

HIGH SCHOOL

3A SECTIONAL SEMIFINAL: WEST LAFAYETTE 55, MACONAQUAH 49

Nycz erupts, sends Red Devils to final

AARON MARTIN
FOR THE JOURNAL & COURIER

BUNKER HILL - All season long, Charlie Nycz was called upon to lead the West Lafayette basketball team.

When it mattered most, he was called upon to carry it.

By erupting for 15 fourth-quarter points, Nycz almost single-handedly rallied the Red Devils to a 55-49 win over Maconaquah on Friday night in the semifinal round of the Class 3A Maconaquah Sectional.

Nycz finished with a game-high 23 points for West Lafayette (15-9), which will face Western at 7:30 p.m. Saturday for the tourney championship.

"Honest to goodness, Charlie willed us to a win in the fourth quarter," said Red Devils coach David Wood, whose team last won a sectional title in 2013.

"(Maconaquah was) playing really well at that point. We were struggling, but we had a lot of guys that were really, really determined. In the end, you've got to make plays. Charlie did that. He made play after play after play."

According to Nycz, his late-game heroics were inspired by memories of his late friend Christian Burns. Burns died last year in a car accident.

"In the fourth quarter, I just thought, 'One more for my buddy Christian Burns.'" Nycz said. "His motto was always 'One more.' I thought I would do it for him."

With his team down 40-30 after the third quarter, and with thoughts of Burns in his heart, Nycz took the game over in the fourth.

A pair of free throws to bring his team within five points with 6:40 remaining. An offensive rebound and a three-point play to tie the score at 40 with 5:23 on the clock, followed by a driving layup to put his team up 42-40 some 30 seconds later.

"I decided that if I was going to go out," Nycz said, "I was going to go out with a bang."

Nycz wasn't done.

A free throw to put the Red Devils up



Charlie Nycz celebrates with his teammates after their victory in the second round of the boys basketball sectionals at Maconaquah. Nycz scored 15 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter.

CHAD KROCKOVER/FOR THE JOURNAL & COURIER

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43-42. Another free throw to put them up 46-44. A pair of one-and-one free throws for a 48-46 lead. Yet another layup, this one putting West Lafayette up for good at 50-49 with 55 seconds left.

Finally, with the outcome still very much in question, Nycz grabbed a defensive rebound and was fouled with 8.8 seconds on the clock. He drained both ends of his ensuing one-and-bonus free throws to put West Side up 54-49 and ice the win.

"I was definitely worried, but we've had so many comebacks this year," Nycz said. "Over the course of the season, we learned never to give up."

Maconaquah (14-9) led 23-15 at half-time, but the Red Devils used a 9-4 run at the beginning of the third period to pull within 27-24. The Braves promptly answered with a 13-6 run, however, to expand their lead to 10.

"Was I worried at that point? Yes, I was worried at that point," said Wood, who also received 14 points and five rebounds from Nelson Mbongo.

"We made a run at the start of the third quarter, and then we lost the third quarter. At the beginning of the fourth quarter, our defense picked up. We got some turnovers that got it back to a one-possession game with six minutes to go. Now you've got a game."

A 3-pointer by Matt Krause with 7:06 left to play sparked West Lafayette's rally, with Nycz's three-point play ending the 10-0 spurt at the 5:23 mark. After that, the two teams battled through three ties and five lead changes before the Red Devils finally took control down the stretch.

"We've been down before in the fourth quarter, so I wasn't too worried," Mbongo said. "We use adversity as a way to motivate ourselves to play better."

CLASS A TRI-CENTRAL SECTIONAL

CC, Clinton Prairie set for showdown

CLYDE HUGHES
FOR THE JOURNAL & COURIER

SHARPSVILLE - Top-ranked Central Catholic will take on No. 4 Clinton Prairie for the Class A Tri-Central Sectional title after both teams grabbed victories in their semifinals Friday night.

Central Catholic (18-6) had the easier time of it, as every player on the Knights roster scored in an 83-43 rout of Clinton Central (9-16) in the opener. Clinton Prairie (22-3) jumped on Faith Christian (12-12) big early but had to hold on for a 60-52 victory.

"We've had some tough games this year and played a lot of road games," Clinton Prairie coach Jeff Henley said. "I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow night against Central Catholic, but I know our kids will play hard, smart and until the end."

The Gophers, behind the play junior forward Collin Stroup, jumped to a 23-8 lead in the first quarter. Stroup scored 15 of his game-high 21 points in the first half.

"Collin is an exceptional athlete," Henley said. "He's only 6-2, but he's got length and can pop out and shoot the 3s and work inside, but he had an exceptional game. We had four guys in double figures. Those are good signs and hopefully we'll play well on Saturday."

Faith Christian, though, kept chipping away at Clinton Prairie's lead and got the deficit down to single digits, 42-33, by the start of the fourth quarter. But the Eagles could not convert on their first two possessions after getting defensive stops.

That's when Gopher seniors Jared

ties earlier in the period loomed large.

"We just didn't have enough time and enough legs," Faith coach Clayton Callan said. "We didn't want to walk away with any regrets. We were disappointed in the way we started, but I don't regret our effort."

"We just didn't execute and we weren't as strong as we needed to be over those first five minutes of the game. The effort was certainly there and I'm proud of the guys for that."

Scott added 12 for Clinton Prairie, followed by Stillwell's 11 and 10 from Sam Schoonveld. Austin Norton topped Faith Christian with 18 points, followed by Luke Peter's 13 and 12 from Lucas DeHahn.

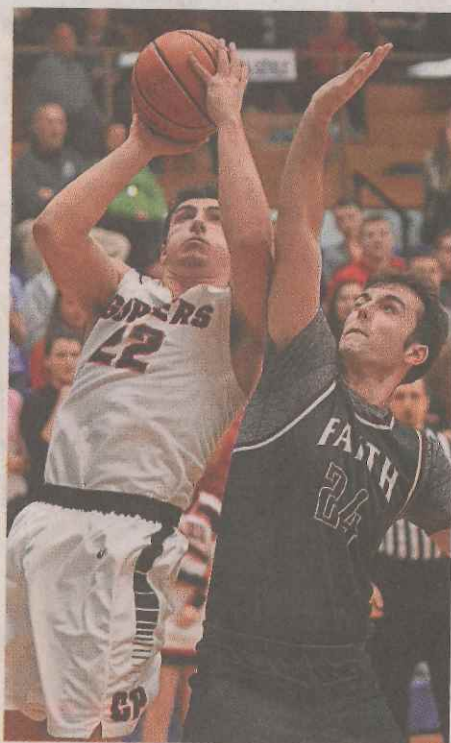
It was a much different contest for Central Catholic, which got a chance to rest its starters throughout the game. The Knights opened with an 11-1 run on their way to an 18-4 lead after the first period.

The Knights scored 20 or more points in the final three periods and owned a 54-31 rebounding edge.

"I thought we played pretty well," Central Catholic coach Dave Barrett said. "We got into some early foul trouble on some silly fouls and you can't do that. Tonight we were able to overcome it. Our bench did a nice job when came him."

"I thought (Grant) Schrader and (Tyler) Powers did some nice things for us when they came in. We didn't give them anything easy all night and that's exactly what you want to do defensively come tournament time."

Ben Tharp led the Knights with 16 points, while freshman forward Carson Barrett grabbed 13 rebounds to go with



Clinton Prairie junior Sam Schoonveld brushes back Faith's Lucas DeHahn to get a jump shot off during first round sectional play Friday at Tri-Central.

ERIC SCHLENE/FOR THE JOURNAL & COURIER

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King's 14 points.

Saturday's Central Catholic-Clinton Prairie matchup will be the second of

HIGH SCHOOL ROUNDUP

Delphi tops North Judson to reach title game

STAFF REPORTS

Blake Carroll scored 16 points to lead Delphi to a 50-31 boys basketball semifinal victory over North Judson at the Class 2A Winamac Sectional.

The Oracles (12-12) also received 12 points from Garrett Tomson. Delphi made more free throws (14) than North Judson attempted (12) in earning a Saturday night championship game matchup with Marquette Catholic (16-9).

Fountain Central Sectional
Fountain Central rode its defense to a berth in Saturday night's championship game, holding Carroll to 12 of 52 shooting in a 56-35 victory.

Dallas Otero paced the Mustangs (11-13) with 13 points and nine rebounds. Nathaniel Butts added 12 points for Fountain Central, which takes on Covington in the title game.

Brandt McClain had 14 points and 11 rebounds for Carroll (6-19).

Covington (17-7) rode the long-distance shooting of Aiden Tanner and Luke Cooper to a 68-62 victory over Rossville in the opener. Tanner was 6 of 10 from 3-point range on his way to a game-high 22 points. Cooper was 5 of 9 behind the arc and finished with 21