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Highland tops Nashville to win Mascoutah girls tourney

BY DEAN CRIDDLE - News-Democrat

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MASCOUTAH -- The Highland Bulldogs played the role of giant-killer to perfection -- twice -- on Wednesday at the Mascoutah Girls Basketball Invitational.

Senior Katie Hempen broke a 33-all tie with a conventional 3-point play midway through the fourth quarter and the Bulldogs put the finishing touch on a remarkable day with a 40-35 title game win over Nashville.

Just hours removed from knocking defending champion Mater Dei from the ranks of the undefeated, the Bulldogs (13-2) jumped out to leads of 11 points -- twice -- then watched as Nashville (14-1) rallied to tie the game at 33 with 4:22 remaining on a 3-point play Jennifer Moeller.

free throw-line jumper and was fouled.

the championship."

lead to 38-33.

with under 10 seconds left fell short.

since 2006.

"I thought the kids were pretty fundamentally sound today and that they did a really nice job of executing our offense. This is probably the best day of basketball we've had all season," a drained Highland coach Matt Elledge said. "Things started clicking for us the last couple of days. We had much better rotation on our offense."

Hempen led Highland with 15 points, while paced Nashville and all scorers with 19.

But just 19 seconds later, Hempen, a four-year starter for Highland, drilled a

"Was the score tied? I didn't even realize," Hempen said. "This means a lot. After beating Mater Dei in the semifinals, we didn't want to come in here and lose in

Hempen was back at it again seconds later when she found Trina Isaak open underneath for a layup to increase the

Nashville continued to battle and had a chance to tie the game in the closing seconds. But Melanie Rhine's 3-point shot

Hempen then iced the game with two free throws and Highland (13-2) had its first tournament championship at Mascoutah

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Nashville's Jenna Morris looks for a way around Highland's Kayla Martin. - Zia Nizami/BND

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For Nashville it was just a case of a slow start.

"We fought back. I was proud of the effort. Give credit to (Katie) Hempen. She stepped up and hit the big shot," Nashville coach Wayne Harre said. "Early, we had to get use to the speed of the game -- their quickness -- and they were being physical with us.

"After we did that, I thought we did a much better job."

Mater Dei 57, Belleville West 29

Bouncing back from their first regular season loss in nearly two years earlier in the day, the Knights came out hot and didn't cool off in a 28-point throttling of the Maroons in the third-place game.

With seniors Brooke Schulte and Ashley Rakers combining for 19 first half points, the Knights (14-1) jumped out to a 33-12 halftime lead and never looked back.

"I was very pleased at how we bounced back. Nobody likes losing, but we'll learn from it and be a better team in the long run," Knights coach Dave Kohnen said. "We came out ready to play from the start."

Schulte led Mater Dei with 14 points,

while Rakers added 13.

Erika McCaster paced West (9-6) with 10 points.

Central 66, Althoff 31

Senior guard Shelby Kohrman was right on target as she canned seven 3-point shots and scored 29 points as the Cougars completed a 3-1 tournament with the lopsided win over Althoff in the fifth place tilt.

Edged by Highland in the quarterfinals on Tuesday, the Cougars (13-3) came out firing from the outset as they took leads of 16-9 after one quarter and 33-15 at halftime.

"I told the kids after the game that it looked like we had a plan offensively and we went out and executed it," Central coach Nathan Rueter said. "We've preached to the kids the last couple weeks that we that we don't want to just run our offense, but we want to execute our offense. We did that tonight."

Jazmine Stubblefield led Althoff (7-6) with 13 points.

O'Fallon 40, Carbondale 37

Taylor Klingelhofer tallied 19 points as O'Fallon (8-5) claimed the consolation championship for the second straight year.

Playing without injured sophomore center Katie Roustio, the Panthers jumped out to a 19-8 halftime lead then survived a third quarter meltdown to post the win.

"It wasn't pretty by any means and we didn't shoot the ball well at all, but we were able to make the plays down the stretch to win the game," Panthers coach Ryan Massey said. "I'll take a 3-1 record at the Mascoutah Tournament every year. There are some excellent teams here. It would just be nice to get over on the winners bracket side."

Highland 55, Mater Dei 46

Executing the game plan of coach Matt Elledge to perfection, Highland stunned the previously undefeated Knights in semifinal play.

Trina Isaak led a balanced Bulldogs squad with 14 points, while senior Katie Hempen added 13. But the story of this game was Highland's flawless execution in its half-court offense.

Setting screen after screen, Highland finally wore down the Knights defense with back door cuts and easy layups around the basket.

"We actually executed our offense," Elledge said. "The last time, they (Mater Dei)

completely took us out of our offense.

"I thought the girls did a nice job of cutting hard today and we used some nice screens. Mater Dei didn't have a very good shooting day either and that helped us."

Tied at 22 at halftime, Highland used an 8-2 run early in the third quarter to take the lead for good at 30-24. Isaak and Kayla Martin keyed the run with four points each.

Mater Dei, getting a combined 10 third quarter points from Brooke Schulte and Ashley Rakers, twice cut the lead to two points, but could get no closer.

Hempen helped ice the win with nine of her 13 points in the fourth quarter, including a 7-of-8 performance from the foul line.'

"We had a bad day. We just didn't execute on defense very well," a dejected Knights coach David Kohnen said. "We just didn't play well on either side of the floor."

Schulte had 15 points, while Rakers added 13 for Mater Dei.

Nashville 51, Belleville West 32

The Hornettes continued to play relentless defense -- holding high scoring Erika McCaster to 11 points under her average as they smoked past the Maroons in the second semifinal.

McCaster, leading the St. Louis area in scoring entering the game with a 23.8 point average, was held to 12 by Jenna Morris.

"I thought (she) Morris did an excellent job and then we gave her some good help at times as well. McCaster is tough to guard because she can shoot the 3 and also take it inside," Nashville coach Wayne Harre said.

The game also saw Nashville senior Jennifer Moeller go over the 1,000 point mark for her career. Moeller led Nashville with 18 points.

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