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SPORTS

Indians drop season opener to Fort Wayne North

By Sean Douglas

On their Thanksgiving Eve home opener, the Mississinewa Indians successfully followed their gameplan against a highly athletic and skilled Fort Wayne North squad, leading for most of the opening three quarters. However, the Indians were never able to put the game away, and that proved costly, as the Legends used a 27-point fourth quarter to defeat the Indians 77-73 at Fredenberger Court. Leading 54-50 after the third quarter, the Indians struggled to knock down their shots in the fourth and were outmuscled on the boards, resulting in a plethora of second-chance opportunities. For the game, the Legends collected 10 offensive boards, and outscored the Indians 27-19 in the final frame to secure the victory. “I think this was a game of letting a team stay too close to us,” Mississinewa Head Coach James Reed said. “We are a young team,

so we still have to figure out the kinks of timing and offense, and when we need a good possession [after] losing our rhythm on the defensive end, we need to take our time. I was really proud of our guys with how they fought, but we have to make sure it’s not a game at the end of the game.” Even though the Indians won the rebounding battle, 30-29, the Legends came away with the important rebounds at crucial stages in the contest, which allowed them to keep the game close and, ultimately, take control in its latter stages. “It all broke down to rebounding. We won the rebounding battle, but they got the key ones, the offensive rebounds that really, really hurt,” Reed said. “We had talked about rebounding every day for the past week. We knew that was where we needed to focus. And we didn’t execute that part of the plan tonight.” Despite the tough loss, Landen Swanner played the best game of his career, shining in every facet of his

game. He finished with a career-high 34 points, knocking down shots from all over the floor, while also collecting six rebounds. After scoring 14 points in the first quarter, he scored 12 in the fourth, helping the Indians get back into the contest late. “Landen is going to have a fantastic season,” Reed said. “He’s just getting started. I was so happy that we could count on him to get the ball in the post and draw those fouls and execute. I’ve got to put him in more situations to be successful.” Fort Wayne North opened the scoring with a triple, but Swanner’s 14-point burst helped the Indians take a 20-15 lead after the first quarter of play. While the Indians never created much separation in the second quarter, leading by seven points or less the entire stanza, they did not give up the lead. McClung scored seven of his 11 points in the frame, while

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Eastbrook shines on both ends in double-digit triumph over Cowan

By Sean Douglas



Coming off tough defeats at the hands of the Northfield Norse and the Bluffton Tigers, Eastbrook Head Coach Jeff Liddick knew that changes needed to be made. Over the weekend as he prepared for the Panthers’ contest against Cowan, Liddick went through his entire roster one-by-one, establishing set roles for each player and what is to be expected from them throughout the rest of the season. The players, after talking with Liddick, accepted these new roles, and came back to practice this week with a renewed focus and vigor. “I had sit-down conversations with every girl on the varsity, and at practice, we saw things that were a lot better than they had been.” Liddick said. “I’m just really proud.” On Tuesday evening, the Panthers put together an im-

pressive performance, using strong starts in the first and third quarters, a stout offensive showing, and a sturdy defensive effort to defeat the Blackhawks 51-35. “I saw a different team tonight,” Liddick said. “It was the team that we saw against Eastern...and then, tonight, that team showed back up. I think you can attribute that to the girls just playing within themselves, not trying to do too much, just doing what they are capable of doing and allowing the other four girls on the court to do the same. When you do that, typically, things go well for you. And that’s what happened tonight.” Eastbrook wasted little time, racing out to a 13-2

“I liked the way we played together tonight.”

Jeff Liddick Eastbrook Head Coach

lead in the first quarter to take the early advantage. However, the Blackhawks battled back in the second quarter. Cowan star Kaylee Kear broke Eastbrook’s zone defense with some quality looks inside as the Blackhawks outscored the Panthers 11-7 and cut their lead to 20-13 at halftime. However, in the second half, the Panthers switched tactics, electing to play man-to-man defense for the first time all season. The adjustment worked, as Eastbrook opened the second half on an 18-9 run and took

control of the contest the rest of the way. “After seeing it, we are probably a better man-to-man team than I thought we were,” Liddick said. “We hadn’t practiced a whole lot of man, but we told the girls to match up. Sehдах [McKim] did a great job in the third quarter on [Kear]. Rachel [Manning] did a great job on [Cowan guard Lauren Smith.] Defensively, if we can mix it up like that now, I think it’s going to cause some problems for some teams.” Sophia Morrison continued to make her mark as one of

the top freshmen basketball players in Grant County, leading the Panthers with 19 points on seven-of-10 shooting from the field. Just five games into her varsity career, Morrison has showcased ability and basketball IQ far beyond her years, and Liddick is thrilled with her development. “She’s a freshman, but she sees the court extremely well, she sees open teammates very well, and at the same time, she doesn’t force things. She took shots in the flow of the offense,” Liddick said. “She is far more mature basketball-wise than her grade shows.” Lexi Binkerd found her offensive touch against the Blackhawks, scoring Eastbrook’s first three baskets and finishing with 12 points and six rebounds. Sehдах McKim collected 10 points on four-of-six shooting and five rebounds, while Johwen McKim added six points, six assists, and three steals.

“Every girl that came in tonight gave us exactly what we needed: a good, solid defensive performance,” Liddick said. “And they took care of the basketball on the offensive end. Very pleased with that.” With an always gritty and scrappy Southwood team on the horizon, Liddick looks to keep the momentum going after a well-deserved triumph. “I liked the way we played together tonight,” Liddick said. “Tonight, I saw great ball movement on the offensive end and I saw girls making that extra pass. If we can build on that, I think we will be a pretty tough team. “[But] we have a long way to go. We are still nowhere near what we are capable of doing night in and night out, but the girls are being very receptive, not only to coaching but to what we expect of them as a player on the court.”