

Heavy hitters head to Hardin County Sectional

Gallatin County, Goreville, Meridian, Steeleville combined for 95-wins

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ELIZABETHTOWN - The Hardin County IA Sectional is provocative to say the least.

Three of the schools involved are familiar foes while one outsider is hoping that its long journey across the state from west to east results in a trip to SIU Arena next Tuesday.

The Gallatin County Hawks are the champs of their own regional, taking care of business with a 64-42 win over Norris City-Omaha-Enfield in the title game to secure a spot in the sectional for the third consecutive season.

In their mission this season, which stands at 25-3 at this moment, they have taken care of two of the three teams left to deal with.

Coach Radar Patton's ground troops have a 50-49 win over Goreville at SIU Arena back in December and a 55-44 victory over Mounds Meridian in the semifinals of the Eldorado Holiday Tournament.

Led by 7-foot senior center Andrew Drone (32-points and 14-rebounds a game) the Hawks have tasted defeat just three times, twice to 2A powerhouse Harrisburg and a road loss at the Nashville Shootout against the host Hornets, 35-28, a game in which Nashville scored the game's final eight points to pick up the win.

Gallatin County is far from a one-man band, having 6-foot-5 senior Patrick Lowe running the floor and averaging 16-points a game.

He is also second to Drone in the rebounding stats, grabbing eight boards a night.

The key to the Hawks success in this postseason will continue to be the improved guard play of 5-foot-11 senior lefty Daine Hish, who is a long-range specialist, and 5-foot-11 senior Anthony Sorto.

Both will need to step up even bigger this week.

Six-foot-five senior forward Wes McGuire will also be a key factor in the Hawks play inside.

With Drone, Lowe and McGuire, Gallatin County is the largest of the teams remaining up front.

Senior Josh Belford and junior Mitchell Ramsey are also important for the Hawks' quest to make a return trip to SIU after their December win.

Steeleville will make a 108-mile trip one way to Elizabethtown to take on the Hawks on Wednesday night.

The Warriors are members of the Cahokia Conference small school division known as the Kaskaskia and are coached by Bryce Bainter.

Steeleville is 20-11 after a 68-61 overtime win over Christopher on Saturday night to win the Waltonville Regional title.

Coach Bainter has a good one in 6-foot-5 senior center Darin Winkleman.

Winkleman is a three-year varsity starter and averages 19.8 points and 7.2 rebounds a game.

Six-foot-three senior Reid Wilson is third on the club with 9.3 points and 7.7 rebounds.

Steven Uchtman, a 6-foot-2 junior forward, adds 5.8 points a game while teammate A.J. Jeffers (12 p.p.g., 3.7 r.p.g.) is a solid backcourt player.

Five-foot-nine junior Kyle Smith adds 4.1 points and is third on the team with 1.3 assists.

The Warriors handed conference champ New Athens a 68-57 loss to close the regular season and then edged both Sesser-Valier and Christopher to win the school's first regional title since 2005.

Goreville has been on a roll since losing to Woodlawn in the championship game of the Sesser-Valier Holiday Tournament.

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Coach Todd Tripp's club has won back-to-back Black Diamond Conference championships in its two seasons in the league.

This veteran and athletic group have some very good wins over 2A teams Chester (2) and Trico (2) while also beating Benton, Johnston City and Anna-Jonesboro while winning their own Goreville Invitational Tournament back in November.

Zeke Snell, a 6-foot-4 junior, proves that it is false that "White Men Can't Jump" as this athletic kid has several eye opening dunks this season, including a one-handed rebound jam in the Blackcats' conference clinching road win at Chester on February 16.

Snell is leading the squad with 12.3 points and 5.2 rebounds, both tops on the 26-4 regional champs, who rolled past Cobden and Zeigler-Royalton by a combined 158-92 to win the Z-R Regional.

Six-foot-four senior J.T. Russell is second in scoring (10.9 points per game) and grabs 4.2 rebounds.

Dayton Tripp, a 6-foot-3 guard, is also capable of a big scoring night.

Tripp adds 10.7 points and 1.6 rebounds while leading the Blackcats with a 37 percent shooting mark from behind the 3-point arc.

Guard Blake Gray, a 5-foot-11 senior, also contributes on the offensive end with 9.8 p.p.g. with 3.4 rebounds.

Six-foot-four senior Alex Andros adds size in the paint and numbers on the stats with 8.2 points and 4.9 rebounds.

Ironically enough Kyefer Cavins, a 6-foot-11 junior forward, comes off the bench and his numbers are also 8.2 and 4.9.

Having six players all averaging over eight points a game is a good asset to have and Coach Tripp (185-77 in his ninth season at Goreville) tries to win the schools first boy's basketball sectional title after winning the program's fifth regional championship.

In the past two seasons the Mounds Meridian Bobcats have reached the IA Supersectional before losing to Woodlawn in back-to-back heart-breaking fashion.

Coach Jeff Mandrell has another good team this season however they have flown well under the radar, sitting at 24-6.

They are once again a high-scoring team, averaging 80.2 points a night.

The Bobcats are led by Joshua Jones, a 6-foot-6 senior swingman who nets 21.4 points a game while leading the way with 8.6 rebounds.

Meridian also has had good guard play, with Michael Schoffner adding 13.5 points a night while Khouri Powell, a 5-foot-9 sophomore, adds 10.7 points a game.

David Davis, a 5-foot-11 sophomore, also adds points (9.6 p.p.g.) and dishes out a team-leading 5.7 assists.

Jammerio Moore, a 6-foot forward, chips in eight points and grabs 6.9 rebounds.

Meridian won the Vienna Thanksgiving Tournament and split games with 3A Massac County and IA power and regional winner Madison this season.

They also scored 125-points in a high-scoring win over Caruthersville (MO.) back on February 5 and won yet another South Egyptian Conference championship and their regional title triumph over Egyptian was their third win over the Pharaohs and Coach Mandrell's brother Matt in 2012-13.

ABV Projected Champion – Goreville.

Jack Bullock is the Editor/Web Publisher of A Baseline View.com. For the past 15-seasons, ABV has covered boy's high school basketball in southern Illinois. Previews, Rankings, Scores, Standings, Tournament Brackets and Game Stories for over 100-teams.