



Zupan scores 17, while Coleman hits 16 in CM's first boys basketball win of season over McGivney

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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GLEN CARBON – Bryce Zupan scored 17 points while Jacob Coleman had 16 to help Civic Memorial get their first win of the season Tuesday night, defeating Father McGivney Catholic 62-25 at the McGivney gym.

The Eagles were able to use good defense to force the Griffins into numerous turnovers that led to many baskets.

“I think defensively, more than anything, we were able to put them in positions where we can create some turnovers,” said CM coach Ross Laux. “I think most of all, we turned defense into offense, so that gave us more possessions. Get more possessions, most times, you get more points. Our defense was pretty good tonight.”

The Eagles were very successful with their full-court press, which helped create the turnovers.

“Yeah, especially when we come out, we put that full-court press on, that means we’re trying to our defense into offense,” Laux said. “Our boys did a really good job tonight. In the first quarter, I thought Father McGivney, I thought their players handled it really well, they ran a lot of time off the clock each possession, but I think we were just able to go a little deeper there, five in and five out, able to wear them down.”

Nine different players scored for CM in the game, including both Zupan and Coleman’s performances, and the idea was to keep fresh players in the game in order to wear down the Griffins.

“We wanted to keep our kids fresh,” Laux said, “so we’re playing 10 guys; that was part of the game plan. That way, we could wear them down with our press. It’s kind of what it came down to.”

The Griffins knew what to expect from the Eagles, but couldn’t execute their game plan well.

“We had what I thought was a pretty good game plan for that; we knew what they were going to play,” said McGivney coach Rich Beyers. “I mean, they’ve been doing the same thing now for three years to us. So there were no surprises out there, I just think our guys, unfortunately, didn’t execute the way that we wanted them to, and if we could have played from a little bit lower position and made passes. They’re long, so If we try to throw it over the top of them, we’re going to have a rough night. And unfortunately, we shot away from playing from a low position.”

The Griffins did have some open looks at the basket, but the shots didn’t drop for them. It’s been a problem for McGivney so far this season.

“That’s been kind of an issue for us all year, is that we haven’t shot the ball real well,” Beyers said. “We did do a nice job first possession of the game, we did everything just perfectly, the way that we wanted to. I told them ‘when you do things right, sometimes, the basketball gods shine down on you and make the ball go in, even if it bounces around four or five times.’ So that’s what happened on the first possession – we moved the ball, got it swung side to side, were patient and we had open shots that we could have taken early. But we were very patient, we got a nice drive, and the ball bounced into the hoop for us, and that was our game plan the entire time. But we kind of got away from that at times, too.”

That’s a key component of the Griffins’ game: Patience, slow the game down and look for the good shot.

“Yeah, just be patient,” Beyers said. “Against them, when we don’t shoot the ball that well, we’re never going to be a team that can go out there and get into a shooting contest with anybody. That’s gotta be what we do, is we’ve got to slow the game down, manage the clock, and hopefully, make our shots when we do get the opportunity. And hopefully, the other team misses some shots along the way, too.”

The Griffins did execute their offense perfectly in getting their first basket of the game, but the Eagles used their press effectively to take a 15-6 lead late in the period before a three-point play by Coleman and two free throws from Zupan gave CM a 20-6 lead at quarter time. The Eagles then opened the second with a 7-2 run, getting a three from Grant Lane and a pair of baskets from Coleman, while the Griffins got free throws from Andrew Dupy and Darren Luchetti. After that, the Eagles outscored McGivney 8-6, led by Coleman, Travis Hilligoss and Zupan to take a 35-16 lead at halftime.

The third quarter started with CM scoring the first four points on baskets by Coleman and Gage Thornton, while Kellen Weir countered for the Griffins. The Eagles then went on a 14-2 run for the remainder of the period, as Coleman and Zupan both scored, and were also aided by threes from both Zupan and Trey Hall. D.J. Villhard broke the string with a basket in the lane that made it 51-20, but a late basket from Noah Turbyfill made the score 53-20 after three, forcing a running clock in the fourth quarter.

The Eagles started the final term by scoring the first seven points, getting a pair of baskets from Zupan and a three from Hall to up the lead to 60-20. Villhard scored from underneath and then hit a three late to cut the lead to the final of 62-25.

Villhard led the Griffins with nine points, followed by Dupy and Nathan Cook, who had four points each.

The Eagles had a tough opening stretch, playing teams such as Highland, Granite City, and Marquette Catholic, among others. But the CM players always kept working hard and supporting each other.

“You know, we’ve had a heck of a first eight games, schedule-wise,” Laux said. “We had a tough schedule the first eight games. Hats off to our kids, because they never once thank going into practice, or after a game, or any situation they’ve been in, you thought they were 0-8. I don’t know, maybe they’re too young to really get down on themselves, but they’ve been battling in practice, they’ve been acting like they’re winning games, and they’ve been coming in and prepare like they just won their last game. That’s hard to do. Those losses start to stack up, and it’s hard to come into practice with the same energy after a loss as after a win. I think about it every day, we come in like we won our last game, ready to get better. So hats off to the kids in the program. We’ve got some really good kids, and they should keep getting better. But it feels good to get that first win, let me tell you.”

The McGivney players are also working hard in their practice sessions as well, always looking to get better.

“That’s one nice thing about the kids here ever since I’ve been the coach, is that the kids never give up,” Beyers said. “They play hard, they practice hard every day, they come to practice ready to go. We just talked about, you know. we’ve got to be more consistent and build better habits. That starts in practice and starts with some situational things that we get into, and if the boys can continue to not let things bombard them so that when we make one mistake, don’t let that second mistake happen. We talked about that after the game. Sometimes I think they think that when we get mad at them, they take it personally. And it’s nothing personal, it’s just that we want them to know what they did wrong, number one, and then, number two, not let it happen again. And they’re accepting of that; they’re all coachable kids. They listen to you, and they understand. You know, you go through all the different things after the game. Have you heard me say this, have you heard me say that? And they all raise their hands. They’re hearing what we’re saying, just not to the point where we’re applying what we are saying in games.”

The team’s chemistry is also still developing, and that takes time as well.

“Chemistry’s a big part of basketball,” Beyers said, “and I would say right now, with what we lost last year – last year’s team had some pretty good chemistry, actually, and we just fell short in a few games. I think there were several games where we actually in the game, had an opportunity to win, and we fell short. But this year, I feel like the chemistry is still taking a long time to get it there. It’s a mountain, so we’re trying to

climb it, and trying to fight all the way through, and we're not so worried about where we are right now, but hopefully, by the postseason, we're ready to go and we can give some teams a run for their money in the postseason."

The Eagles host Roxana on Friday night in their last game before playing in the Columbia-Freeburg Holiday Tournament next week. And Laux knows that his team will be ready to go.

"Well, now we celebrate this tonight, and then we forget about it tomorrow and we've gotta prepare for Roxana," Laux said. "I know their kids are looking at our record of 1-8, and licking their chops, thinking they can come into our place and get us. We've got to have two great days of practice, prepare for Roxana, and take care of business at home. It's not going to be an easy one. Roxana's going to give us their best game, so we've gotta give them our best game."

The Griffins host Hillsboro on Friday night, then go into the Vandalia Holiday Tournament, where they'll face good competition every night.

"You know, another game where we've got a home game against Hillsboro here," Beyers said, "and every game we go into, we feel like we can win. It's just a matter of executing and doing the little things at the end of the day. And the Vandalia tournament, I think we've got the seventh seed, so it's a very competitive tournament. Hillsboro's a 2A team, and we've got 2A teams mostly, some 1A teams in the Vandalia tournament, so it's a good challenge for us. One thing about our schedule is there are no opportunities for gimmes, that's for sure because CM is a 3A school, a bunch of 2A schools on the schedule. We do have a few 1A schools here and there, but by and large, I think we do a good job of scheduling good competition. Hopefully, that pays off for us, like I said, in the postseason."



[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)