

Triad Punches First, But East Side Runs Away To Second-Straight Sectional Championship

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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CENTRALIA – The East St. Louis High School boys basketball team has now won back-to-back Sectional Championships.

“It speaks a lot for our program,” Flyers’ head coach Mark Chambers said. “We’re working really hard to put a good product on the floor and build young men of character and I’m just thankful that I’m able to coach these guys.”

A 53-28 win over the Triad Knights set up a Super-Sectional rematch with Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin on Monday, March 6 at 7:30 p.m. from the Bank of Springfield Center.

The game Friday night was mostly Triad in the early goings. They were up 12-10 after the first quarter before going on a quick 7-0 run to lead 19-10 early on in the second.

But thanks to a couple of baskets from Macaleab Rich and a D’Necco Rucker three, the Flyers stormed back and led 21-19 at the half.

East Side pushed the pace in the second half and took over offensively. Thanks to some good three-point shooting from Rucker and Antwan Robinson the Flyers pushed the envelope to 40-26 after three.

Rich opened the fourth with a basket before Triad’s Jake Stewart hit back-to-back threes to bring the game to 42-32 East St. Louis.

Triad tried, but the Flyers used their height and speed all night and put the game to bed after a couple of dunks from Rich and some free throws.

“We turned it up on the defensive end,” Chambers said about his team’s second-half performance. “They really attacked us from the beginning. They were the aggressor. They knew they had to come out and punch us first and they did, but we withstood it.”

“I think tonight we came out and attacked them early and gave them our best shot,” Triad head coach Jeff Guidry said. “At the end of the day, their size overwhelmed us at times, their length and speed and stuff like that, but I can’t fault our effort.”

East St. Louis improves to 24-8 and is now just three wins away from a state championship.

The Knights end an impressive season at 28-7 after winning the regular season conference title and a regional over Jerseyville.

Rich led all scorers with 23 points. Robinson added nine and Rucker had eight.

As for Triad, McGrady Noyes and Aydin Hitt each scored 10. Stewart and Drew Winslow each scored eight.

The Flyers have a Super-Sectional rematch with Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin coming up. East Side lost to them this time last year by a score of 60-50.

Chambers and the team look forward to it and the chance at getting back to the state tournament.

“Three more wins, one at a time,” he said. “We’re going to celebrate this one for a little bit and get ready for that next one.”