

# Alton Gets Past Okawville At Highland Tourney Setting Up Semifinal Against Upset-Minded Nashville

by Bradley Piros, Reporter  
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**HIGHLAND** – It wasn't a perfect game for the Alton Lady Redbirds, but they got the job done.

State-ranked Alton (No. 3 Class 4A) defeated Okawville (No. 6 Class 1A) in the quarterfinals of the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Highland tournament by a score of 45-29.

It was a rematch of last year's tournament championship, a game Alton won 54-38. Okawville had the last laugh going on to win the Class 1A state title.

On Monday night, the Redbirds came out firing, scoring the first three baskets to go ahead 6-0. Alayna Kraus went the other way and drilled a three to cut the deficit in half, but Kiyoko Proctor answered right back with a three of her own.

Alton led 11-4 after the first quarter.

Talia Norman scored followed by a three from Alyssa Lewis to open the second quarter en route to an 18-11 halftime lead.

Okawville started the second half on a 6-2 run to try and get back in it.

Caroline Tepe and Kraus would score back-to-back baskets to make it 21-17, forcing Alton head coach Deserea Howard into a full timeout.

She thought that her girls weren't as focused as they should have been.

"A lot going on," she said. "I think just mentally, we've got to focus. It's weird, no school all day, laying around. I could see the energy before the game, not really ready to go. We've got to understand that every game we have to bring it."



Coming out of the timeout, the Redbirds ended the third quarter on a 10-2 run with threes from Proctor and Aryanna Anthony to go up 31-19 after three.

From there, Alton remained in control despite Kraus' best efforts in the final quarter.

Kraus scored eight of her team's 11 points in the first half on her way to finishing with a team-high 17.

"Anytime Alayna's on the floor, you better be ready to play," Howard said.

"She can score. I feel like Alayna can score go for 30 or 40 any night," she continued. "Our goal was to hold her under 20. I think we probably could have done better. We were kind of sloppy switching off when we needed to switch off."

Kraus scored 17 points in a 57-50 win over Civic Memorial in the opening round.

Proctor led the Redbirds with 14 while Jarius Powers, fresh off eclipsing the 1,000<sup>th</sup> career point against Belleville West, scored 10 against the Rockets.

In the end for Alton, a win is still a win as it improves to 21-1 on the season.

"The ugly ones still count," Howard said. "Especially in a tournament where you're just trying to survive until the next day. We could easily be in the losers bracket with the way we came out in the first half."

Alton moves to the semifinals on Wednesday, Jan. 17 at 8 p.m. against Nashville, a shocking 63-56 winner over the defending Class 4A state champs O'Fallon in their quarterfinal.





Many people, including Howard, wanted to see a big Southwestern Conference showdown in the semis, but it wasn't meant to be. The two will have to wait until their second conference meeting on Thursday, Jan. 25 at 7:30 p.m. in Alton.

The Hornets improved to 20-2 on the season, with losses only coming against Breese Central and O'Fallon in the Mascoutah Holiday Tournament. They have since won six straight and are ranked No. 5 in Class 2A in the latest state polls.