

Alton Plays Well Defensively, But Shots Fail To Drop As Redbirds Lose To Lincoln In Opening Round Of Collinsville Holiday Classic 35-17

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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COLLINSVILLE - Alton put together a very good defensive effort, holding Lincoln to 35 points, and offensively, ran good plays and had the right players taking good shots.

Unfortunately, the shots didn't fall into the basket, and it was the difference as the Redbirds lost to the Railsplitters 35-17 in the opening round of the 37th Prairie Farms Collinsville Holiday Classic boys basketball tournament Monday afternoon at Vergil Fletcher Gym.

Alton scored four points in the second quarter after being shut out in the first, and scored 13 points in the second half as the team showed much resilience and kept plugging away.

"The kids are playing hard, and they're very coachable," said Redbird head coach Eric McCrary, "and working. Shots just didn't fall. I thought the right guys got great looks and they just didn't drop. Sometimes, that happens. We got the ball where we wanted it, with guys we wanted to have it, and we just didn't make shots today. Defensively, holding them to 35 points in a game is outstanding. Our defensive effort was great, and we just couldn't get anything to fall."

The Redbirds played very well defensively, and McCrary was very proud of his team for that.

"All year, these guys have been guarding so well, half-court especially," McCrary said. "We have spells where we have trouble scoring, and can make things a little difficult for us. It puts a lot of pressure on our defense, but they've been battling and competing and our half-court defense is tough. I thought we did a great job cleaning up a lot of things, our turnovers were down, we didn't give up easy baskets because of our turnovers, so that's a huge positive going forward. I told the guys the best thing about tournaments is you get to play now tomorrow. So, we don't have four or five days to sit and dwell on this and feel sorry for ourselves. We've got to get ready to go tomorrow, and we have two tomorrow. The goal is to get two W's, The good thing is we get to wash this off quickly and get back at it."





The defenses controlled the first half of the opening period before Payton Cook tipped in a missed three with 4:10 left in the quarter to give Lincoln a 2-0 lead. A three from Elijah Pollice and another Cook basket gave the Railers a 7-0 lead after the first quarter, which Camden Nelson expanded with eight straight points to double Lincoln's lead to 15-0 early in the second quarter. The Redbirds got on the board with 4:26 left in the first half on a three from Adrian Elliott, but Nelson stayed hot for the Railers, hitting two more threes on the side, while a Pollice basket before the buzzer gave Lincoln a 23-4 lead at halftime.

Roger Elliott scored at the start of the third quarter to cut the lead to 23-6, then Lincoln went on a 9-0 run, with a three from Tyler Sasse, along with baskets from Cook giving the Railers a 32-6 lead before a pair of free throws from Adrian Elliott cut the lead to 32-8 at three-quarter time. A Roger Elliott three at the start of the fourth quarter put the Redbirds into double figures at 32-11, and from there, a free throw from Noah Hardin, a three from Blake Hall and a basket near the end by Jeremiah Van Zandt helped make the final score 35-17 Lincoln.

Both Adrian and Roger Elliott led Alton with five points each, while Hall had four points, Van Zandt scored two points and Alex Macias had a single point. Nelson led the Railers with 12 points, while Cook added 10, Pollice scored seven points, Sasse had three points, Drew Hayes had two points and Jaden Klopp had one point.

Both teams play at 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday, with the Railers meeting Quincy, while the Redbirds face Belleville Althoff Catholic in the consolation quarterfinals. McCrary does feel that the Redbirds will be turning the corner sooner rather than later.

"You know, the kids are doing everything they're asked," McCrary said. "They're buying in, they're working so hard, they're getting better. I try to tell them this all the time, that the scoreboard doesn't always reflect this. But we are getting leaps and bounds better every week, every game. It doesn't always reflect that on the scoreboard, but lots of little things just improving every day, every game. I can't ask for a better group of guys to work with. Like I said today, we just didn't make shots, and that's just how it goes sometimes."





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