

Griffins' Comeback Falls Short Against Althoff - Crusaders Win First GMC Title Out Right

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
February 8 2024 9:09 AM



GLEN CARBON - The task was simple Wednesday night for the Father McGivney Griffins.

If they beat Althoff, they'd split the conference title with them. If the Crusaders won, they'd win the conference out right.

Well the Crusaders did exactly that in a 42-38 win at Father McGivney, finishing the Gateway Metro Conference a perfect 10-0. In Althoff's first year in the GMC, it won the title outright.

"That was one of my biggest goals at the beginning of the season, to win the conference," Althoff head coach Bruce Romine said. "I think every year you want to win the conference, but being the first time, it's very important to me and the girls are very excited about it."

This was the Griffins' second loss to the Crusaders this season, falling by a score of 46-41 back on Dec. 11 in Belleville.

McGivney finishes the regular season at 21-10 and 8-2 in the GMC.

Before Althoff's arrival in the GMC, the Griffins won the title outright last season, going a perfect 10-0.

Wednesday's game was very back and forth early on.

Devin Ellis got the game started with a basket, followed with an answer from Althoff's Kamora Davis. Davis scored her team's first eight points as the teams swapped the lead five straight times.

Emilee Travnicek basket made it 10-7 Althoff before Izzy Vernasky's basket cut the lead to 10-9 after the first quarter.

From then on, McGivney wouldn't lead again, still trailing 18-14 at halftime.

That first half scoreline could have easily been reversed, but the Griffins struggled from the free throw line, shooting 2 of 12 in the first half.

"We were a little sluggish," McGivney head coach Jeff Oller said.

"Credit to Althoff, they're big, they got us sped up a lot. We forced a lot of passes. You've got to take advantage of your opportunities when you get them. There was a lot of missed layups and obviously free throws."

Then, it was a third quarter that the Griffins want to soon forget. McGivney got outscored 9-0 in the third quarter, as the Crusaders grew their lead to 27-14 after three.

"You can't go a quarter without scoring," Oller said.

"I think they scored nine, so it wasn't like they were going off offensively, but I think it impacted our defense and rebounding. That's something that can't happen and you hope it's something we can learn from moving forward in the postseason."

But, McGivney went on a mad dash to finish out the game, outscoring Althoff 24-15 in the final frame to make it a four-point game.

"We were talking pregame, every possession matters, especially this time of the year," Oller said.

"You have to bring it all four quarters and I thought we brought it at the end of the fourth, but it takes more than that to beat a team like that."

The Crusaders were grateful to get out of there with the win.

"I hoped to beat them," Romine said. "I hoped to beat them twice in a season. I wouldn't say I expected it."

"They are so good," Romine continued on about the Griffins. "Whenever we were up by whatever we were up by towards the end, I was not comfortable. I think it was double digits and two minutes left, but they just keep coming. They're just a really really good team, really well coached."

Travnicek was the game's leading scorer with 13 points while Davis added 12 and Anna Brewer had nine for the Crusaders.

Emily Johnson led McGivney with 10 points, nine of which came in the fourth quarter. Natalie Beck had eight and Sami Oller added seven.

Now the focus turns toward the postseason for both of these teams.

Althoff, in Class 2A is in the daunting Nashville Sectional. Seeded No. 6, the Crusaders host No. 10-seeded Trenton-Wesclin on Saturday, Feb. 10 at 1 p.m. The winner of that game will play the No. 2-seeded Nashville Hornets on Tuesday, Feb. 13 at 6 p.m.

The Griffins, in Class 1A, are seeded No. 2 in their sub-sectional behind top-seeded Hardin Calhoun. McGivney awaits the winner between No. 9-seeded Mt. Olive and No. 11 Dupo. The Griffins will play the winner on Monday, Feb. 12 at 6 p.m. in Mt. Olive.

"Moving forward everybody's 0-0. If you lose, you're done," coach Oller said.

"But, they understand the finality of where it is now. That was the last home game for our seniors, that's the end of the regular season, they did a lot of great things, but there's still a chance to do something special. They can. They have the capability to do it."