

# Red Devils set to defend sectional crown

S-V, Hardin County pull upsets on Friday; Top-seeds Cairo, Meridian advanced

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ELIZABETHTOWN – The **Sesser-Valier Red Devils** are proving to naysayers that they belong in the conversation of the top IA programs in the state.

Head coach Shane Garner, in two short seasons, has stamped his moniker on this program as one to be reckoned with after dismantling Woodlawn for the second-straight season to advance to the Hardin County IA Sectional.

Behind the play of senior guard Nick Marlo, and a strong defensive effort on Friday night, the Red Devils buried the Cardinals early in a 64-42 spanking that wasn't as close as the score indicated.

Marlo is pacing the 22-9 club with 23-points a night, and he turned up the heat at Woodlawn on Friday night, scorching the nets for 33-points, including 15 in the first quarter as they put away the Cardinals early.

Senior's Luke Thompson, Logan Barrett and Jacob Vanwey came up big on Friday night for the Red Devils who have strengthened their schedule to get themselves ready for big games.

They rode the postseason wave last year and reached Peoria and they are on the same course in 2015.

S-V resume speaks for itself as they went 4-1 in the Benton Invitational Tournament against four 2A schools and one IA school Meridian, their opponent on Tuesday night at Hardin County.

After some early season losses, including a defeat at the hands of Cairo who they could face if both teams win in the semifinals, the Red Devils are rolling at the right time.

Marlo is the key, having produced some memorable games this season including a 51-point outburst at the DuQuoin Tip-Off Classic back in December.

The Red Devils have some impressive wins this season having topped state-ranked Okawville early in the season and then victories over 2A squads Carlyle, Benton, Hamilton County, Carmi-White County and Chester.

The losses include Woodlawn, Cairo and Pinckneyville of the highly-regarded.

Their first round opponent is a familiar one as the **Meridian Bobcats** rallied for a 48-44 win over Trico to win the Campbell Hill Trico IA Regional on Friday night on the Pioneers' floor.

Head coach Erik Griffin has his 'Cats playing well heading back to the sectional after being upset by Cairo last February.

With an IHSA switch this season, the two rival programs were separated because of some off court issues and could potentially meet in the sectional final on Friday night.

Meridian sits at 23-7 on the season with three double digit-scorers leading the way. Senior leader and four-year starter David Davis is a lefty guard/forward who averages 16.7 points a game for the Bobcats and is also a 1,000-point scorer.

Devarae Edmonds, a 6-foot-2 senior forward, adds 14.8 points a game to the totals to a team that averages 68 points a game.

Tyrone Nesby is also at double-digits, averaging 10.9 p.p.g. Cayden Ballard, a 6-foot-1 senior guard, averages 7.6 p.p.g.

Meridian, like S-V, has been in some tough games with 3A Massac County and Missouri

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powers Scott County Central and Charleston along with wins over Madison and Edwardsville Metro-East Lutheran.

One of their losses was a 75-62 defeat against Sesser-Valier back on January 24.

The **Cairo Pilots** are back-to-back regional champs, thanks to a 65-44 win Friday night over the hosts at the Century IA Regional. Coach Brian Brantner's club doesn't have a shiny won-loss mark (10-13) but they, too, have been on the floor with some good competition.

They have played 3A teams Marion and Bethalto Civic Memorial along with trip to Kentucky to face larger schools Marshall County and McCracken County and also New Madrid (MO.). The Pilots own an early season triumph over Sesser-Valier, 67-64, at the DuQuoin Tip-Off.

Demetrius McGee, a 6-foot senior who wasn't eligible early in the year, has turned it on in the second half of the season for the Pilots. He tops the club with 17 points and 9.6 rebounds a game for this athletic Cairo club.

Sophomore Dave Taylor, a 6-foot forward, averages 15 points and 8.6 rebounds.

Coach Brandtner lost Melvin Duncan to an ankle injury and is questionable for the sectional. Duncan was averaging 10.8 p.p.g. and 7.2 r.p.g.

Sophomore Ladaruis Woodson, a 5-foot-5 guard, adds 7.5 points a game while Damarius Taylor, a 5-foot-6 freshman adds 6.8 points to a team that is averaging nearly 80-points a game.

Disregarding tournaments and shootouts, the Pilots are 5-1 against Illinois schools and Friday night's triumph was the school's 23<sup>rd</sup> boy's basketball regional championship.

The **Hardin County Cougars** and head coach Rodney Lane have officially crashed the party as they upset both host Norris City-Omaha-Enfield and Crab Orchard to reach their own sectional. Having lost all three previous games with NCOE, Hardin County turned the tables on the Cardinals on Wednesday night and they topped the top-seeded Trojans, 43-37 on Friday night.

Behind 1,000-point scorer BJ Austin and some vast improvement on the defensive end, the club from this rural river bend area have quietly posted a 23-6 record and have captured a regional title for the first time since 1986.

Coach Lane has Austin leading the way as this 6-foot-11 senior tops the Cougars with 18-points a contest.

Six-foot-two sophomore forward Austin Seavers adds 10-points and seven-rebounds to the stat sheet while Tyler Winters, a 5-foot-8 sophomore, adds 14-points a night. Senior Darrien Robinson, a 5-foot-9 guard, has added some important points and rebounds in the postseason as has Logan Conn, a 5-foot-11 senior.

Senior Tanner Dutton and sophomore Carmeron Shaw provide spark off the bench for the Cougars, who have two wins over Crab Orchard, including a 74-70 during the Trojans' Thanksgiving Tournament that the Cougars won. The other three losses were to Eldorado and Crittenden County (KY.) twice. In Hardin County's last two wins at NCOE, the Cougars were an outstanding 27-of-34 from the foul line (79.4 percent) after having struggled during the season.

**Jack Bullock is the Editor/Web Publisher of A Baseline View.com. For the past 18-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.**