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By JASON EPP

Leader & Times



KISMET - Until this season Southwestern Heights trademark in girls basketball was their number of tall players. With a much shorter team this year, Heights has had to rely on tenacious defense and shooting. Neither came through Friday night as the Lady Mustangs lost to the Elkhart Lady Wildcats, 44-40.

"Two things happened; we didn't get after them with our pressure, and our shots didn't fall like they usually fall," Lady Mustangs coach Barry Mellen. "Too many times we were out of position. We played sloppy on defense. We let them get the angles on us and they go score."

Defense was not an issue for the Lady Mustangs at the start of the game. Heights held Elkhart without a point for the first six minutes of the game.

But Heights led just 5-0 at that time, failing to take advantage because of turnovers.

"I bet we had 8 turnovers in our first 10 possessions," Mellen said.

Elkhart got rolling moments later when Jentry Strotham converted a three-point play to knot the game at five. The Lady Wildcats scored the final bucket of the quarter to go up 7-5.

Elkhart's run continued into the second quarter, outscoring Heights 18-2 over a six minute stretch to go up 18-7 with 4:08 left in the half.

Threes by Jackie Loya and Raquel Longoria cut the lead to five. Elkhart by six at the half (19-13)

"We got a little bit tight, and it's hard to shoot when you're tight," Mellen said. "First quarter they were in a man (defense) and we're driving and getting them in foul trouble; they go to a zone and we're happy shooting threes with no rebounders. That's what we worked on at halftime, attacking the basket."

The halftime changes worked for the Lady Mustangs who went on a 13-2 run to start the half, and put the Lady Mustangs up 26-21 with 3:24 left in the third.

Elkhart came right back, scoring the final six of the third to regain a one-point lead (27-26).

Tiana Couch opened the fourth with a three-pointer that gave the lead back to Heights, 29-27. Free throws by Ivon Amparan and Loya put Heights up, 33-29 with 5:11 left. Elkhart's Miranda Brewer, who finished with 9 points, fouled out of the game on the play.

Elkhart answered right back by going 4 for 4 at the line to tie the game at 33. Heights again scored twice to go back up by four with 4:06 left.

Trouble struck for the Lady Mustangs when Nayelly LaPoint was called for her fifth foul with 3:11 left and Heights up only two. LaPoint finished with 9 points, but was hampered with foul trouble the entire game.

Elkhart finished the game on an 11-3 run, and retook the lead (41-40) on Strotham's basket with 2:24 left.

Heights could not muster anymore offense and did not score a field goal over the final four minutes of the game.

Heights finished the game just 13 of 46 (28 percent) from the field. Heights stayed close despite a poor shooting night because of a 32-24 rebounding advantage.

Strotham finished with 15 points and Victoria Fullerton scored 10 for the Lady Wildcats.

Ivon Amparan led the Lady Mustangs with 13, and Jackie Loya added 10.

Heights (11-8) will travel to Cimarron Thursday for their final regular season game.

Elkhart is coached by a former graduate of Southwestern Heights. Lorrie Wright played for Mellen, and helped the Lady Mustangs win the 1992 state championship.

"I'm proud of her," Mellen said. "We've got about 7 girls who've went through our program that are coaching and that's a good feeling for me to know they want to go out there and set the kind of example I hope we all set."

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