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SPORTS

Marion Giants win second regional title in three seasons

By Sean Douglas

Friday night’s regional championship between Marion and East Noble was nearly a carbon copy of Marion’s contest with Delta.

While the offense looked to find their footing, the defense set the tone early. The offense then found their groove, particularly in the running game, to give the Giants a commanding lead.

Finally, in crunch time, several of the Giants’ big-time players made key plays in crucial situations to help put the game away.

This is what championship football teams do, and on a cold night in Kendallville, the Giants put together another champi-

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The Giants with their fourth regional championship trophy after defeating East Noble on Friday night. Photo by Sean Douglas

Eastbrook shines on both ends of floor

By Sean Douglas

While the Eastbrook Panthers did win a sectional championship due to their stellar defensive play in 2019-2020, their lack of confidence in their offensive abilities proved costly in several of their contests last season and again in their season opener this year against Fort Wayne Blackhawk.

However, on Tuesday night against Eastern, the Panthers showed that when they are on their game offensively, combined with their stalwart defense, they will be a tough team to contend with.

The defense set the tone early, the offense clicked from start to finish, and the Panthers earned their first win in resounding fashion with an 81-27 rout of the Comets.

“I saw a lot of confidence from the start of the game tonight on both ends of the court, particularly on the offensive end,” Eastbrook Head Coach Jeff Liddick said. “After Thursday’s game, I did some thinking and did some talking with our coaches, and we were like, ‘We have to build some confidence in these girls’ shots.’ We really broke the shot down, and you can see it throughout practice that the



Sehdah McKim goes up strong in the post, drawing the foul.

Photo by Sean Douglas

girls are gaining that confidence.”

For the game, Eastbrook shot a scorching 31-of-50 from the field (62 percent), including six-of-12 (50 percent) from beyond the arc as the Panthers put together one of their best offensive performances in recent memory. In the second and third quarter alone, the Panthers knocked down 22 field goals attempts.

“Tonight, it really

showed,” Liddick said. “At halftime, we were shooting 62 percent from the field. Going into the fourth quarter, we were shooting 69 percent. Obviously, in practice, we are doing something right to create that confidence, and we want to continue to do that.

“We were catching the ball, squaring up, seeing what was there, then attacking and kicking it to open teammates. We were just

doing little things so much better. Were they perfect? Absolutely not. We still have a long way to go and a long way to improve, but compared to last Thursday, I couldn’t be more pleased as a coach in the difference, especially in our younger girls.”

Freshman Sophia Morrison, after not scoring a single point against Blackhawk, could not miss against Eastern. After missing her first

shot, Morrison knocked down 10 straight, including all four of her attempts from the perimeter, to lead the Panthers with 26 points in just her second varsity contest.

“She missed that first one, and we told her, ‘You’re falling back and finishing low. That’s why it’s flat. Finish high and go straight up like you do in practice.’ That second shot [sparked her.] She hit 10 in a row after that.”

Three other Panthers finished in double figures. Sehdah McKim dominated the glass, collecting a double-double with 13 points and 14 rebounds, Rachel Manning finished with 12, 10 of which came in the third quarter, and Kirstin Goff added 11 points and four rebounds.

The contest got off to a slow start, as the two teams combined to score just 10 points in the opening 3:20. However, after Eastern’s Jacey Richmond with 4:40 remaining in the first quarter, the Eastbrook defense took control.

Over the course of the next 12 minutes, a quarter-and-a-half of basketball, the Panthers held the Comets to just one point, forcing 13 turnovers in the process.

Those turnovers led to several easy looks from the Pan-

thers, who outscored the Comets 42-1 from the middle of the first quarter through the end of the second to turn a 6-4 deficit into a 46-7 half-time lead.

The Panthers kept the pedal down in the second half, continuing to pressure the Comets defensively while knocking down their shots from all over the floor. Eastbrook led by as many as 56 points in the second half before settling for the eventual 54-point triumph.

“I thought our defensive effort last week against Blackhawk...we were just going through the motions. Instead of moving on the pass, we were moving on the catch, and we were getting to closeouts late,” Liddick said. “We were moving, and we were there on the catch [tonight.] When they had girls catching the ball, we had somebody there closing out on them, putting the pressure on, and really challenging them on the offensive end.”

For the game, the Panthers held Eastern to nine-of-40 from the field, including a woeful two-of-20 in the first two quarters.

Eastbrook will be back in action on Wednesday, November 18 when they travel to Northfield.