70-53, December 28.

Cruse said at this point in the season (4-4 record), "We are where we would like to be at this time in our season. I feel that this is, and I've been telling the boys this, that this is the key part of the season for us in that now the games are going to start getting a whole lot tougher from here on out," he said.

The Jackets fell to Fleming County 11 days later in the Mason County Invitational Tournament, 75-62. Cruse's Jackets followed this up the next week with two wins, first at home against Menifee County, 81-56, then away to Richmond against Model Laboratory, 78-65.

Next, the Jackets took on Harrison County January 19, who later became their district slingshot to Maysville and the 10th Regional tourney.

Much like a premonition of the March 2 37th District match-up, the Thorobreds of Harrison pulled the Jackets into overtime. Only Harrison came out better from the January 19 battle with a one-point win, 66-65.

"Right now, I think tonight proved we can challenge anyone in this district," Cruse said after the game. The Jackets pivoted their half season mark to 6-6 with the Harrison loss.

Nicholas opened the final 12 games of its season with a 86-47 loss to Jessamine County January 22. Then tied the season mark again, this time at 7-7, with a win at home against Pendleton County January 26.

Four tough consecutive losses were handed to the Jackets - Boyle County, 77-59; Fleming County, 84-52; Montgomery County, 75-41; and a vengeful Bourbon County on February 8. It was a Kevin Hughes rebound and pump-in shot that sent Bourbon and Nicholas into overtime. But the Colonels served a two-point, heartbreaking loss to the

Jackets, 85-83. Cruse's Jackets rebounded back three days later with a stunning win over Bracken County, 49-46, February 9. This was to be the Jackets' final victory of the regular season. With a 8-11 mark, the Jackets headed into the remaining five games of their 1987-88 season, losing all five. Estill County began the downhill ride with a 79-56 victory in Irvin; Maysville followed, 95-66; Bath County, 90-84, and then Lexington Sayre, 48-46. The Jackets ended the season with a one-point loss, handed them by Deming, 78-77, February 26 in Carlisle.



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