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Friday, Jan. 13, 2012 0 comments

Flyerettes elude Panthers: O'Fallon falls short in another tight finish

By DEAN CRIDDLE - News-Democrat

EAST ST. LOUIS -- Playing the top teams in Southern Illinois close hasn't been a problem for the O'Fallon Panthers during the 2011-12 season.

It's winning those close games which has been the problem.

LaShawndra Hardy, Jaqueline Buford and Petra Elbert combined to make four free throws in the closing 30 seconds as East St. Louis escaped with a 53-47 win Thursday in a Southwestern Conference girls basketball game.

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The Flyerettes (12-2, 6-1 in the SWC) trailed 24-18 at halftime and by as many as eight points in the third quarter, before Elbert and Hardy helped bring them back.

O'Fallon, which got a combined 32 points from Kaitlin Kendall and Taylor Klingelhofer, were guilty of eight turnovers in a six-minute stretch late in the third and early in the fourth quarter as the Flyerettes mounted their comeback.

"I thought our girls showed tremendous poise and maintained their composure there in the second half," Flyerettes coach Hubert Butler said. "We're still a piece or two of the puzzle apart from

being the kind of team that we can be.

"This was a big win for us. O'Fallon came in here with a game plan and executed that game plan to perfection. Our girls were able to make plays down the stretch."

But O'Fallon fell short. Tied 44 following a basket by Kendall with 3:47 left, the Panthers (8-6, 5-3) managed just three points the rest of the way.

Elbert, who scored 14 points, made two free throws with just under three minutes left to give the Flyerettes the lead for good.

"That's been our recent history and really for a large part of the season. We play well, but then we just can't close games out," O'Fallon Ryan Massey said. "I know people will talk about us not being able to block out on free throws and shooting under 50 percent from the line tonight, as reasons for us not winning this basketball game.

"But it wasn't one or two things or a possession here and a possession there which beat us tonight. I know people say it's good to be close, but I'm getting a little tired of being close. I'd rather win."

The first half proved to be a showcase for two of the top players in the SWC in the Flyerettes' 6-foot, 1-inch Joymesia Howard and the Panthers' 5-10 Taylor Klingelhofer.

Howard, who scored 15 of her team's 18 first-half points, was the dominant player on the court in the opening period. Attacking the offensive glass, Howard grabbed five rebounds, resulting in three baskets as East St. Louis took an 11-9 lead.

Howard finished the night with 26 points. Klingelhofer score 19 to lead O'Fallon.

But struggling to find the range with their perimeter game, the Flyerettes managed just seven points over the final 10 minutes of the opening half.

Contact reporter Dean Criddle at dcriddle@bnd.com or 239-2661.

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