

North Greene comes up short to Payson-Seymour in WIT semifinals

by John Hough, Sports Writer
January 13 2018 1:00 PM



WINCHESTER - In the Winchester Invitational Tournament, you're going to meet powerful sides in the semifinals, and the North Greene Spartans did just that with the Payson-Seymour Indians.

However, the Spartans were the better team in the first half, but then their shooting went cold, and the Indians came alive.

“We came out flat after halftime. Down the stretch we a couple of mental mistakes here and there,” Spartans head coach Brett Berry said. Against a team the caliber of Payson you can’t give them any room at all.

Shooting lanes specifically.

A 24-11 third quarter, included four three-pointers by Payson-Seymour gave them a 50-43 lead and then did enough to hold off the Spartans and advance to the championship game. They’ll improve to 15-1 and play Barry (Western) at 7:00 p.m. North Greene drops to 11-4 and takes on Petersburg Porta at 3:00 p.m. in the third-place game.

Once again, Jonah Hopper led the Spartans in the points department with a game-high 21, but it was his twin brother, Josh who played his best game of the season and it had been a long time coming.

“We didn’t play a very good game. We had a lot of turnovers, and they did too, but they came out with the win,” Josh Hopper said. “It’s definitely one of the best games of season because it was against a very good opponent and I wasn’t scared at all.”

“He played outstanding. This was the breakout game we’ve been looking for him,”. He was locked in, focused, and confident. He did the things we asked him to do, and he really stepped up his game.”

The six-foot-five senior had to go up against Turner Voss, one of the best forwards in Class 1A and western Illinois and outplayed him for the most part. Hopper scored a season-high 18 points and stayed out of foul trouble.

Travis Johnson scored 13 of his 18 points in the first half for the Indians and Voss, despite battling foul trouble for the majority of the game scored 11 points. Cole Schwartz added ten points, including two triples.

“I thought our guys did everything we asked them to do tonight and they played beautifully. They jumped on them. We turned the ball over and did some silly things here and there, but our team play was solid enough to take the lead and keep it for awhile.”

The first quarter was back-and-forth as the Hoppers scored all of North Greene’s points, minus a Carter Hoesman layup. On the flip side, Johnson and Voss did the same for Payson-Seymour. The Spartans closed out the first quarter on a 7-2 run.

Josh Hopper made a layup as he was fouled to extend North Greene's run up to 15-5 and led 24-16 early in the second quarter. However, on the ensuing possession, Voss wowed the crowd with an alley-oop dunk to bring the score to within six. Undeterred, the Spartans withstood their lead and led 32-26 at halftime.

The Indians heavily relied on Johnson and Voss to establish a post-presence because they struggled mightily to knock down three-pointers in the first half, but the tables turned in the second half.



“The zone worked for us early. In the second half we weren’t getting out on the shooters quick enough,” Berry said. “We were sinking too deep.”

Payson-Seymour came out shooting hot, and the Spartans traded baskets with them for a bit, but they eventually started to go cold. Johnson sank a three-pointer to trim the deficit to 36-35, and Tanner Cannady gave the Indians the lead with two-straight baskets. Moments later Schwartz and Lucas Loos connected from three to give the Indians a 45-37 lead.

Blake Dean ended North Greene's field goal drought with a steal and layup, followed by another Josh Hopper layup. However, another Indians layup and Schwartz triple gave them the biggest lead of the game at 50-41 to cap a 30-13 run.

Payson-Seymour elected to slow things down and play conservative, which worked out for the better in favor of the Spartans as they trimmed the deficit to 50-48 with under four minutes left. The strategy eventually paid off as the Indians were looking for mismatches inside and finally got one with Cannady who earned an and-one to put his team up 53-48.

After a Josh Hopper and-one, but missed the free throw, the Indians scored on a layup, and then Voss got a steal at mid-court and dunked to put the Indians up 57-50 with under two minutes left. He would then foul out as he hit Hoesman as he attempted a three. Hoesman made two of three, and then the Spartans got a steal, which would send Jonah Hopper to the charity stripe. He made both to make it 57-54, however, Payson-Seymour broke North Greene's press, which freed up Cannady for an open layup and the Spartans would ultimately come up short.

"We're excited where we're at. Right now it's a tough loss. We want to win the Winchester Tournament championship, but it's a small thing in the scope of the reality. We got a lot of basketball left in the season." Berry said. "We're the only team outside of West Hancock who kept under a double-digit win, and I think that's a feather in our cap that we gotta take. You look at the silly things we did down the stretch, and still, we're in striking distance of a top caliber team."



