SPORTS

Seventh grade junior Jackets stand at 5-5 midway through this season

Coming into the season, Coach Greg Letcher wasn't exactly sure what to expect from the Nicholas County seventh grade Bluejackets. So to stand at 5-5 heading into conference tournament action, he's pleasantly surprised and very happy about his team's season.

He also believes the Bluejackets are a team perfectly capable of bringing home the championship trophy from the conference tournament, which starts later this week in Fleming County.

"These guys have competed hard and made good progress all season," he said. "Absolutely, I feel confident that if these boys step up and play like they are capable, they can beat any team in the tournament."

Among the Bluejackets' five losses are two against Fleming County and two versus Bracken.

Letcher said the seventh grade Jackets style of play has made for an exciting season.

"What I like about these guys is their aggressiveness and the way they run the floor," he said. "We've still got to work on some things, like taking care of the basketball, but they really willing to listen and are eager to learn and I like watching them play.

"They are a fun group to coach and watch," he added.

While they are only .500 at the moment, Letcher believes continued hard work will lead to much more success for this group. He said making a serious run at the conference title as 8th graders is certainly possible and should be a goal of the team.

"If they stay with it, they are just touching the tip of the iceberg right now," he said. "They can get a whole lot better. When their fundamentals improve and their understanding of the game improves, and they get mentally tougher, I can't help but think that these guys have a bright future ahead of them."

Members of the seventh grade Bluejackets are: Austin Allison, J.D. Wagoner, Drake Bussell, Jacob Fryman, Ethan Smith, Jacob Denton, Mason Davis, Toby Howard, Zach Howard & Sam Watkins. Six graders on the team are: Logan Brown, Dalton Pope and Logan Fryman.

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8th Grade Jackets eyeing upcoming tournaments

Though they failed to meet expectations during the regular season, the Nicholas County eighth grade Bluejackets are a team that cannot be overlooked in the upcoming conference tournament.

Playing the role of underdogs with nothing to lose, the Jackets are perfectly capable of pulling the upset of the conference leaders when everything is clicking, said Nicholas County coach Greg Letcher.

"The boys have played hard and been aggressive all season," he said. "They've done what we asked them to and in most games, we've been right there at the end. The only team to really beat us soundly was Bracken County. But other than that, we've either had the lead in every game or were close enough at the end that if things go right, we come out on top."

With a record of 1-9, the Bluejackets have not enjoyed the success expected from them after a success campaign as seventh graders. Injuries, illnesses and promotions to the high school program have depleted the team of some of its better players.

"Coming into the season, we felt like we had a good chance of being in the running for the conference championship," said Letcher. "But our starting point guard went down early in the season with a broken foot and he was a major part of us being able to get into our offense and generate some things on defense. That was a big loss for us.

"And then we've had some kids move up to the high school team and others sick. So it's been a rough season," added Letcher.

"But this team could really surprise in the conference tournament if we had all of our horses. But we don't and we know it's going to be a struggle," said Letcher. "But the boys are going to play hard and they know on any given night, if we play good defense and hit our shots, we are capable of beating any of these teams."

The tournament draw was held on Tuesday and action is expected to begin on Thursday in Fleming County.

After the conference tournament, Nicholas County will play some games in January before most likely playing in the Bluegrass Conference Tournament in February. The second half of the season could be a lot more successful with a full roster, said Letcher.

"If we get everyone back and healthy, we'll get a real picture of what we have in January," said Fletcher. "There is no doubt about it, we are a better team than our record shows."$$

After this season, the eighth grade Bluejackets will move on to the high school program where some will get the opportunity to help immediately. Letcher believes some of them will have very successful careers at the high school level if they stick with it.

"We've got some very athletic players and some of them have the ability to help the high school program immediately," he said. "They're athletic and aggressive. They've got to improve their fundamentals and basketball knowledge, but they give every ounce of energy they have."

Members of the eighth grade Bluejackets are: John Lee Allison, Jake Blakeman, Josh Howard, Devin Johnson, Matthew Perkins, Nathan Gilkerson, Dylan Fryman, Jordan Bussell, Caleb Pope and Jesse Smith.

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Nicholas County Little League

K-2 Boys
Wildcats 12: Wells 8, Hatton 3,Crawford 2, Sexton 1, Mitchell 1. Co. Shrout 1, Ch. Shrout 1. Nuggets 10: Switzer 4, D.Davis 6, T. Davis 1
Nuggets 8: Switzer 2, Campbell 1, D.Davis 2, Watkins 4.
Magic 5: Wiggins 2, Fryman 3, Smith 1
Bruins 13 : Workman 9, Mullins 1, Hamilton 4. Gators 12 : Morris 13, Liver 1, Planck 1, Blake 1
3-4 Boys
Nuggets 20: W. Sapp 6, Hamilton 2, Bowles 6, Northcutt 2, Barnett 4. Wildcats 5: Dailey 4, Buzzard 1
Magic 22: McLean 8, Wills 8, Paynter 2. Nuggets 18: T. Sapp 6, W. Sapp 2, Barnett 8, Bowles 2
Bruins 11: Richardson 1, Stafford 2, Duncan 2, Markel 2, Markland 4. Gators 3: Caswell 2, Crump 1
5-6 Boys
Nuggets 26: Fryman 8, Sosby 7, Bussell 6. Wildcats 22: Bussell 2, Simpson 14, Sexton 4, Becraft 2
Nuggets 38: Fryman 2, Sosby 6, Bussell 14, Stanfield 2, Duncan 14. Magic 22: George 2, Gardner 5, Woosley 2, Wiggins 13
Gators 27: Trussell 12, Webb 5, Keaton 10. Bruins 14: Watkins 6, Sexton 6, Hayes 2

K-2 Girls
Sparks 25: Flowers 15, Hughes 10. Phillies 2: A. Dotson 2
Sparks 20: Flowers 8, Hughes 12. Lady Vols 6: Stacy 2, Bowerman 2, A .Hughes 2, Hollar 1, Bussell 1
3-4 Girls
Sparks 12: Martin 4, Craig 4, Tolliver 4. Phillies 4: Watkins 2, DeRossett 2. Lady Vols 9: Howard 6, Kiskaden 2, Bussell 1. Sparks 6: Martin 2, Craig 4
5-6 Girls
Sparks 36: Smith 6, Fryman 4, Bret 9, Livingood 3, Letcher 2, Johnson 12. Phillies 10: H. Davis 2, Caswell 8
Sparks 24: Smith 2, Fryman 2, Johnson 11, Bretz 9.
Lady Vols 21: Myers 13, Buckler 2, Townsend 4, Hollar 2

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Cofer sees progress in Bluejackets squad

By Wade Holland
wade@thecarlislemercury.com

In a sure sign of progress for the program, the Nicholas County Bluejackets played their best game to date and gave district-power Harrison County all it could handle before falling to the defending district champions, 68 - 53, in Cynthiana.

While the final score may indicate that Harrison County was in complete control down the stretch, that was not the case at all with Nicholas County trailing by only four in the final two minutes and momentum on its side. But the Jackets' inexperience took its toll and Harrison County ended the game on an 11-0 run to make an otherwise close game look like a romp.

Nicholas County coach Michael Cofer praised his team for its effort and said with better composure down the stretch, he believes the Jackets would have had a great shot of beating Harrison County.

"To tell the truth, I think we should have won tonight," he said. "Harrison County is a great team. But we played the way we wanted to play. And if we take care of the ball and don't turn it over down the stretch, I think we win this game.

"But the thing that killed us tonight is the same thing that has killed us in all of our games, and that's turnovers," added Cofer. "I don't think Harrison County really forced us into that many turnovers. I think we just made bad passes."

The 15-point defeat against the neighboring Thorobreds is the closest a Nicholas County team has come to beating Harrison County since the 2001 season when the Jackets came within 14 points in an early-season meeting. Since then, in a span of 13 games, Nicholas County has been able to stay within 20 points of Harrison County only once, and has often times lost by 30 or more points to the Thorobreds.

Nicholas County got a game-high 22 points from sophomore Kyle Campbell, who hit four 3-pointers in the game. Senior Tyler Rose had possibly his best game of the season with 13 points, while Matt White added eight and D. R. Purvis seven for the Bluejackets.

Fryman chipped in two points, while Johnny Mattox added one in his first action of the season after returning from an injury suffered during the football season.

"Tyler Rose is capable of playing that way every night," Cofer said of the senior post player. "These are the kind of games we expect out of Tyler. And

See SQUAD Page 2

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SPORTS

Lady Jackets, Cornett claim first win

By Wade Holland
wade@thecarlislemercury.com

If the Nicholas County Lady Jackets felt like they had a monkey on their backs in the midst of a three-game losing streak to start the season, it had to feel more like a gorilla to first-year coach Jennifer Cornett.

But everyone is standing a lot taller today after the burden was lifted with a 48-43 Lady Jackets' win over district-rival Deming Saturday in Carlisle, putting Cornett in the win column for the first time as a head coach.

Cornett, like the rest of the Lady Jackets, was all smiles after the game.

"It feels awesome to get that first win," she said, while noting the win will take a lot of pressure off everyone in the program. "Everyone is going to be so much more relaxed now. And I'm sure they will enjoy the next two days off."

Nicholas County (1-3) was led in scoring by senior center Brandi Messick, who scored a season-high 18 points, including the first six points of the game to give the Lady Jackets a lead they would never surrender.

"Brandi is capable of having this kind of game every night," said Cornett. "This is the way she plays in practice all the time. Now we're starting to see it in games."

After Messick, the rest of the Lady Jackets' offensive attack was balanced, with five others contributing points. Shelby Sosby had eight points for the winners, followed by Brittanie Sosby and Petrea Mitchell with nine each, and Hollee Bretz and C. C. Humphries with four apiece.

But the story of the game was Messick, who had six points in the first quarter and seven in the second, including a key three-pointer that helped spark her team just before the half.

After Messick scored six points in the first two minutes of the game, Brittanie Sosby and Bretz added a basket each to stake Nicholas County to a 10-2 lead with 4:06 remaining in the first.

But with Nicholas County threatening to run away with it early, Deming scored the next three points to take away some of the Lady Jackets' momentum. But it wouldn't last long as Shelby Sosby hit a short jumper followed by a rebound and putback by Mitchell to give the Lady Jackets a 14-5 lead with less than a minute to go in the first quarter.

Deming closed the quarter with four points in the final 20 seconds on two free

See WIN Page 23

Wade's Words

The Kentucky High School Athletic Association's decision to expand football from four classes to six prior to the 2007 season was done, at least in part, to help even the playing field among Kentucky's 222 participating teams. If year one of the new system is any indication of how well it worked, the change has to be considered a complete failure.

The real problem in Kentucky high school football had little, if anything, to do with the alignment we had for the last four decades. Instead, the problem centers around the difference in Kentucky's private and public schools.

Private schools have been dominating Kentucky's high school football ranks for many years, with Trinity and St. Xavier being unbeatable – except against each other - in the largest class, and teams like Newport Central Catholic, Lexington Catholic, Highlands and Newport Central Catholic, among others, dominating competition to become familiar faces on the carpet.

And 2007 was no different, with private schools representing seven of the 12 participants in the state championship games and coming away winners in four of the six games.

The two exceptions, Beechwood in Class A and Central in Class 3A, are far from your normal public schools. Beechwood is a football powerhouse that has been winning championships for decades – 10 to be exact - while Central draws student-athletes from a very large section of the Louisville area.

So while the change from four classes to six most certainly did allow more teams to participate in the postseason, which has to be considered a positive, I don't see how you can look at anything that happened this season and say the change was good overall for Kentucky high school football.

I personally believe the KHSAA dropped the ball big time on this one. It seemed like a silly move when it was first announced, especially considering that the majority of Kentucky's coaches were against the change and voiced major opposition to it, and it seems just as silly today. At least the way I see it.

+++++

Nicholas County's boys' basketball team seems to have taken a step forward recently, even though they do not have a win to show for it – yet.

Everyone expected Harrison County to be the clear favorite in the 38th District. Cate Pause had the Thorobreds ranked #1 in the district coming into the season and fourth overall in the 10th Region.

Yet Nicholas County, ranked last in the district by Cats Pause and not even mentioned as a candidate for the region's Top 10, gave the defending district champion Thorobreds all they could handle this week, trailing by only four with two minutes to go before Harrison County scored the final 11 points of the game to make the final score very deceiving.

To see the moral victory in the loss for Nicholas County, one only has to look at the history of the series. Harrison County has won the last 17 meetings with Nicholas County. The last time the Blue Jackets were within striking range of the Thorobreds was in ..... well, let's just say this year is the closest Nicholas County has been since the turn of the century.

Of the last 17 meetings between the two, Harrison County has won by 50 points once (2000) and 40 points two times (2005 and 2006). The margin of victory was 30+ points in Harrison County's favor four times, and 20 plus points eight other times.

The average margin of victory for Harrison County over the last 17 meetings with Nicholas County is 29 points.

The last time Nicholas County beat Harrison County was 35-33 on March 3, 2000 in the district championship game at Bourbon County. The Bluejackets also beat Harrison County earlier that regular-season, 64-58, at Nicholas County, marking the only times since 1998 that Nicholas County has had the upper hand on its neighbors.

So once again, to be within four points of Harrison County with two minutes to play, with the hand they've been dealt this season, has to be taken as an encouraging sign for the Blue Jackets.

+++++

Speaking of the Bluejackets' basketball team, it is nice to see Johnny Mattox back on the hardwood.

Mattox' status for this season was in serious doubt when the senior suffered a serious elbow injury while helping lead the Nicholas County football team to one of its most successful seasons in nearly a decade.

But don't expect any miracles from Mattox. He'll for sure have an impact for the Bluejackets this season, but because he's sure to still be feeling the effects of the injury, he may not be 100 percent healthy until late in the season, if at all.

+++++

Something I'd like to start up and make a regular piece in the Carlisle Mercury's sports section is a 'Where Are They Now' series that focuses on past standout athletes for Nicholas County. The series will take an in-depth look at the athletes' lives, from his/her days at Nicholas County High School up until their place in today's business world.

If you have a past student-athlete that you'd like to nominate for a future story in our 'Where Are They Now' series, please email that information to me at Wade@thecarlislemercury.com. Please give us as much info as possible on the former student-athlete, including any info you may have on their career at Nicholas County, in college and later in life. Contact information for that person will also be vital.

SQUAD

Continued from Page 20

these are the kind of games we need from him in order for us to be successful.

"Matt White and his effort were real important to us tonight, and D.R. played real well with only one turnover and five assists from his point guard spot," continued the Nicholas County coach. "Everyone on the team really battled their butts off all night. And I'm very proud of that."

Nicholas County came out of the gates on fire with Campbell nailing a 3-pointer for the game's first points, followed by a short jumper by Rose to give the Blue Jackets a 5-0 lead. But Harrison County scored 10 consecutive points to take its first lead, one it would never give up.

Nicholas County did threaten to go back on top later in the first quarter when Purvis hit a pair of free throws and Rose was good on a jumper in the lane. But one was as close as the Jackets could get before Harrison County opened the quarter on a fury with an 11-0 run over the final 2:52 of the frame for a 21-9 Thorobreds' advantage.

Harrison County built its lead to as many as 14 before Nicholas County made a run in the second quarter to get back within single digits. Campbell took a nice pass from Purvis to start a Nicholas County run that also saw Campbell hit a short jumper, followed by a Purvis 3-pointer and mid-range jumper by Rose. But nine was as close as Nicholas could get before Harrison County extended its advantage to 12 points, 35-23, at the half.

Showing they were not intimidated, Nicholas County came out of the locker room and immediately went on the attack against the Thorobreds, using back-to-back 3 pointers by Campbell and a pair of baskets from White to pull within eight, 43-35, at the 4:11 mark of the third quarter.

Campbell was at it again, nailing a 3-pointer and getting fouled for a four-point play that pulled Nicholas County within six points, 47-41, heading into the final period of play.

Nicholas County started the fourth quarter where it left off in the third and scored the first four points of the frame to pull within two, 47-45, on back-to-back scores by Purvis and White.

With just under five minutes remaining in the contest, Nicholas County trailed by only three, 51-48, following a basket by Campbell. But Harrison County began to pull away and extended its lead to seven on two occasions before Nicholas County made its final run and got within four, 57-53, on a 3-pointer by Rose at the 2:37 mark of the final quarter.

But it was all Harrison County from there as the Thorobreds started their 11-0 game ending run with back-to-back three-point plays. Harrison County then scored five points in the final 60 seconds to finish the Bluejackets off.

Cofer, who said he believes his team showed a lot of heart to hang with Harrison County the way it did, also believes coming so close to the district-giant Thorobreds will give his team a lot of confidence going into a later meeting with Harrison County. "We've got Harrison later in the year at our place and possibly in the district tournament," said Cofer. "And anytime you play as close to Harrison County as we did tonight, and have a chance to win, it's a great thing. It shows maturity. And that's what we are looking for right now."

+ + + + +

HENRY CLAY 97
NICHOLAS COUNTY 33

Completely outmanned at every position, Nicholas County was no match for the highly ranked Blue Devils, who brought a top-five ranking statewide into the game.

Coached by former Nicholas County star Daniel Brown, Henry Clay displayed its offensive power early and often in building a double digit lead on Nicholas County in the game's opening minutes.

Leading 28-8 after one quarter, Henry Clay never let up and built its lead to more than 40 points in the second quarter before ending the half with a 56-12 advantage on the host team.

It was much the same in the third quarter with Henry Clay continuing to extend its advantage to 50 plus points on the way to a 98-24 lead heading into the final period.

With reserves seeing most of the action for the Blue Devils, Henry Clay outscored Nicholas County 19-11 in the fourth quarter.

NICHOLAS COUNTY (33) – Kyle Campbell 21, Travis Fryman 7, Kyle Rose 3, D. R. Purvis 2.

HENRY CLAY (97) – Chase 14, Nicholas 13, Stewart 12, Barnes 10, Gardner 9, Henderson 9, Johnson 6, Boyd 6, Brightwell 6, Wilder 5, Stewart 5, Oakley 2.

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