

## Huskies caught fire when Muhlbach returned

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 11 February 2013 23:25 -

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SHELLSBURG - Will Muhlbach's right knee was bothering him when the basketball season began, so the 6-foot-5 senior decided to skip his final season at Cedar Valley Christian and support his teammates from the stands instead.

It hurt almost as much to sit and watch his lifelong friends playing ball without him.

"I went to one of the games and we weren't 100 percent, so it was kind of hard to watch that," he said Monday night. "So once my knee got better I decided I would go out."

That was in mid-December, and the Huskies have been riding high ever since.

Muhlbach poured in 26 points Monday as Cedar Valley Christian finished the regular season with an impressive 73-47 victory over GMG at the Shellsburg Elementary School.

The Huskies began the season with a 1-6 record, but they've won 13 of their last 15 games and will take a 14-8 record into the quarterfinal round of the Class 1A playoffs Thursday night at Highland of Riverside.

Muhlbach, Jeremy Strutz, Jon Landis and Spencer Zielke have been friends and teammates for a long time. They are all seniors now and they're hoping to make a good run in the playoffs, perhaps all the way to the state tournament in Des Moines.

Evan Koch, another senior, joined the club along the way and gives the Huskies an all-senior starting lineup. They survived a rough start this season, but are flourishing now.

"Our season started off kind of slow when we didn't have Will," said Strutz, a talented 6-foot point guard. "It was great to get him back. We're starting to get back on track now."

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Coach Jeff Pospisil likes to stick with his five seniors as much as possible - sometimes for the entire game - but Muhlbach and Strutz got into foul trouble Monday and Pospisil had to use a few reserves. The Huskies never missed a beat.

"A solid win," the coach said, happy with the final tuneup before the playoffs.

Landis contributed 16 points, Strutz finished with 12, Zielke scored nine points and Koch added seven. Alex Kennedy scored three points off the bench.

The Huskies displayed a "sixth sense" on many of their cuts and passes, seemingly knowing where everybody was headed before they got there. That led to a series of crisp feeds and easy buckets.

"That just comes from playing with each other," said Landis. "We don't have one selfish person on the team. We're all great passers."

Landis comes from a prominent basketball family. His grandfather, Bob Landis, is a member of the Iowa Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame and led Linn-Mar High School to an undefeated season and state title in 1983.

Strutz is the main playmaker, but all of the Huskies made good passers Monday.

"I've known Jon and Will and Spencer for pretty much our whole lives," said Strutz. "We've got pretty good chemistry. It's just fun playing with them."

Pospisil called a timeout in the first half so they could inform the crowd that Strutz recently joined the 1,000 Point Club at Cedar Valley Christian. Strutz reached the milestone in a road game, but they wanted to briefly stop the game and give him an ovation.

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"It's a tradition," Pospisil explained.

Strutz has scored 1,045 points in his prep career.

Pospisil thinks his team is good enough to reach the state tournament, but also knows the Huskies could stumble at any point. His players have embraced the challenge of trying to reach Wells Fargo Arena.

"I feel pretty confident," said Strutz. "It's our senior year. We definitely don't want to lose. We'll do whatever we can to win. We'll have to beat some pretty good teams."

"We could definitely make it to state," Landis agreed. "We have to stay out of foul trouble and we have to play our best basketball."

"If everyone is 'on' the same night, I don't think anyone can stop us."

Brock Fisher led GMG (11-11) with 14 points.

GMG (47): Plaehn 1 0-1 3, Sayadtdy 1 2-5 5, Petty 4 3-6 12, Vaughn 1 0-2 2, Newcomb 0 0-0 0, Warren 1 5-8 7, Fisher 7 0-0 14, Claussen 1 2-4 4, Slingluff 0 0-0 0, Carlon 0 0-2 0. Totals 16 12-28 47.

CEDAR VALLEY (73): Ostroot 0 0-0 0, Ulmer 0 0-0 0, Scroggs 0 0-0 0, Koch 3 0-2 7, Kennedy 1 1-2 3, Landis 6 3-4 16, Zielke 4 0-0 9, Strutz 4 4-4 12, E.Gustafson 0 0-0 0, Johnson 0 0-0 0, Muhlbach 11 4-6 26. Totals 29 12-18 73.

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Halftime - Cedar Valley 40, GMG 26. 3-point goals - GMG 3 (Plaehn 1, Sayadtdy 1, Petty 1), Cedar Valley 3 (Koch 1, Landis 1, Zielke 1).