

# Calhoun slips by Cahokia 50-48 in season opener

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer  
November 15 2016 10:22 AM





**ALTON – Hardin-Calhoun's girls basketball team** opened defense of their 2015-16 IHSA Class 1A girls basketball championship against Cahokia on the opening night of the **Alton Tip-Off Classic tournament**.

The Warriors had to battle back from being 10 points down at three-quarter time to take a 50-48 win over the South Seven Conference's Comanches and did so thanks to some big three-point shots from **Junie Zirkelbach** and **Jordan Holland** down the stretch and a 22-point performance from **Grace Baalman** to go 1-0 on the season.

“That was a good comeback,” **Warrior coach Aaron Baalman** said. “We kind of had a deer-in-the-headlight look in the first half; we're playing with four new players and we have a good centerpiece with Grace. We're running four or five new girls out here.

“It'll come with time, but I'm extremely proud of the girls; they fought hard to the end and that's what you ask for as a coach.”

Finding Grace Baalman was an important task for her teammates, and Aaron Baalman felt they did a good job of that in the first half. “I thought we did a pretty good job in the first half of finding Grace, but I think Grace scored four points in the second half,” Aaron Baalman said. “I thought those four or five other players really stepped up in the second half and took control of the game; they busted their butts all game.

“Cahokia's got a couple of nice players; we had some trouble with the dribble-drives and got lost in the zone a couple of times, but I thought we did a good job overall for the first game of the year and a week of practice, so I really can't complain.”

Play started out slowly, the Warriors taking a small lead early on before the Comanches drew level and took the lead before Calhoun managed to put together a small run to lead 14-12 at quarter time. Cahokia kept pressing and forged ahead of Calhoun to lead 24-23 at halftime.

The third term started out slowly, Cahokia managing to pull ahead to 29-23 just past halfway through the quarter before Calhoun cut it to 29-26 on a three-ball from Holland before they pulled ahead again, eventually getting the lead to 38-28 at three-quarter time, eventually pulling to 41-28 early in the final quarter before Zirkelbach connected twice from behind the arc to cut the Cahokia lead to 45-39.

After a timeout on Zirkelbach's second triple, Holland connected on another three-ball to pull to 45-42. Cahokia scored on their next trip down to extend the lead to five, but **Sophie Lorton** knocked down a couple of free throws to pull Calhoun to 47-44. before Baalman scored from inside to get the Warriors to 47-46. A free throw made it 48-46 when **Rayna Zirkelbach** scored from inside to draw the Warriors level with 2:08 to go. Baalman then gave the lead back to Calhoun with a make from inside with 1:08 left, and all the Warriors had to do was bleed the clock, which they did despite the Comanches getting one last shot to tie or win after a missed free throw on the front end of a one-and-one; Cahokia could not get a shot off before the siren.

Junie Zirkelbach wound up with 18 points on the night, with Holland scoring eight and Lorton two. **Mayesha Jones** led Cahokia with 17 points with MaKayla Brownlee adding 12 and Destiny Robinson 14. The Warriors will finish group play at 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday against the host Redbirds; the games for fifth, third and first places are slated to begin at 4:30 p.m. Saturday.

