

Balanced attack helps Redbirds in win over Granite City

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GRANITE CITY — When a basketball team has many of its players chipping in with the scoring, that team can be pretty hard to stop.

Which is what happened Friday night at **Granite City’s Memorial Gymnasium**, as **Josh Rivers** scored 12 points, **Ty’ohn Trimble** added 11 and **Dereaun Clay** had nine as the **Alton Redbirds** defeated the host **Warriors** 69-41 in a Southwestern Conference matchup.

The Redbirds overcame a sluggish first period to outscore Granite 22-8 in the second quarter to win going away.

“We struggled a little bit in the beginning,” said **Redbird coach Eric Smith**, “but once we kind of calmed down and kinda had the right approach, we did OK.”

The balanced scoring is a key to the Redbirds’ success.

“That’s kind of a good recipe for us,” Smith said. “When we give multiple kids that obviously score some points, that’s always good. But we feel like we’ve got a handful of kids that can play, and that have some skill offensively. We kinda emphasize a little bit more of not necessarily one guy’s gonna do it all for us. The more balanced we are, and the more guys pitching in, the better shot we’ve got.”

The Warriors have struggled this year with a very young team that plays its share of underclassmen. But **Granite coach Raffi Karibian** does see better days ahead for his team.

“In the conference, obviously, it’s been real difficult for us,” Karibian said. “Out of the conference, and in tournaments, we’ve been playing a little bit better. I thought tonight, we played some inspired basketball in the first half, the crowd was excellent, they had a special promotion tonight, pink-out, and our kids were happy to play on their home floor, and played well.

“Unfortunately, at halftime, we were down 16 after a solid first quarter,” Karibian continued, “We missed some shots that we could have made, we turned the ball over and made a few mistakes in our defense, and it came back to hurt us. But overall, I like the effort, and I think better days are ahead.”

The first quarter was indeed a bit of a see saw affair, where the Redbirds jumped to an early 15-5 advantage, thanks to a pair of threes from Trimble and Donovan Clay and baskets by Dereau Clay and Kevin Caldwell. The Warriors had a late charge as Marquis Shaw and Freddie Edwards. Shaw hit a three at the top of the key before the quarter time buzzer that cut the Redbirds lead to 16-14.

Granite tied the game at the outset of the second term, as Zidane Moore hit a driving layup to even things at 16. But the Redbirds went on a 10-2 to take control, as Dereau Clay, Morris Adams Trimble and Terrance Walker all scored in that span. After Jalyn Harper hit underneath to break the string, Alton went on another run, outscoring the Warriors 10-4 to take a 38-22 lead into the locker rooms.



The Redbirds added on to the lead early in the third term, led by a pair of threes from **Donovan Clay**, then upped the edge to 47-27 behind a three from Damion Reid and a pair of free throws by Maurice Edwards. The period ended 48-31, Alton. However, the Warriors kept playing hard, and were able to cut the lead to 18 on a pair of threes by Kendrick Williba that made it 59-41. But the Redbirds were able to answer the challenge, scoring the final 10 points of the game with baskets by Johnathan Bumpers and Evan Meyer, free throws from Walker and Josh Rivers and a three point play by Walker that helped make the final 69-41.

The balanced scoring attack will come in handy for the Redbirds as the season approaches its final month and the state playoffs around the corner.

“Yeah, I mean, obviously, the more diverse we are on the offensive end makes it a little bit more difficult.” Smith said. “They played a box on Pop tonight, so other guys were going to have to step up. And we have kids who can do that.”

As for that final month, Smith knows what the Redbirds need to do — keep plugging away and keep playing hard.

“We just gotta keep grinding away,” Smith said. “Like we tell the kids, the only thing that matters most is that we come out every night and compete, and if we do that, we think we’ve got a shot.”

As for the Warriors, Karibian has a simple formula to put Granite going in the right direction.

“I thought we did play hard tonight, “ Karibian said, “but we’ve got to practice hard and be more consistent, and better results will come. We’ve got a few opportunities in the conference down the road, and a couple of non-conference games that maybe get in the win column and the kids will feel a little bit better about themselves.”



