

Late game heroics save Marion boys

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Sub-par shooting didn't stop middle school girls with Indian jerseys and war-painted faces from asking to pose for photos with Dusty Albaugh and Kasey Semler after Wednesday night's game.

For the Marion seniors are not only teen heartthrobs, they're bona fide stars.

With the white-knuckler of a game with Center Point-Urbana on the line, knotted-up with just seconds to go, it was Albaugh and Semler who pulled it out for their team.

"It's fitting that it was the two of them that came through in the end," said Marion Coach Mike Manderscheid after the 55-51 home victory over CPU in a first round Class 3A substate matchup of Wamac rivals.

"They've been doing it all year."

And they'll likely be called on to do again when they face Mount Vernon or Independence Thursday night in a substate semifinal at Kennedy. Independence's game against Mount Vernon scheduled for Monday night was postponed to Tuesday because of icy road conditions.

The Indians (15-7) and Stormin' Pointers (10-12) faced each other twice in the regular season with Marion winning both, 86-78 and 72-60.

"We knew we'd get their A game," said Albaugh. "They're a good team, and they play hard. And, yeah, it was pretty intense."

It was a see-saw struggle of two well-prepared, gritty fighters all night long.

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With CPU ahead by three, Semler tied it up at 51 with a steal and free throw for an old-fashioned three-point play with 2:18 left.

After several lost balls and missed shots on both sides, CPU had the ball out of bounds at midcourt with 14.7 seconds to go.

Pointer sophomore guard Josh Jirak, who with senior brother Jared had given Marion fits all night, was about to dribble when Albaugh swiped the ball away and sprinted down-court for an uncontested layup.

“He’d gotten by before,” Albaugh said. “That time I just stuck out my arm when he put it down, stole it and then focused on the hoop.”

With 2.2 seconds, the Pointers threw the ball away on the inbounds pass.

Semler was fouled and dropped in two free throws to ice the game.

Notwithstanding the pair’s late game heroics, it was their less heralded teammates who kept them in the game.

Semler had scored 42 points the last time the teams met, and CPU Coach K.C. Tupa threw in a new wrinkle by having two players bird-dog him and Albaugh while the other three collapsed into a zone in the middle.

It worked. Semler was held to five field goals and 17 points, and Albaugh had three field goals and nine points on poor shooting performances.

“They face-guarded Dusty and me everywhere we went,” Semler said. “We struggled

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offensively.”

But fellow seniors Tyler Fisher, Dylan Cronk and Dan Van Gorp played solid on defense and on the boards. Cronk also totaled 13 points.

And hulking big man Austin “Big H” Hardman came off the bench to push the Pointers around the under the basket.

“I just do whatever I can to help my team,” Hardman said. “My job is to get to the boards, go get the ball if it’s on the floor, just play hard and get after it.”

“Credit these kids,” Manderscheid said of his scrappy bunch. “It wasn’t easy. But they kept battling. And they found a way to win it.”

CENTER POINT-URBANA (51): Colin Kramer 2 1-1 5, Jared Jirak 5 2-3 17, Nick Wood 3 3-5 10, Josh Jirak 5 0-1 11, Nathan Becker 2 2-2 6, Joey Dighton 0 0-0 0, Aric Myers 0 0-0 0, Tyler Smith 1 0-0 2. Totals 18 8-12 51.

MARION (55): Dusty Albaugh 3 1-3 9, Tyler Fisher 1 0-0 2, Kasey Semler 5 6-7 17, Dan Van Gorp 3 2-3 8, Dylan Cronk 6 1-1 13, Austin Hardman 2 0-0 4, Mitch Wagner 0 0-0 0, Mark Stone 1 0-0 2. Totals 21 10-14 55.

Halftime – Marion 31, Center Point-Urbana 28. 3-point goals – Center Point-Urbana 7 (Jared Jirak 5, Josh Jirak, Wood), Marion 3 (Albaugh 2, Semler). Totals fouls -- Center Point-Urbana 16, Marion 11.