

SPORTS

Bluejackets eye tough Henry Clay ahead; first three games present challenge

By Wade Holland
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Turnovers and key free throws were on target in the very high school basketball games. It can be seen from the way, inexperienced squad like the Nicholas County Bluejackets.

With only one full-time starter returning from a year ago, Nicholas County has struggled out of the gates, falling victim to both turnovers and missed free throws in three straight losses to open the season.

And while there is no relief in sight for the O-3 Bluejackets with one of the nation's top-ranked teams - Elizabethton Henry Clay - scheduled to visit Carlisle this coming week, there is still reason for optimism as Nicholas County played its first game in date in its most recent action against Washington County.

"I was real impressed with how hard we played against Washington County," said second-year Nicholas County coach Michael Coker of the team's 61-51 loss. "We came out playing a lot better than we had in the first two games. Our guys really wanted this game and we controlled the tempo for most of the game."

But just as they had in the first two games, turnovers plagued the Bluejackets down the stretch with Nicholas County turning the ball over on 10 of its last 17 possessions.

"That killed us," said Coker. "To have 20 turnovers in the second half and only lose by 10 is pretty great. But we've got to take care of the ball better if we want to win games. That's our main problem right now in turnovers."

Kyle Campbell led the way for NCHS with 29 points and 10 rebounds.

While his team was never in

Up this week for the Bluejackets was defending district champion Harrison County on Tuesday in Ordwayville, followed by Nicholas County's first home game of the season on Saturday versus Henry Clay.

Coached by former Nicholas County standout Daniel Brown, Henry Clay made enough of the shots to win in every major upball battle has been faced against Harrison County and Henry Clay, he hopes his team will use the lessons learned so far this season to put both their best effort in both upcoming games.

"I think playing teams like Pendleton County and Central Hardin this early in the season will help us," said Coker. "But it certainly doesn't get any easier for us."

Central Hardin 85
Nicholas County 62

Central Hardin did Coker no favors by handing the former Dean assistant his worst defeat since taking over the Nicholas County program. But Coker holds no grudges and praise toward the position of the game.

"Losing the way we did was hard on the boys and myself, but I hope we take something from the trip and use it to our advantage," he said. "We wanted our guys to see what it takes to play that kind of basketball on that kind of level. So yes, I think it was good overall for us."

"Teams like Central Hardin expect to win every night," added Coker. "Right now, we're not expecting to win. We're playing hard, we're just not expecting to win. If we want to jump Nicholas County around, we've got to start expecting to win some of these games."

While his team was never in

the game against Central Hardin, Coker points out that Nicholas County is without double losses there is added against the Bluejackets who finished last season 24-4 and came into this season as legit fifth Region contenders.

"I don't think we came out ready against Central Hardin," said Coker. "That of course is my fault for not having them ready. And I think the long bus trip had something to do with it, too."

Kyle Campbell was once again the leading scorer for the Bluejackets with 20 points.

Pendleton County 61
Nicholas County 45

The Bluejackets were held back against Pendleton County in recent

years, losing their last seven meetings with the district rival Wilkins, including by 20 in their season opener in Fairmount. The last time Nicholas County beat Pendleton was in February of 2003.

Pendleton County scored the first points of the game and overtook through Nicholas County did threaten to take the lead a time or two early on. Three consecutive free throws by Kyle Campbell pulled the Bluejackets within one, 64, at the 4:20 mark of the first quarter.

Pendleton County countered with an 8-0 run to push its lead to 14-4 with less than a minute remaining in the period before Campbell hit a free throw to strip the streak. But Pendleton answered right back and stretched its lead to

double digits on the very next possession and continued to lead, 19-8, at the end of one.

Pendleton County continued on the offensive in the second quarter and threatened to blow it open before Cody Pymran hit an short jumper followed by a three-point play from Kyle Campbell to get Nicholas County back within 10.

Campbell hit another key 3-pointer down the stretch to get Nicholas within 10 again, 30-20, before Pendleton closed the half with a jumper at the buzzer for a 32-20 advantage.

Pendleton County started to run away with it early in the second half when they used a 6-0 run to take a commanding 38-20 lead. But Nicholas County would not go away and

used a 3-pointer from D. R. Purvis and a short jumper from Cody Pymran to start a run of their own.

Trailing 47-30 heading into the final quarter, Nicholas County went on a 7-0 run to once again threaten to get back into the game. "We played pretty well at times. And we played hard. But we struggled with turnovers and we didn't hit our free throws," said Coker. "If we take care of the ball better and shoot better from the free throw line, we have a shot at winning this game."

"First game Pymran probably had a little bit with it," he said.

Campbell led the way with 25, followed by Purvis with seven and Pymran with six. Tyler Rose and Matt White chipped in four each.

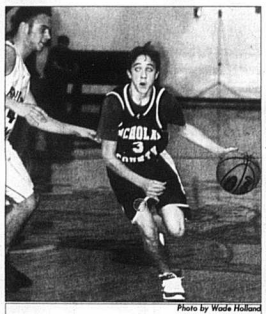


Photo by Wade Holland

D.R. Purvis brings the ball upcourt during the Jackets' season opener at Pendleton County.



Photo by Wade Holland

Driving the baseline
Nicholas County's Brittanie Sosby looks for room against Scott High.

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