

ND girls make it to Convo for first time

Del Dudit
Portsmouth Daily Times
3-1-11

There is always one Cinderella story when it comes to high school basketball sectional and district tournaments.

This year, Cinderella plays on the Notre Dame girls' high school basketball team.

The Lady Titans went into Jackson on Saturday to face the Eastern Eagles, this season's Southern Ohio Conference Division I champs, and came out with their prince charming — and a trip to the Convo.

Notre Dame defeated Eastern 46-42.

According to school records, this is the first time in the school's history the girls' team has reached the district finals and earned a trip to Ohio University.

"We are all still excited, and that's all we talked about this weekend," Notre Dame Coach J.D. McKenzie said. "The girls couldn't wipe the smiles off their faces, and some of them were even crying."

That's the beauty of high school sports. It can take a team that had little chance of winning and put it on one of the sport's biggest stages — the Convocation Center on the campus of OU.

I have to admit I was stunned by the win, because I covered the game when Eastern defeated Notre Dame 55-25 to win the conference crown. I was so surprised that I called McKenzie on his mobile phone as I was heading to Jackson to cover the Portsmouth Trojans.

"Yeah, we did it," McKenzie told me while he was on the bus heading back to Portsmouth.

Going into Saturday's game, Eastern (17-6) had defeated Notre Dame in their two regular season meetings by a combined 59 points.

"Really nobody gave us much of a chance to win," McKenzie said. "And who should have? They had beaten us twice in the season by big numbers."

So now this team, which has no seniors and a first-year coach, is getting prepared to go to the Convo for the first time ever.

Luckily, some of the players have been there and know what to expect.

Libby Welsh played in the Convo this past spring on a travel team.

"I'm very excited," Welsh said. "It's a cool place, and I'm glad we get to go there and play and not watch."

Welsh, a five-foot-five sophomore, scored 12 points on Saturday.

Jenn Arnzen has been to the Convo, but she admitted this will be the first time she has stepped onto the basketball court. Arnzen scored 19 points on Saturday.

"We're all excited to play there," Arnzen said. "We all celebrated this weekend, and now we have to get back to practice and focus."

And focus is right.

The Titans will face top seed Waterford on Thursday at 8:15 p.m. in Athens.

"They are a solid team, and I've been watching some film of them," McKenzie said. "It's going to be a tough challenge."

Challenge or not, the Lady Titans overcame a big one on Saturday, and now a lot of the hard work has paid off.

Most high school basketball players and coaches from this area always have a goal to at least reach the Convo. Some have higher goals, and I hope they reach them.

But Notre Dame, who is 13-9 at the moment, to go this far for the first time, has reached a major milestone in the school's history.

I wish all the local teams in the tournament success. I also hope the Lady Titans remember this moment and take it all in, because nothing is ever guaranteed in sports.

Appreciate it while you are able to, and thank everyone who helped you get to this point including your teammates, coaches and parents.