

Alton Embracing Tough Schedule - Redbirds Coast Past Chatham Glenwood And Move To 16-0

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
January 5 2024 10:10 AM



ALTON - As of late, the Redbirds have been calling the greater Chicago area their home.

Alton head coach Deserea Howard made one thing clear before the season even started. She wanted a tougher schedule.

So, she went out and made one.

"There's a lot of competition in Chicago; a lot of good shootouts, a lot of good showcases," Howard said. "More importantly we're seeing some teams that we don't see all the time, which is forcing them to stay on their toes, keep thinking, and keep pushing themselves."

Last year at Mascoutah the Redbirds saw Class 1A power Okawville and Class 3A and conference rival O'Fallon. Some great competition, but a little repetitive since they would then see some of those same teams a month later at the Highland Shootout.

Alton played Okawville twice last year, Mater Dei twice, and O'Fallon four times.



Alton recently replaced its typical Mascoutah Holiday Tournament for a more enticing tourney in Morton. Up there, the Redbirds, [ranked No. 2 in the latest AP polls](#), saw other state-ranked teams, and came out the other side victorious.

They took on Peoria Notre Dame (No. 4 Class 2A) in the tournament semifinals before playing Batavia (No. 8 Class 4A) in the championship. Before that the Redbirds played Marist and Geneva, two teams they would never would have come across if not for switching things up.

Now, the Redbirds head north again for two games in the Grow The Game Shootout.

Alton plays Chicago Whitney Young which was ranked No. 6 in Class 4A in the [initial AP rankings](#) last month, but it has since fallen outside the top 10. Then Alton plays Notre Dame Academy of Green Bay, Wisconsin, a three-time defending state champion that's amassed a record of 98-4 from 2020 until now.

Those games will be played at Glenbard West and Hinsdale Central today and tomorrow, Dec. 5th and 6th.



"I mean last year, we saw everyone in this area pretty much," Howard said. "We go up there, we see the big teams in the Chicago area, we come home, and we're No. 2 in the

AP polls. So, it helps us to go up there and let people see us, and see that we are the real deal, but it also helps us with our confidence to know that we can play."

So, Alton used Thursday night's game against Chatham Glenwood as a bit of a tune up. In the Redbirds' first home game in nearly a month, they beat the Titans 67-35 and continued to switch things up.

"This was the plan tonight, we wanted to try different things," Howard said. "We wanted different looks. We know what we look like in certain settings, so we wanted to kind of switch it up and see what happens if we had to play different lineups."

According to her, the Redbirds are beginning to learn some things on the fly.

"Things are clicking and it's showing on the floor as fast as we're teaching it. We knew we would have some ups and downs with Glenwood, that's kind of what we wanted to push ourselves, test some things before we go to Chicago."

Against Chatham Glenwood Thursday night, Kiyoko Proctor celebrated her [1,000th career point](#) and finished the night with 21 points. She was one of four Redbirds to score in double figures.

Alyssa Lewis and Jarius Powers each scored 14 points while Talia Norman scored 12.

The Redbirds embraced the challenge of this season's tough schedule, and things are working out exactly how Howard would have hoped.

"I think they like it tough," she said. "They like it when we have big things in front of us. It makes them work harder in practice. It's easier to push them when they know this matters."



It won't get much easier when the Redbirds transition back into Southwestern Conference action before a Feb. 3 date with Lincoln, the No. 1 team in Class 3A and undefeated at 17-0.

Howard realizes that her Redbirds once again have a target on their back now sitting at 16-0. Last season Alton got up to 24-0 before suffering its first loss to O'Fallon on Jan. 26.

"I think practices are more intense," Howard said. "We know that we're everybody's target, but this time we're not just focused on one single thing. We're really pushing each other to stay ahead. We're not running away, we're not trying to back down to anything. Being the target really allows us to push them hard in practice."

And she says that her girls are starting to like being the target.

"I think this year they like it better than last year. They understand what it is and they don't feel like victims. Instead, there's privilege to the amount of pressure they have."

