

Lady Eagles Fall Short Against Carlyle At EAWR State Farm Shootout

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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WOOD RIVER - The CM Lady Eagles and Carlyle Indians kicked open the East Alton-Wood River State Farm Shootout with a bang Saturday afternoon.

They were the first of six games scheduled on the day, and it was one of the more intriguing matchups.

CM, who had just fell out of the IHSA Class 3A rankings for the first time all season, was trying to bounce back after a close loss to Waterloo the night before.

The Eagles were tasked in beating Carlyle, the No. 9 ranked team in Class 2A in the latest AP polls.

The Indians rallied from a 10-point deficit to win 57-50 over CM, improving to 25-2. The Eagles lost their third straight game and fell to 22-8.

Carlyle's Sophia Hoffman opened the game with a three-pointer as the Indians got out to a quick 8-2 lead.

Marlee Durbin drained a couple of threes, but CM still trailed 16-12 after the first quarter.

The second quarter was an entirely different story. The Eagles outscored Carlyle 14-2 during that frame, erasing the deficit and instead going ahead 26-18 at halftime.

CM made it a 10-point lead at 38-28, but the Indians started to chip away, eventually taking a 36-35 lead after three quarters.

Avari Combes connected from deep to make it 38-36 CM to kick open the fourth, but the Indians took the lead right back with a three from Hoffman and another basket from Lera Schmeink.

Right after that Combes hit the floor and seemed to be in a lot of pain holding her left knee. CM fans held their breath, not wanting to see a seventh player in seven years go down to a torn ACL.

But it was good news to see her walking back to the bench on her own accord later on in the fourth quarter. She never returned to the game. Head coach Mike Arbuthnot said that she just twisted her knee awkwardly and should be just fine.

Without her in the game, the Indians went on nine-point run to push the lead to 50-38. The 12-point lead was too much to overcome as Carlyle made its free-throws late to keep the Eagles at bay and pick up the win.

CM, a team that likes to shoot the three, made nine, which is what it averages this season. But Carlyle kept pace with seven, five of which came in the second half.

"I thought we did a pretty good job in that first half neutralizing a lot of those things, but second half, our rotations weren't as good," Arbuthnot said. "They were able to put in a couple of shooters."

Hoffman was one of those shooters. After scoring the games first basket, she didn't score again in the first half. Instead, she scored 16 points in the second half, finishing with 19, leading her team.

Schmeink had 14 points and Emma Meyer had 12.

For CM, Durbin scored 11 points while Combes and Reagan Twente each scored 10.

Avery Huddleston had seven, Gracie Miller had five, Allie Truetzschler had four, and Belle Edwards had three.

"I thought our kids gave a great effort today," Arbuthnot said. "I thought we really played well, really played hard."

The Eagles have one more regular season game remaining at Highland on Friday, Feb. 9 at 6 p.m.

CM was once 19-3 as of Jan. 12. Since then it's gone 3-6.

"It hasn't been a good two weeks for us," Arbuthnot said, "but like I told the kids, I've seen teams that have been on 15-game winning streaks go into postseason and lose their first game. I've seen teams that lost eight of their last nine go win a regional. Until they throw it up on Monday, you don't know what's going to transpire."

The loss to Waterloo on Friday mathematically eliminated CM from the Mississippi Valley Conference title race. And the postseason brackets are already out as well, so Friday's game at Highland is mainly for pride.

"We want to obviously get ourselves set for a first-round regional game and we want to go to Highland Friday night and compete like heck with them," Arbuthnot said.

After Highland, its playoff time.

The Eagles were given the No. 3 seed in their respected sub-sectional. They'll take on No. 5 seeded Centralia on Monday, Feb. 12 at 7:30 p.m. in Salem.

Highland was given the No. 1 seed on the other side of the bracket. The Bulldogs will play at No. 9 Charleston on Tuesday, Feb. 13 at 6 p.m.