

Austin Eagles take Southwestern Sectional Championship in 68-56 contest

Written by Administrator
Tuesday, 11 March 2014 00:00 -

by MAGGIE WHITE

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After defeating the South Ripley Raiders on Friday night, March 7, the Austin Eagles traveled once more to Southwestern High School for the boys' Class 2A Sectional championship game on Saturday, March 8.

The Eagles were paired against the Indians of memorable Milan High School. The Indians had played an exciting game that Friday against the Switzerland County Pacers, taking an unexpected victory.

The gym filled with huge fan bases ready to shout and cheer on their players.

The first possession went to a Milan player, but the ball was stolen by Austin with a mere second off the clock. Two more turnovers put Markus Fleenor at the charity stripe after he was fouled under the basket. He hit both shots to give the Eagles a 2-0 lead. Dakota Stashke then fouled at the opposite end of the court, giving the Indians an old-fashioned three-point play. Stashke fouled again, putting Josh Turner in the game for the Eagles with 4:45 on the clock.

Fleenor got the Eagles' next points with a lay-up, and Devin Richey hit a long shot, but it was answered with a trey from the Indians. The score was a basket-by-basket affair until Duncan Wooten and Richey made 2 smooth shots under the basket in the last minute of the first quarter to put the Eagles ahead 15-12 at the buzzer.

Milan's players redeemed themselves at the start of the second quarter getting free throws and making the score 15-14.

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Richey hit a basket, and Turner let the Indians claim another free throw. The Eagles began pulling down key rebounds to give themselves a solid lead of 22-16, but the Indians just as quickly built their score back to 22-21.

The quarter ended with Richey scoring another trey, putting the Eagles at 28, while Milan got a basket, making their score 23 at the half.

Milan scored another bucket nine seconds into the third quarter to bring the score down to a three-point difference. Fleenor built up Austin's score at the free throw line, making 3 of 4 shots in the next 30 seconds. Hunter Spencer also contributed at the line, taking charges under the basket.

Mayfield and Fleenor worked together via steals courtesy of Mayfield, all of which led to easy fast breaks by Fleenor.

With just under two minutes left in the third, Mayfield shot one behind the arc, then stolen possession from Milan and passed the ball to Fleenor. He drove in another 2, putting Austin ahead 45-33.

Spencer was benched with 34.3 seconds left to play after getting his fourth foul. Milan did not make the free throw, though, and fouled Richey with 3.7 seconds to go. After making the fouled shot, Richey uncharacteristically fell short at the free throw line. He made up for it by stealing the ball from the rebounding Indians. He passed it on to Turner who just couldn't get that trey to fall. But the Eagles were still leading by a score of 47-36 going into the final quarter.

Quick and talented ball handling by Austin gave Fleenor more open basket opportunities. Milan answered with shots behind the arc and brought the margin down to 6 points with just under two minutes to play.

But whatever the Indians tried, it just wasn't enough to stop the Eagles from claiming a victory.

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After a much-heated discussion between coaches and referees, Vires was sent to the line to shoot after Milan got slammed with a technical.

The Eagles then finished the game with their strong subs, and players were greeted with hugs by their coaches as they retired to the bench. Austin's student sections chanted "We love Sibbitt," honoring Coach Joe for challenging the Eagles through a difficult year and getting his first sectional title.

The buzzer sounded with a final score of 68-56 in favor of the Eagles.

Markus Fleenor got the lead in points this night, grabbing 21. Devin Richey was right behind with 19. Hunter Spencer got 9; Mayfield 7; Wooten 7; Stashke 4; and Vires 1.

Fans, players, coaches, cheerleaders and managers raided the court in celebration. After the runners-up were congratulated, the 2014 All Sectional Team was announced. As voted by participating coaches, officials and media, Devin Richey and Markus Fleenor were Austin players who were selected. Chris Mayfield was named the All Sectional Team's Most Valuable Player. His teammates lifted him and their Sectional trophy shoulder-high above the celebrating crowd.

On their way home, the Eagles were escorted around the Scottsburg square before heading back to Rigel Gym for a celebration. Principal Sherman Smith, Coach Sibbitt and senior players expressed their gratitude to the program and fans before everyone finally went home.

Now, the Eagles face a familiar foe, the Clarksville Generals, in the 1 p.m. game at the 2A Southridge Regional set at Huntington on Saturday, March 15.

The 11 a.m. game will feature two teams out of the Booneville Sectional, one of which is Linton-Stockton. The second team was not yet listed Monday on the IHSAA website.