



North Greene and Calhoun advance in the Spartan Classic and will face off tonight

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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1 North Greene v. #8 Brussels

WHITE HALL - Coming in as the No. 1 seed in their tournament, the North Greene Spartans looked every bit of that with a thorough display against the Brussels Raiders in a 63-27 blowout in the first round of the Spartan Classic on Tuesday night.

They improve to 3-0 on the season.

“We started off not playing as sharp as we liked. When you get those first games of the tournament sometimes the guys do things they don’t normally do, and we settled in and defended better,” North Greene head coach Brett Barry said. “I was proud of the boy's efforts. We got a deep bench, and they did a lot of good things for us, especially with a back-to-back bracket style like this being able to rest our guys and not have a grueling slugfest.”



The Spartans took their time to get going early on, but the floodgates would open up soon enough.

Jonah and Josh Hopper each scored 21 points to lead the Spartans and the vaunted double-duo attacked the Raiders in various ways all game long. Brett Whicker, Blake Dean, Collin VanMeter, and Kaiden Heberling played well defensively, and offensively they would usually feed the ball to a Hopper whether it was to Josh posted up inside or to Jonah who would drive, pull-up and shoot 10-to-15 footers.

“Those guys have worked hard to improve their game, they kept it simple tonight,” Berry said. “They played within themselves and within the scheme that we had going on,” Berry said.

It was 19-7 after the first quarter, and then North Greene exploded out on a 24-4 run and led 43-11 at halftime.

Brussels falls to 1-2.



4 Calhoun v. #5 Pleasant Hill

Two long-time rivals faced off in the last first-round game that would determine who would face the hosts.

It was tightly contested in the first half, but a substantial 12-0 shutout in the third quarter by Calhoun proved to be the difference as the Warriors took down the Wolves 44-30 in White Hall.

Calhoun improves to 2-0, and Pleasant Hill falls to 0-3.

“The home opener was last Friday, and we were able to shut Bunker Hill out in the first quarter. We didn’t even look like the same team tonight,” Calhoun head coach Ryan Graner said. “We looked young and out of our element.”

A fresh face for the Warriors was their star freshman Corey Nelson. He scored 12 points with six coming in that vital third quarter. Nelson stands at six-foot-six and was involved in plenty of ways whether dribbling the ball up court in transition or going down low for a close-range shot.

He wasn’t the only the freshman out there for Calhoun.

Ben Eberlin one-ups Nelson in the height department by an inch and played sporadically throughout the game scoring two points off a hook-shot. Graner was happy with their contributions.

“ a very smart kid, book smart, and ball smart. He’s capable of a lot of big things. been preaching more aggression to him since part of that is being a freshman, but he did some nice things tonight. The sky’s the limit as far as improvement goes for him,” Graner said. “I’m really pleased with our other freshman, Ben coming in. Tonight was his first major varsity minutes that he’s gotten, and he didn’t look too out of his element. Obviously, he’s got ways to go as far as strength.”



Drew Baalman led all scorers with 18 points, including two triples in the first quarter. He and Nelson were virtually Calhoun's offensive production in the first half.

"Drew kinda kept us going in the first half, but offensively you'd think we'd been doing something else for the last three-and-a-half weeks, but we'll get better," Graner said. We're young, and I have to remember that myself, but we'll keep plugging away."

Pleasant Hill was led by Dalton Crane's 15 points, and the first 12 came in the first half, while he was mainly the offensive production for the Wolves by getting to the basket for layups. All the while, Pleasant Hill's experience, and physicality worried Graner throughout the game.

“They’re like grown men. Peebles is just a monster down low, and they’re all big, strong kids,” Graner said. “That really concerned me coming into tonight, and I don’t think we did a really good job at all in the first half, especially on the boards. We did a better job or at least what we needed to do in the second half.”

Calhoun led Pleasant Hill 22-17 after the deficit was cut to five on a Harley Miller three-pointer at the buzzer going into halftime.

The Warriors did enough offensively to keep their heads above water, while the defense improved significantly by denying Peeble’s the ball inside and then cutting off Crane from the basket. That forced the Wolves to take mid and long-range shots where they struggled mightily in that department all game long.

Graner credited Trey Hart and company for limiting Peebles to two points, particularly during the third quarter stretch.

During the fourth quarter, Pleasant Hill’s long-range shooting came alive with two triples from Harley Miller, but the Warriors didn’t show any real signs of faltering when the Wolves started pressing them and showed good composure in the final minutes.

Despite the win, Graner has a somewhat pessimistic view of how his team shapes out at the minute with the Spartans looming tonight unless the Warriors can cut out their own mistakes.

“We got a lot of work to do in 24 hours, or we’re going to run into a juggernaut of a North Greene team who we definitely look like we’re not prepared for,” Graner said.

Tip-off is at 6:30 p.m. at North Greene High School in White Hall.