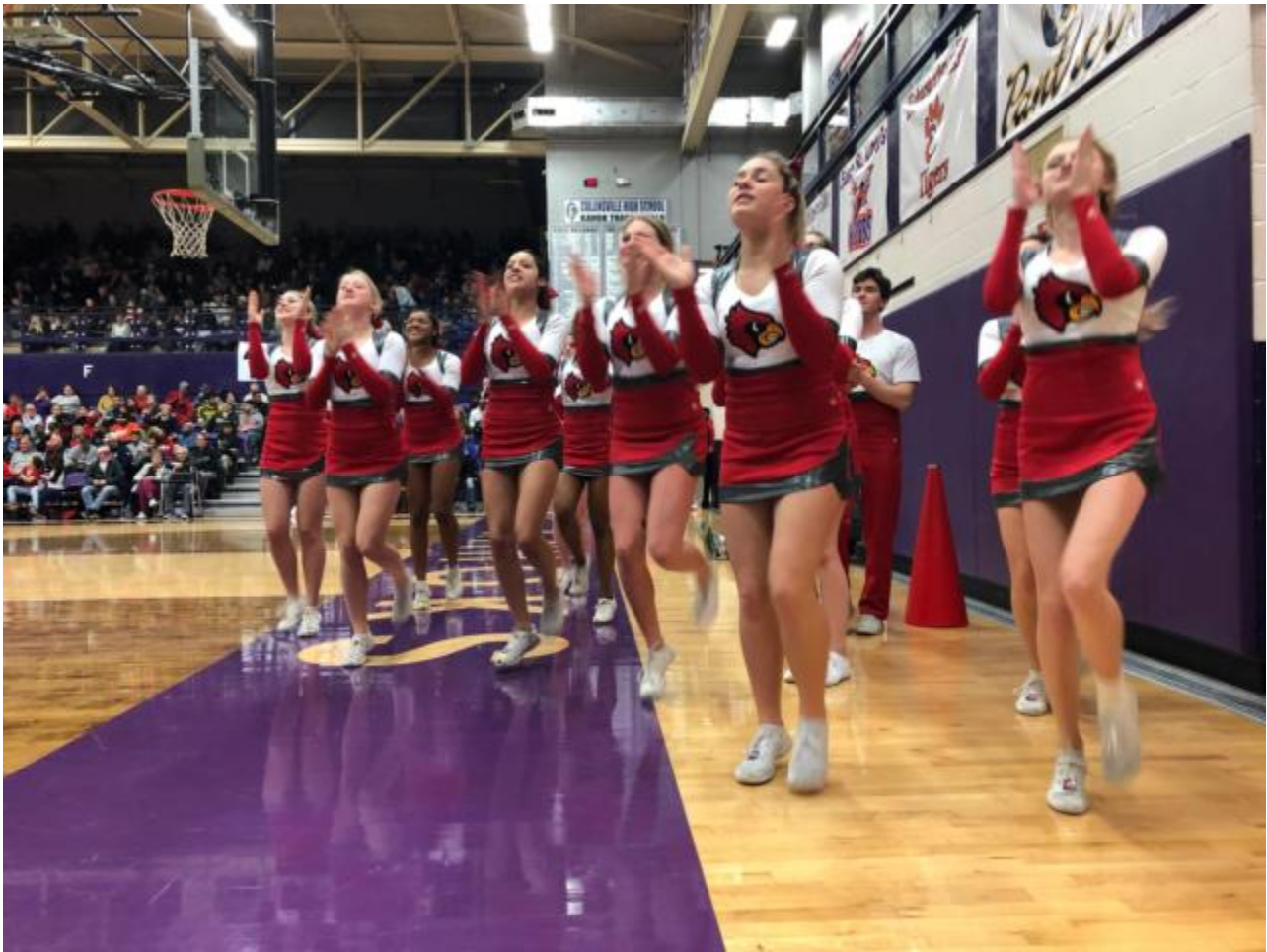


Clay Shines on Both Ends of Court, Scores 20, Taylor 10, as Redbirds Defeat Kahoks 58-48 to Advance

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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COLLINSVILLE – Donovan Clay shined on both ends of the court, leading all scorers with 20 points while holding Collinsville's Ray' Sean Taylor to 10 as Alton defeated Collinsville 58-48 to win the IHSA Class 4A boys basketball regional Friday night at Vergil Fletcher Gym.

The Redbirds used a great team effort on both ends to win the rubber game between the two teams, having split their two games in the Southwestern Conference in the regular season.

Collinsville had defeated Alton in the second game in February, but there were some slight differences in this game that helped the Redbirds to the win.

"We did the same thing that we did against them last time defensively," said Alton head coach Eric Smith. We rebounded the ball better. You know, last time, I think we got caught up in too much of the extra stuff like they took us out of our game a little bit, and

we weren't necessarily worried about things that were going to help us win a basketball game. We kept our composure a little bit better this time. I mean, we always tell our kids that we're good enough basketball players, that if they play hard, we've always got a shot. And we've been in every game this year, because we played hard, and they did the same thing tonight.

"Offensively, we struggled doing some stuff for a while," Smith continued, "and at the beginning of the game, we didn't shoot it very well, but we played our tails off."

Defensively, the Redbirds did so a better job of helping out, which was also a key to the win.

"We did do a little bit better helping," Smith said. "Last time, they set a ball screen, we didn't necessarily really do what we wanted the last time, and the other guys were a little more involved in helping Don, instead of him just trying to do it on his own tonight."

Guarding the other team's best player is something that Clay takes a lot of pride in, along with his offensive skills.

"Yeah," Smith said with a laugh. "The thing that helps him out is that he's a talented offensive player, and he's willing to play on the defensive end. He had a little stretch a couple of years ago where (an Alton assistant coach) kind of pushed him to be the defensive stopper, and he's carried that through the rest of his career. He's always taken pride in guarding the other team's best player, and we need him to do that."

And when the Kahoks changed defenses to slow the pace of the game down, Alton was able to adjust to that very well.

"We told our kids that if we rebound, don't turn the ball over, play hard, we'll win the game," Smith said. "And until the last two minutes, we really didn't have any issue with turnovers. So, I mean, the kids did it, and incredible job with it."

And in holding Taylor, one of the St. Louis area's top scorers, who was averaging 21 points-per-game coming in, was a big team effort.

"It was probably one of our better team efforts that we've had tonight," Smith said. "Everybody pitched in, but we've done a really nice job against him in some other games, but we wouldn't rebound and finish out possessions, and for the most part, I thought getting stops included finishing out a possession by getting a rebound, and I thought we did that really well tonight."

The Kahoks battled for the entire game, and Collinsville coach Darin Lee gave credit to the Redbirds.

“We battled, but they’re a very good team,” Lee said. “That’s all there is to it.”

Lee also gave credit for Alton’s defensive effort.

“They did a nice job,” Lee said. “They’re long, but the only thing they’re not great at is post defense, but everything else is very good. We just couldn’t get enough post touches.”

The Kahoks finished 27-6 on the year, and Lee was very proud of his team on their season.

“Yeah, 27 wins is a lot of wins,” Lee said. “It’s the most we’ve had in a long time here, so yeah, we had a heck of a season. I don’t think people thought we’d win that many games.”

Looking ahead, Collinsville, who started four juniors in the game, lose only two key seniors, Zane Baker and Marshall Harrison, and will bring back a very talented roster, including Taylor, Cawhan Smith, and Keydrian Jones, among others, and the future looks very good.

“We’ll be pretty good,” Lee said. “We’ve got everybody back, but two seniors played, Marshall Harrison and Zane Baker, and we’ve got everybody back.”

It was a season that upheld the great Collinsville basketball tradition very well.

“It did,” Lee said. “We had a lot of fans coming to watch us play. We had a tremendous season. We’d like to have played a little better tonight, but we had a great season.”

The game started a little bit slow, as both teams missed some shots, and it was Smith who scored the first basket to give the Kahoks a 2-0 lead. The two teams traded baskets to make it 4-4, and it was here that the Redbirds made the game’s first run, going 7-2 on a three from Malik Smith, a Moory Woods drive and a dunk from Clay, sandwiched around a Lorent Dzelandini basket to make it 11-6. A Smith three-point play cut the lead to 11-9, but Alton then a basket in the land from Clay and a three from Andrew Jones to make it 16-9. Free throws from both teams made the score 17-12 for the Redbirds after one period.

Clay got the first basket of the second quarter to make it 19-12, but then Smith hit on a three-point play, and Jones hit inside to cut the lead to 19-17, with Taylor hitting on a

bank to tie the game 19-19. Josh Rivers hit a three to give the Redbirds the lead back, then Clay hit in the lane again to extend the lead to 24-19. A basket in traffic by Jones and a free throw from Harrison pulled the Kahoks to within 24-22, but a Woods basket, along with two free throws and a baseline three from Clay gave the Redbirds its biggest lead of the half at 31-22. Taylor connected on a free throw and a floater in the lane to cut to cut the Alton advantage to 31-25 at halftime.

The two teams traded baskets to start the second half before a three from Taylor made it 33-30 for Alton. Clay countered with a three of his own to extend the lead to six, causing the Kahoks to call time out. The two teams then exchanged baskets, and on an inbound play coming out of a Collinsville time out, Woods stole the pass and dunked to make it 40-32 and send the Redbird supporters wild with delight. A basket and free throw from Jones cut the Redbird lead to 40-35 at the end of the third quarter.

Smith came through the lane to score the first basket of the fourth quarter to make it 42-35, and after a Jones free throw, Woods scored on a reverse, Izeal Terrell scored off a great pass inside, and after a steal, Clay dunked on an alley-oop pass to make it 48-36, forcing another time out by Collinsville and putting the Redbird fans into dreamland. Clay dunked again off a breakaway, and after that, the Kahoks did outscore Alton 12-8, but couldn't get any closer than eight. Rivers put the exclamation point on with a dunk before the buzzer to make the final score 58-48.

Besides Clay, Malik Smith had 12 points for Alton, while Woods, Andrew Jones, and Rivers scored eight each. Both Taylor and Jones had 10 points each for Collinsville, while Harrison had eight.

The Redbirds are now 22-9 and will face Belleville West, who won their own regional with a 52-43 win over Chatham Glenwood, in the East Moline United sectional on Tuesday night, with the game to be played at Edwardsville's Lucco-Jackson Gym in a 7 p.m. tip-off.

"It'll be fun," Smith said. "Our kids look forward to it. It's been a good rivalry this year. It'll be fun."





[Chris Rhodes also contributed to this story.](#)