

Emotional OT win for Kats

The Daily Gleaner (Fredericton)

Fri Feb 8 2008

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Section: Sports

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When all was said and done and the bragging rights decided, two fierce basketball rivals agreed on one thing last night at the Fredericton High School Gym.

"That was as much fun as I've had playing high school basketball, maybe ever playing basketball," said Ryan Clarke of the FHS Cleve's Source for Sports Black Kats.

"It was very fun to be a part of it," agreed Jason Daniels of the Leo Hayes Nashwaaksis Y's Men Lions. "Just to be out there playing and having fun knowing my brother is up there watching me."

If sports events could stop when it seemed appropriate to end them the game the two basketball players were referring to would have ended 63-63, which was the score at the end of regulation time. Having to play a five-minute overtime seemed unnecessary, but, oh, those darn old rules get in the way.

The game went to an anti-climatic five-minute extra period with the Black Kats prevailing 79-65 to end the two-game season series between the cross-river rivals with a sweep, although the Lions won a third meeting at the Capital City Classic tournament in December.

Paul Young led the Black Kats with 21 points. Clarke added 16 with AJ Durling knocking down 12. Daniels led the Lions with 19 while David Boyce had 13.

The game had two angles to it and that filled the bleachers with a loud enthusiastic crowd. The game was, of course, the meeting of the two rival high schools. FHS was looking to lock up first place in the Southwest Conference and Leo Hayes was fighting hard to grab second place with the playoffs just around the corner. It was also the first game for the Lions since former Lions player Mike Fitzgerald passed away a week ago. Proceeds from the event went to a fund in his name.

Two or three times the crowd, split in their loyalties to the teams, chanted Fitzgerald's nickname "Mikey Fitz" in unison. It made for a special night, and though the win was a big one for FHS and the loss a blow to the Lions' hopes for second spot, in the aftermath nobody seemed all that concerned with who won and who lost. They will save that for another day.

"This was just a great chance for us to get out and do something," Daniels said. "It has been a tough week for us, for both teams really. We just wanted to play. We were playing for Mike, but we also needed to get out on the court and play a game."

And what a game it was. The Black Kats honoured their five graduating seniors and started them. The price for that was a slow start. After the emotion of the pre-game goings on and such, the Lions jumped all over the home team scoring the first six points and carrying that to a 20-7 lead at the end on one quarter.

"We tried to not let it happen but we were caught up in the emotion," Clarke said. "It took us a while to settle down and get our heads where they should be. Leo Hayes is a good team and they jumped all over us. We kept telling each other to settle down. After awhile we started listening."

But even when they did settle the Lions weren't letting up. The Black Kats slowly got closer and closer but couldn't catch them. At halftime it was a three-point game with the Leos leading 32-29.

The Kat-and-mouse game continues into the second half. The Lions jumped out with three unanswered hoops to begin the half only to be reeled in when Clarke hit back-to-back threes around the six-minute mark of the quarter.

There was bad news on the second three, however. As the ball went in, six-foot-six Black Kat Dave Dolan went down in a heap and was helped off, done for the night with a sprained ankle.

The Lions took a five-point lead into the fourth quarter but an 11-3 run by FHS turned the lead around in favour of the home side.

Down the stretch the Kats held off the charging Lions. It seemed they had been successful when Daniels put up a shot at the buzzer with his team down by two. The ball circled the inside of the rim and hopped out as the buzzer sounded. But it wasn't over. A foul on Cameron Clark of FHS on the shot was awarded sending Daniels to the line where he went 2-for-2 to send the game to overtime.

The overtime was indeed an anticlimax with FHS scoring the last 12 points for the win.

"We weren't tired, but I think we were emotionally drained," Daniels said. "We'll get them next time."

Next time might be next week because the Kennebecasis Crusaders got a leg up on the race for second place with a 104-67 win over OHS Pizza Twice Blues to improve to 14-3 while the Lions slipped to 12-4. The Black Kats are 15-1. Final proceeds for the Fitzgerald Fund were \$1,734.11.

Ryan Vaughn led KV with 18 points while Jordan McGill scored 14 and Brent Kingston 13. Gregg Dempsey countered with 23 points for OHS. Tyler McCarthy added 14 and Chris Hillier eight.