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By JASON EPP

Leader & Times

On paper it looked like a complete mismatch. But games are not won and lost on paper, and the Southwestern Heights Lady Mustangs beat the Meade Lady Buffaloes 68-58 with grit, heart, and a belief that they could.

“We use words like faith, believe in each other, faith in God – those three things came through tonight,” Lady Mustangs coach Barry Mellen said. “We had to believe, after being beat by them the two previous times we met. These girls played their heart and soul out last night.”

Outmatched at virtually every position by a 4-6 inch height advantage, the Lady Mustangs used their superior quickness to gather 12 steals and cause 23 turnovers. Heights was able to neutralize the height advantage on the boards with Meade holding only a slight, 23-20 advantage.

“The key for us is everyone being on the same page and playing our heart and soul,” Mellen said. “Were not going to out-rebound people so we have to play all 85 feet of the floor. These girls are getting in basketball shape. Early in the year we couldn’t press like we can now.”

Early in the game Meade's length frustrated the Lady Mustangs. Heights turned the ball over several times trying to throw across court against the Lady Buffaloes extended zone. Meade fed the ball inside to Kinzie Friesen and Bailey Olvera used dribble penetration to build a 14-8 lead with 2 minutes left in the first.

Nayelly LaPoint kept Heights in the game with six straight points. Tiana Couch drained a three and Raquel Longoria put back a missed shot just seconds before the first quarter ended to cut the Lady Buffaloes lead to just two.

Heights took the lead (22-20) on another LaPoint basket with 4:33 left until half. It also started a 9-4 run that put the Lady Mustangs up 31-24 with 1:31 left. Meade scored the final six points of the half to cut the lead to just one.

Back-to-back baskets by Jackie Loya, including a 3-pointer, put Heights up by six with 4:53 left in the third. Olvera scored on a three-point play to cut the lead back to one, but LaPoint answered right back with a three-point play of her own. Hanna Miller drained a three in the final minute of the third for Meade to cut the lead back to just three heading into the fourth.

LaPoint and Longoria nailed threes to start the fourth to put Heights up 51-42 with 6:44 left. Meade battled back with a 6-0 run to cut the lead to three with 5:10 left.

Meade went into the double-bonus with almost five minutes left, and Heights' senior point guard Tiana Couch fouled out seconds later. Meade took advantage and tied the game at 55 and again at 57 with 2:40 left.

But LaPoint and Longoria, who combined for 18 points in the fourth quarter, would not be denied. The two scored five straight trips for the Lady Mustangs, making the score 63-58 with 1:10 left.

Heights capped off the game by making the front end of all three one-and-ones and finishing the

fourth quarter 6 of 7 at the free throw line.

Nayelly LaPoint finished with 29 points on 11 of 15 shooting, including a pair of threes. LaPoint also was 5 of 5 at the free throw line and had eight rebounds, four steals and three assists. Jackie Loya scored 13 points, 11 in the second half. Loya was 4 of 4 at the line and had six rebounds, three assists, and two steals. Raquel Longoria finished with 12 on 6 of 12 shooting, and three steals.

Kinzie Freisen led the Lady Buffaloes with 20 points, Bailey Olvera scored 14, and Tara Weins added 11.

Heights (11-7) will host Elkhart Friday.

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