

Dragons take regionals; headed to state tourney

Written by April Peregoy

Holyoke's Dragon basketball team will be going to the state tournament in Pueblo, March 12-14, after eeking by with a two-point victory in overtime over Limon, 37-35, at Sterling High School on Saturday, March 7.

To make it to Saturday's game, the Dragons first defeated Front Range Christian, 57-28, in first-round regional action at Sterling on Friday, March 6.

Coach John Baumgartner is obviously proud of Region 2's championship team and is looking forward to state competition. "The guys play with a lot of character and heart—they're an unbelievable team to coach. Th



ey don't quit. I'm pretty lucky to coach a group of boys like that," he said.

"Hopefully, we can continue to execute our plays well at state," he continued. "We gotta come out and play three solid games, and if we do that, we should be in good shape."

He added his congratulations to the Lady Dragons for a good season, saying he wishes they were going to state together and will miss them at the tournament.

Holyoke 37, Limon 35

Holyoke's varsity team was off to a great start in the first quarter against Limon on Saturday, ending it with a six-point edge. Unfortunately, they lost their momentum in the following periods, allowing the Badgers to catch up and, at times, to take over the lead. However, the Dragons squeaked out the win in overtime, earning their spot in the state tournament by two.

Though the game took place in Sterling, the atmosphere in the gym was that of a Holyoke home game. A sea of green covered half of the stands, and the excitement of the game had HHS fans on their feet throughout the final two periods.

"We really appreciate the fan base and support," said coach Baumgartner. "I truly believe it helped us in overtime. Having a crowd like that really fires them up."

Judging by first quarter play alone, it looked like HHS wasn't going to have much trouble against Limon. Carper scored nine points for Holyoke, while Tharp had two-point and three-point field goals and Evan Swanson another three-pointer.

But the Dragons lost control of the rest of the game. In the remaining time of regulation play, they scored only 14 points—three less than what they earned during the first quarter alone.

It started in the second period, with HHS remaining scoreless until the final minute. Meanwhile, the Badgers took advantage of the opportunity to gain on the Dragons, bringing the score to 17-15. With 55 seconds left on the clock, Carper went to the line and earned one more free throw for HHS, but Limon answered right back with a two-pointer and a free throw to tie the game at 18.

With only 16 seconds left in the half, Swanson took aim and gave the Dragons a slight two-point edge as the teams headed to the locker rooms.

Even after the break, the Dragons had a hard time rebounding from the second quarter. Ryan Baumgartner hit the first three of the half to start it off. This was followed by another two from

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Swanson. But the Badgers fought back to tie it at 23, then took the lead for the first time that night, 25-23.

Taking turns at holding the lead, the score was tied two more times during the third, and ended with both teams at 27.

With the Dragons unable to make a field goal during the fourth, it all came down to free throws. Carper went to the line three times, making three of six attempts. The only other free throw earned was by Baumgartner.

Still, as coach Baumgartner pointed out, it was enough to keep them from losing the game. With five minutes left in the game, the score was tied at 29 and would remain that way until the final two minutes. Limon put up another two-pointer, after which Baumgartner went to the line and brought HHS's deficit to only one.

With only 43 seconds left, Badger Brett Schmidt was fouled and sent to the line. Dragon fans held their breaths as he missed both free throws to give HHS another shot. It was then Carper's turn at the line, with 20 seconds left to play. He missed the first free throw, but made the second to tie the game at 31 and send it into overtime.

Again, it all came down to free throws in overtime, and this time the Dragons made them. In the first two minutes, Limon pulled ahead by three, 35-32. But then Carper was sent to the line two more times and made all four baskets to give Holyoke the lead once again.

With only a minute left to play, Tharp stole the ball from the Badgers and was fouled. His first shot was good, but not the second. As the clock ticked away the final seconds, Limon attempted a three, but it was no good. Colby Wailes caught the rebound for a two-point Dragon victory.

According to coach Baumgartner, it was Holyoke's defense that won the game. He especially credited Tharp and Baumgartner for playing well defensively.

"We had some kids who didn't score, but still did a lot of good things for us," he added. "One thing I really like about this team is they stay calm and collected, even under pressure like that. They just kept fighting."

Carper led the team offensively with 18 points and in rebounding with 10. Swanson, noted Baumgartner, really stepped up as well and filled in the gaps when Carper and Tharp were in foul trouble. He contributed nine points.

Shooting average percentages were low for both teams, with Holyoke making 10 of 31 attempts for 32 percent. Limon was 14 for 42 for 33 percent.

Limon also outrebounded the Dragons, 31-29. But Holyoke had fewer turnovers with 10, compared to Limon's 14, and more steals at 10-2.

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~~Multiple images of the basketball game were included in the original document but have been removed for clarity.~~