

Harrisburg, Meridian favored for championship rematch at EHT, Herrin, Massac County not to be counted out; Fairfield, Gallatin County look to make waves

BY JACK BULLOCK

Editor/Web Publisher

www.abaselineview.com

ELDORADO – Two seasons ago in one of the best Eldorado Holiday Tournament title games, Meridian rallied for a stunning 72-70 win over Harrisburg.

The 47th annual EHT could produce a “do-over” as the Bulldogs and Bobcats are the top two choices to meet up Wednesday night in the finale.

Harrisburg is 8-3 this season and have the horses in place for a long run in this event. Head coach Randy Smithpeters stiffened the regular season schedule and it has paid off even though they have a pair of defeats at the hands of a couple of “mean hombres.”

Breese Central, the ABV Preseason number one ranked 2A Deep South squad, and Marshall County (KY.) on the Marshall's home floor.

Herrin, who moved up to 3A this season, upended the Bulldogs in overtime on December 23 and the Tigers could be a tough foe for either or both Meridian and Harrisburg on the final day at the EHT.

Two of these defeats were at shootouts in big environments which is something this coach is hoping will make his team a state-title contender come February.

But to win this tournament he will need continued good play from his top three scorers who have led this club to a Harrisburg Invitational Tournament title along with key wins over Fairfield, Murphysboro, Massac County and Du Quoin.

Tyler Smithpeters, a 6-foot-4 junior guard/forward, is averaging just over 16 points a game for the Bulldogs. He is just percentage points ahead of teammate Capel Henshaw (15.5 p.p.g.) who is a 6-foot-3 junior guard. Eli Taborn-Scott, a 6-foot-4 sophomore, averages 12 points a night for Harrisburg. The other two starters are Ryne Roper, a 6-foot-2 junior, and 6-foot-11 junior Caleb Goldman.

Mounds Meridian is the state's top-ranked 1A team and was the ABV preseason choice and the pick to represent the Deep South at Peoria in March.

Coming off a supersectional appearance from last season, Coach Jeff Mandrell's Bobcats have a Vienna Thanksgiving Tournament title under their belts and have but one loss on the season to Missouri powerhouse Charleston.

The “Double-J's” for the 'Cats are 6-foot-5 junior forward Joshua Jones (14.4 p.p.g.) and 6-foot-3 senior Jerry Johnson (14.3 p.p.g.)

But on this high scoring club, those two are just second and third on the scoring list for Meridian.

Five-foot-eleven senior guard Cameron Ballard is leading the way with 15.5 points per outing. As a team the Bobcats are averaging 32 rebounds a game with Johnson grabbing 6.5 boards while also having rejected 32 shots on the season.

Six-foot-four Justin McClellan (3.8 p.p.g.), 5-foot-8 senior Demarko Ransom and 6-foot sophomore Michael Schoffer (6.4 p.p.g.) have also stepped up for the Bobcats who have averaged 71.4 points a game in 2011-12.

The third seed is **Herrin**, owners an impressive won-loss record when you take a look at who they have played. The Tigers are 6-2 overall with losses to East St. Louis, Salem and Marion in the first week of the season but have wins over Mount Vernon and Massac County in the 2-3 finish in the Pyramid Plus Tournament and they also have victories over Benton, Pinckneyville and West Frankfort to go with that 80-75 overtime win over Harrisburg.

Demarlo Harris, a 6-foot-3 senior, has been a thorn in many opponents during his four seasons in varsity Orange and Black as a starter. He has been a part of a nice early season run for Coach Irv Lukens. Six-foot-one senior Bobby Mannie, along with Harris, are double-digit scorers for the Tigers who hope to improve on its third place finish from a year ago. Nathan Lukens, a 5-foot-11 senior guard, is one of the top Tigers as is 5-foot-9 junior Justin Lukens (cousins) and 5-foot-11 forward Alex Davis. DaShaun Hart, a

Harrisburg, Meridian favored for championship rematch at EHT, Herrin, Massac County not to be counted out; Fairfield, Gallatin County look to make waves

5-foot-10 senior, is also part of the talented mix at Herrin.

The fourth seed **Massac County** is trying to get everyone on the same page for the first time all season, having not had a complete starting lineup for its first 11 games.

Coach Joe Hosmans' Patriots are 6-5 after a rough 1-4 beginning at the Pyramid Plus event and recently lost to Murphysboro last Tuesday.

Malcom Amos (19 p.p.g. 7.5 r.p.g.) tops the Patriots scoring parade along with 6-foot Dalton Mitchell who has added seven points a game.

Travis Beck, a 6-foot-2 senior guard, has chipped in eight points a contest for MC. Mitchell is questionable for the EHT with a foot injury while Beck hopes to return after injuring his hand in a game.

Fairfield and head coach Scott McElravy have a good resume coming into the event after having a good showing at the talent deep Capital Classic in November playing against Teutopolis and Robinson and holding its own.

Five-foot-eleven senior Tyler Hutcheson is the key player for the Mules who have a 6-3 mark heading into the event while winning all four of its Black Diamond Conference games against Hamilton County, Eldorado, Johnston City and Vienna. They also have wins over Red Hill and Lawrenceville. Harrisburg topped the Mules in a close game 66-56 back on December 6.

The sixth seed in the event is **Gallatin County**. The Hawks are just 4-4 on the season but they are 4-1 in games played in southern Illinois. Three learning experience losses to powerhouse programs in at Tournament of Champions in Washington, Illinois to begin the season will make Coach Robert "Radar" Patton's club stronger in February.

Andrew Drone is by far the tallest player in this field, standing 7-feet tall. Drone is averaging nearly a double double in points and rebounds for the 4-4 Hawks who have wins over Galatia, Eldorado, Norris City-Omaha-Enfield and Carrier Mills with a lone loss to unbeaten Crab Orchard in games down south.

Patrick Lowe, a 6-foot-5 junior, is also a double-digit scorer for the Hawks. They have the best chance of the GEC teams in this event to make it to the winners side of the bracket.

Anna-Jonesboro from the SIRR Mississippi Division have made it to the third place game in each of the last two seasons and would like to make another final day appearance at the EHT.

Head coach Mike Chamness has one of the most talented players in the event in 6-foot-4 senior Brady Wright (14.9 p.p.g. and 9.6 r.p.g.) who is a four year varsity starter. Travis Smith, a 6-foot-11 senior guard, has helped out the Wildcats with 14 points a night. The 'Cats are just 4-5 but are coming into the event off of a win over Sparta on December 23.

Carmi-White County is the eighth seed and have a tough first round draw in Carrier Mills.

Coach Eric Dixon's Bulldogs rely on 6-foot sophomore Chase Sailer and 5-foot-9 senior Trenton Veach for much of their offense.

Sophomore Brodie Brown and 6-foot-4 senior Isaac Hayse have also stepped up for the 4-5 Bulldogs. They have two wins over Hamilton County and victories over NCOE and Johnston City.

Of the teams that weren't in the top eight seeds, **Carrier Mills** has the best chance as the Wildcats have a 6-3 mark with all nine of the games being played away from home due to having a new floor installed at the gym.

Coach Mark Motsinger's Road Warriors are led by 6-foot-5 senior forward Gabe Morgan, who scored a game-high 16 points in the Cats most recent win over Pope County. Collin Crim, Clayton Stucker, Dathan Taborn and Jordan Walker have each contributed to the CM success this season.

Hardin County, with Coach Rodney Lane doing a fine job, could be one of the factors in this event.

The Cougars are 6-2 on the season with losses to Crab Orchard and a 53-51 loss at home to Carrier Mills on the slate.

Jack Bullock is the Editor/Web Publisher of A Baseline View.com, Southern Illinois' Top Boy's High School Basketball Web Publication. You can email him at jbullcock@abaselineview.com.