

North Greene advances to Winchester Invitational Tournament quarterfinals

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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WINCHESTER - Most times in the Winchester Invitation Tournament teams have to earn their way to victory truly, and it might not be pretty sometimes.

That was the story for the North Greene Spartans.

“Hacking each other is a great way to put it,” North Greene head coach Brett Berry said. “It was physical both ways. I was proud of our defense; we defended well. We weren’t really motivated at times, and then we kinda got it together.”

The Spartans did enough to hold off the Rushville-Industry Spartans as they beat them 46-33 in the first round on Saturday night.

North Greene ups their record to 10-2 and extend their winning streak to six. They advance to the quarterfinals to play the Triopia Trojans at 8:30 p.m. on Wednesday night.

After Brady Klitz, who finished with nine points, drained two three-pointers to start the game, Jonah Hopper scored 13 of his 18 points in the first quarter. Perhaps the most significant sequence of the game was him sinking three unanswered triples late in the first quarter, which gave the Spartans a 22-9 lead. Things stagnated after that.

“Offensively we were looking strong early, and then we got to a point where we were rushing our shots. We weren’t working the ball quite enough, and then we got a little impatient,” Berry said. “Some of that is the last couple of games we’ve had. We’ve jumped on teams and had hot starts early. We keep preaching to the guys it’s not always gonna that way.”

North Greene ended up scoring six points for the rest of the first half and missed several open shots, but fortunately for them, the Rockets managed to score four points and trailed 24-13 going into halftime.

A pair of Rushville-Industry sophomores helped keep them afloat in the form of Briar Stinson and Jacob Reller. Stinson led the Rockets with 12 points, and Reller added seven.

Despite his strong start to the game, Jonah Hopper scored one more field goal, which was a three-pointer in the third quarter. His twin brother Josh and Brett Whicker who both came into the game averaging ten points, scored below their average and combined for ten points. For the Spartans, baskets were hard to come by whether it was good defense from the Rockets or plain missed shots.



“I think we got frustrated with ourselves mentally because it wasn’t coming so easy. They weren’t moving the ball according to the things we wanted to do. It was one of those things where we could never find our groove offensively, but grinded it out,” Berry said. “We never could really put Rushville away. They did a nice job of battling back. The Stinson kid hit some big, tough shots for them,” Berry said.

Reller got the Rockets within single digits to start the third quarter at 24-15, but a steal and layup by Whicker put the Spartans up by 11. However, Stinson answered that with a three. That's when Jonah Hopper broke out of his slump and responded with a triple of his own to put North Greene up 29-18, and the Spartans wouldn't let the Rockets get back to within single digits.

Junior guard Carter Hoseman added a much-needed spark off the bench for North Greene.

He scored the last points of the third quarter on a baseline shot and opened the fourth quarter with another basket. A couple of possessions later he gave the Spartans their biggest lead of the game when he got a steal at half court and scored on a layup.

Berry applauded his contribution.

“He's a kid that has that potential. He has that life. To get him to break out his shell is the hard part. Sometimes he's a little tentative about things, and today he came out, played tough and gave us a shot in the arm.”

