

By DICK BOYD
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Coach Doug Reusink's Norton Community High School boys basketball team put together a tremendous second half rally to force higher seeded Sacred Heart of Salina into overtime before losing their Class 3A substate semi-finals game 56-53 on Thursday evening in the NCHS Stull Gymnasium in Norton.

The Knights from Salina were the winners on the scoreboard but the Blue Jays won the battle of the hearts! Trailing by 10 points at half-time, Norton looked like the higher seeded team after intermission. The Blue Jays outscored the Knights 17-11 in the third quarter to cut the deficit down to 42-38, then forced overtime by outpointing Sacred Heart 12-8 in the fast-moving fourth period.

The loss ended the season for the Blue Jays, who won the praise of their fans and coach for finishing in championship style. Norton compiled a 15-7 season record, placed third in the Mid-Continent League Tournament and finished third in the Mid-Continent League race with a 6-2 record.

Trego Community won the league and Smith Center placed second. Trego won a berth in the Class 2A state tournament with a 56-44 win over Atwood in the Overlin substate on Saturday evening. Smith Center just missed a state tournament berth with a 55-51 loss to Bennington in the Brookville substate tournament.

The Colby boys earned a spot in the Class 4A state tournament with a 50-40 victory over Nickerson in the Russell substate.

"I couldn't ask any more of our players," said Norton coach Reusink. "We battled back and had the opportunities but just couldn't finish enough plays to win it."

"We made a run, our crowd really got into it, our enthusiasm increased and we played our hearts out to the end."

Sacred Heart, the No. 2 seed, increased their record to 18-4 and played No. 1 seed Belleville in the championship finals on Saturday evening. The two teams had split games this season but Sacred Heart played another solid game and won the third meeting 51-45 to earn a trip to the State Tournament this week in Hutchinson. It was only the second loss of the season for Belleville, who finished 21-2.

Belleville defeated No. 4 seed Thomas More Prep of Hays 41-37 in the other semi-final game on Thursday.

Sacred Heart played four overtime games this season and won all four and did not lose a game during the month of February. By winning four overtimes, they tied McPherson, Leavenworth, Shawnee Heights and Effingham for the state record.

With 3:07 left in the third quarter, Norton trailed Sacred Heart 39-32 but senior forward Wes Georgeson, who scored 11 of the Blue Jays' 17 points in the period, tallied inside with 2:45 showing. Sacred Heart turned the ball over on a traveling violation and senior point guard Logan Kats hit a jumper in the lane at the 1:35 mark to make it 39-36.

Guard Aaron Wedel scored for the Knights, was fouled and hit a free throw with 1:27 remaining but Kats threw the ball the length of the court to Georgeson for a layin to cut the deficit to four points at 42-38 with one regulation period left.

Fourth quarter
Kats hit two free throws to start the fourth period and cut the Sacred Heart lead to two points but the Knights held off the Jays with a free throw by Conner Martin and basket by Wedel to make it 45-40 with 6:00 left.

The Blue Jays didn't back off. Kats passed to Georgeson for two more points, then passed to sophomore point guard Landon

Hamel for his second basket of the game and it was a two-point game again at 46-44.

Ethan Hendricks hit his only basket of the second half for Sacred Heart but Georgeson wouldn't go away and scored again, was fouled and swished the free throw for a three-point play, cutting the deficit to 48-47 with 3:88 remaining in regulation.

As the volume of the Norton crowd got louder and louder, the Blue Jays continued to play airtight defense and got the ball back. Senior guard Jared Cox went in for a scoop shot in the lane, missed it but was fouled. With ice water in his veins, Cox connected on both charities to give Norton their first lead of the game at 49-48 with 2:26 left!

The Norton crowd got even louder and the Blue Jay players fed off the ear-splitting cheering from the hometown boosters. Lucas Bradbury, who had not scored for the Knights since hitting three baskets in the first quarter, connected at the 2:04 mark and Sacred Heart was back on top.

The Blue Jays failed to score on their next possession but Hamel made a good play on defense to cause the Knights to turn the ball over. Cox drove the lane again and once again was fouled with 1:28 left. This time, he hit the first charity try and missed the second to tie the score at 50-48.

The score remained tied and Sacred Heart took one last shot at the basket at the buzzer but it fell off, putting the game into the four minute overtime.

Overtime
Wedel was fouled with 3:49 left in the extra period but missed the free throw and a chance to put Sacred Heart back in the lead. Georgeson was fouled at the 3:08 mark but missed his free throw as well. Hamel was fouled with 2:09 left and was unable to connect on either charity.

With 53.2 seconds remaining, Mark Riordan avoided the Norton defenders inside and scored for the Knights to put them up 52-50. The Blue Jays hustled down the court to the rhythm of the deafening roar of the Norton fans. Cox drove inside with 35 seconds left, scored and was fouled in the process. Cox was also accurate on his free throw and Norton was ahead 53-52.

Sacred Heart worked the ball around and Conner Martin hit a basket inside with 20 seconds remaining. Norton hurried down-court but a Blue Jay shot missed and Lucas Bradbury was fouled. He hit both charities with 8.3 seconds left.

Again, Norton sprinted down-court. Kats took a three-point shot at the buzzer but it missed and the Blue Jays were three points short on the scoreboard at 56-53.

Georgeson led the way in scor-

ing for Norton with 1 of 2 from three-point range for 50 percent, 9 of 15 two-point attempts for 60 percent, 10 of 17 overall for 59 percent and 1 of 3 free throws for 33 percent and 22 points.

Kats and Cox were the Blue Jays' other double figures scorers with 11 points each.

Although he hit just one basket, Kats was a nearly-perfect 9 of 10 from the free throw line for a net smoking 90 percent accuracy.

Cox hit 2 of 6 two-point attempts for 33 percent, 7 of 9 charities for an excellent 78 percent and missed his only trey try.

Bradbury was the Knights' leading scorer with 14 points.

As a team, Norton connected on 1 of 6 from beyond the arc for 17 percent, 16 of 39 two-point tries for 41 percent and 17 of 45 overall for 38 percent.

The Knights hit 1 of 7 from long range for 14 percent, 21 of 42 two-point attempts for 50 percent and 22 of 49 overall for 45 percent.

Both teams hit 69 percent of their free throws. Norton connected on 18 of 26 and the Knights swished 11 of 16.

The rebounding battle was very close. Norton pulled down 5 offensive and 18 defensive caroms for 23 total. Sacred Heart grabbed 7 offensive and 19 defensive boards for 26 total.

Herman led in rebounds with 7, followed by Georgeson, 6; Kats, 4; Hamel, Dreher, 3 each.

Norton had 7 steals and Sacred Heart recorded just 2 thefts. Georgeson and Herman led with 2 steals each, followed by Kats, Hamel, Cox, 1 each.

The Blue Jays had 17 offensive assists compared to 15 for the Knights.

Kats led assists with a whopping 11, followed by Hamel, 2; Cox, J.D.Gall, Dreher, Herman, 1 each.

Norton had just 13 turnovers and the Blue Jay defense forced 18 Sacred Heart turnovers.

After the game, coach Reusink had nothing but praise for his five seniors. "Our seniors held us together all year long," he commented.

The Norton senior basketball players were Logan Kats, Zach Dole, Jared Cox, Wes Georgeson and Preston Herman.

BOX SCORE
Norton boys 53
Logan Kats 10-10 11; Landon Hamel 20-24; Jared Cox 20-7-9 11; Wes Georgeson 9 1 1-3 22; Preston Herman 2 0 1-2 5; Total 16 1 18-26 53.

Sacred Heart boys 56
Conner Martin 3 1 2-2 11; Drew Clark 1 0 0-2; Aaron Wedel 2 0 1-2 5; Mark Riordan 1 0 1-2 3; Blase Martin 4 0 1-2-9; Josh Windholz 2 0 2-2 6; Lucas Bradbury 4 0 2-3 10; Ethan Hendricks 4 0 2-3 10; Total 21 1 11-16 56.



Once Norton senior point guard Logan Kats got inside the Sacred Heart defense to score, a Knight player had to avoid a foul and possible three-point play by the fiery Blue Jay. In the background for Norton was senior post Wes Georgeson.

-Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

Girls to open state play on Thursday

By DICK BOYD

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The Norton Community High School girls basketball team (16-7) is seeded No. 6 in the Class 3A State Basketball Tournament and will play No. 3 seed Wichita Collegiate (20-3) in the first round at 4:45 p.m. on Thursday in the Sports Arena in Hutchinson.

In the first game on Thursday, No. 2 Cimarron (22-1) will play No. 7 Allen-Northern Heights (15-8) at 3 p.m.

Following Norton's contest, No. 1 Riley County (23-0) will play No. 8 Effingham-ACCHS (12-11) at 6:30 p.m. and No. 4 Cherryvale (20-3) will play No. 5 Gypsum-Southeast of Saline (17-6) at 8:15 p.m.

Winners of the Norton-Wichita-Collegiate and Cimarron-Allen-Northern Heights games will play in the semi-final at 3 p.m. on Friday and winners of the Riley County-Effingham-ACCHS and Cherryvale-Gypsum-Southeast of Saline games will play at 6:30 p.m. in the other semi-final contest.

The semi-finals winners will play for the state championship at 4 p.m. on Saturday and the losers will play for third and fourth at noon on Saturday.

The Sacred Heart boys (19-4) are seeded No. 5 after winning the Norton substate and will play No. 4 seed Holcomb (20-3) in the 8:15 p.m. game on Wednesday in the Sports Arena in Hutchinson.

CLASS 4A
The Class 4A State Tournament will be at the Bicentennial Center in Salina.

On Wednesday, the defending

state champion and No. 1 seeded Colby girls (23-0) will play No. 8 seed Andale (15-8) at 3 p.m.

The No. 6 seeded Colby boys (18-5) will play No. 3 seed Hesston (21-2) at 4:45 p.m. on Thursday.

CLASS 2A
The Class 2A State Tournament will be at Bramlage Coliseum in Manhattan.

The No. 2 seeded Osborne girls (21-2) will play No. 7 Pittsburg Colgan (16-6) at 3 p.m. on Wednesday.

The No. 6 seeded Ellis girls (16-6) will play No. 3 St. John's (21-2) at 4:45 p.m.

The Trego boys (20-2) are seeded No. 2 and will play No. 7 Bennington (17-6) at 3 p.m. on Thursday.

CLASS 1A

The Class 1A State Tournament will be at Gross Memorial Coliseum in Hays.

Boys games will be on Wednesday. In the opener at 3 p.m., No. 7 Natoma (20-4) will play No. 2 Olpe (23-2) at 3 p.m.

No. 6 Sharon Springs (20-4) will play No. 3 Hanover (23-2) at 4:45 p.m.

In girls action on Thursday, No. 8 Wheatland-Grinnell (18-6) will play No. 1 Olpe (25-0) at 3 p.m. and No. 5 Weskan (22-3) will play No. 4 Dexter (22-3) at 4:45 p.m.

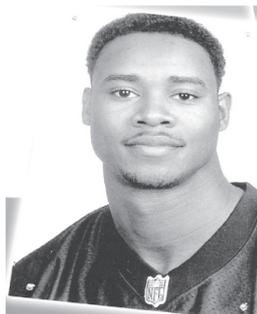
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Admission prices each day for the tournaments are \$6 for adults and \$5 for students K-12.

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MONDAY, MARCH 10
2:00 p.m., Norton Community High School, Speak to Norton and Northern Valley Students
MONDAY, MARCH 10
6:00 p.m., The Rock-Smoothies and Snacks Dinner and Speaking to area JH and HS Students
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