

# **STATE CHAMPIONS: Undefeated 7th Grade Junior Lady Redbirds capture first-ever crown over Shorewood-Troy**

by John Hough, Sports Writer  
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**BOLINGBROOK** - For the first time in program history, the Alton Middle School Junior Redbirds have won a state basketball championship.

The Redbirds defeated the Shorewood-Troy Trojans 56-48 in the IESA 7th grade 4A championship game at Brooks Middle School in Bolingbrook on Thursday night. They finished the season with a perfect 24-0 record.

“It feels awesome. I’m very proud of the girls,” head coach Jeff Harris said. I’m very proud to be their coach, and I’m very proud to represent Alton Middle School.”

For 21 minutes Alton was coasting to the state championship. Then star point guard Kiyoko Proctor fouled out with 2:09 to play while Troy’s Maziah Shelton converted a layup to cut the deficit to 53-43. All the Trojans produced a full-court press that saw them get steals and turned them into points.

Avery Houlihan cut the deficit to 53-47 with less than 90 seconds to play, but a quick basket by Amyracie Hardimon stopped the bleeding.

The Lady Redbirds would still struggle offensively in the final minute, but their defense held firm and was able to hold on for the victory.

“It was a battle. You gotta give credit to Shorewood Troy. Last year they were state champions so that school has a lot of pride,” Harris said. “When their backs are against the wall a team with a lot of pride is going to come back fighting. I tip my cap to them for sticking it out that entire time, but I’m also proud of my girls for sticking it out too.”

Alton was led by the sixth-grade duo of center Jarius Powers and point guard Kiyoko Proctor. Powers poured in 21 points and was 8-of-10 from the free throw line. Proctor, a quick, smooth ball-handler and shooter scored 19 points and drained two three-pointers. Hardimon, a power forward chipped in 12 points and was a constant force in the paint and on the glass.

Proctor and Powers have statistically been the leaders of the team for the vast majority of the season, but Harris insists it’s been a team effort all season long. The final two minutes of the game proved his point based on how other players had to fill in and ultimately got the job done.

“It’s sincerely been a team effort all season long,” Harris said. “We had big steals by some of our substitute players at the end of the game when they came in. You never know when your number is going to be called and it showed tonight that we got contributions from some of our subs in clutch situations. It worked out.”

Houlihan and Shelton combined for 46 of Troy’s 48 points. Shelton led all scorers with 26 and Shelton added 20, including knocking down three triples.

The Lady Redbirds set the tone early by roaring out to an 18-3 first quarter lead. They set up a devastating full-court press that caused turnovers, and if they couldn't knock down shots, then Hardimon and Powers used their height advantages to crash the boards.

Their pressure and length have been the bedrock of their overall dominance this season.

“We started with a full-court press,” Harris said. Off the tip-off’s we’ve a really good job of putting a lot of pressure on teams, and it’s been a pivotal part of our team's success.”

Troy weathered the storm in the second quarter, but still, Alton increased their lead to by 17 at 31-14 going into halftime. The Lady Redbirds led by as many as 18 points in the second half before the Trojans made their comeback attempt.

































