Wittman three-pointer, Panthers' defense spark Jersey to 40-39 OT win over Columbia

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JERSEY 40, COLUMBIA 39 (OT): Blake Wittman has scored a lot of points in his basketball career at Jersey Community High School, but probably none have been bigger than a shot he netted with 10 seconds to play in overtime on Monday night.

Wittman netted a three-pointer that gave Jersey a 40-39 lead and ultimately the victory over Columbia in the 3A Civic Memorial Regional.

Jersey's defense was phenomenal all night long, holding their star player Jordan Holmes back most of the night. Without the defensive effort, the Panthers would not have prevailed.

"We were not necessarily looking for that shot (Wittman's game winner); we were trying to get a post for Jake, which we got and they guarded it well," Jersey head boys basketball coach Stote Reeder said. "But we had Blake, A.J. and Kurt on the backside and Blake made the shot."

Columbia led Jersey just 15-7 at the half, but the Panthers erupted for 18 points in the third to forge a 25-25 tie at three-quarter time and went on to take a 40-39 overtime win over Columbia in a first-round IHSA Class 3A Civic Memorial Regional game in Bethalto Monday night.

The Panthers improved to 11-18 on the year and advanced to a 7 p.m. Tuesday semifinal contest against No. 1 seed Breese Central; Columbia was eliminated at 14-15.

"We were lucky Holmes missed some shots," Reeder said. "Anytime you can win when you scored seven points in the first half, it is pretty incredible. Our defense was there in first half. Coby scored five in the first half. You name it, it went wrong in the first half, but not on defensive end. If our offense was as good as our defense all year long that would have been our 19th win rather than our 11th."

Jake Ridenhour had 15 points and Blake Wittman 12 for the Panthers; Coby Gibson added five crucial points and Kurt Hall three. Nathan Goldacker had five rebounds for Jersey, with Lucas Ross and A.J. Shaw pulling down four each. Columbia was led by Jordan Holmes' 17 points and Jon Peterson's 12, with Greg Long adding five; Peterson pulled down 10 rebounds for Columbia.