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SLASH SCORES BIG WIN

The St. Albert Slash silenced the Edmonton Thunder in midget AAA female playoff action Sunday. See story, page 54.

ON TAP

3A zones

The St. Albert Skyhawks are shooting for their seventh-straight 3A provincial berth today in the Edmonton zone women's basketball semifinals.

Game time against the Beaumont Bandits is 4:45 p.m. at the SkyDome.

The Skyhawks are 27-12 overall. Beaumont was 6-7 in the metro Edmonton city conference.

If victorious, the defending provincial champions would host the Louis St. Laurent Barons or visit the Edmonton Christian Lions on Thursday afternoon to determine the zone champion and wildcard entry at provincials next week at Chestermere.

The Skyhawks have won the Edmonton zone final the last four years.

They are coming off a 104-30 rout of the Holy Trinity Trojans in Monday's zone quarter-final at the SkyDome.

Last year's metro premier champions took their frustrations out on the Trojans, the 10th place team in the city conference, after losing the league semifinal to the rival Paul Kane Blues 75-67 last week at the SkyDome.

In the latest 3A rankings, the Skyhawks slipped from their season-long number-one position to second place.

The undefeated city conference champions Barons are ranked fourth and the Edmonton public league Lions are sixth. Beaumont is an honourable mention.

In zone action Monday, the Barons downed the Ardrossan Bisons 58-55. The Lions had the bye in the seven-team draw.

Meanwhile, in the city conference final Saturday, the Barons erased a 10-point third-quarter deficit against the 2010 champion Sturgeon Spirits, en route to a 47-44 decision at O'Leary High School. The Barons regained the lead at 41-40 with 4:22 remaining in the game.

At halftime it was 28-26 for the Spirits.

SAPEC finals

Two new champions will be crowned at the SAPEC junior high basketball A-side finals Friday night at the SkyDome.

The Lorne Akins Gators and Vincent J. Maloney Marauders will battle for bragging rights. The girls play at 6 p.m. and the boys hit the court at 7:30 p.m.

Both Lorne Akins teams are undefeated in league play. The VJM teams go into the finals with one loss apiece and both were against the Gators: 39-36 by the girls and 70-48 by the boys in week two in the SAPEC schedule.

In semifinal action last week, the VJM girls defeated the Sir George Simpson Voyageurs 39-36 and the VJM boys knocked off the 2010 champion William D. Cuts Crusaders 74-59.

The Gators swept their semifinals against the Richard S. Fowler Falcons: 64-45 by the girls and 67-42 by the boys.

Meanwhile, in the B-side finals Thursday at Ecole Secondaire Marguerite d'Youville, the ESSMY Leopards play the Morinville Wolves at 4 p.m. The Wolves won the last two city championships. The boys' final between Simpson and Morinville tips-off at 5:30 p.m.



PLAYOFF BATTLE – Brandon Best of the Paul Kane Blues is tripped up after stealing the ball against the Bev Facey Falcons in the first half of the metro Edmonton premier men's final Saturday at O'Leary High School. In a barn-burner, the Blues prevailed 72-69 for a berth at the 4A provincial tournament next week in Edmonton.

CHRIS COLBOURNE/St. Albert Gazette

Blues beat Paul Kane curse

BY JEFF HANSEN
 Staff Writer

O'Leary High School – Saturday's exorcism of the Paul Kane junior men's basketball demons stopped four years of losing the premier final.

"We called it the Paul Kane curse and it's great to finally end it," said a beaming Harrison Laforest, a Grade 11 power forward, after the Blues hung on to beat the plucky Bev Facey Falcons 61-59 for their first metro Edmonton championship since 2003 and the second title in Paul Kane history.

"What we did today is pretty special," chimed in co-captain Josh Wilkie. "We'll be known for quite some time as the team to break the curse."

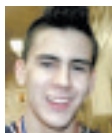
The Blues bowed out to the O'Leary Spartans in 2007 and 2008, fell to the Christ The King Chargers in 2009 and last year suffered a 63-52 setback against the Spartans.

"It was pretty heartbreaking to lose last year and that's why it feels so good that we won it today," said co-captain Jon Van Dorp, who was joined by Laforest, Wilkie and James Rowse as returning players from the 2010 junior line-up that finished 8-2 overall in premier. "This win means everything to us as a team. Words can't even explain how we feel right now."

The Blues led 19-14 after the first quarter, 29-22 at halftime and 44-37 after three quarters en route to their 13th victory in 15 games this season.

"It's the best we played all year as a team. Our starting five really stepped up today. We also had people coming in off the bench that stepped it up," Wilkie said.

See "Junior," page 56



JOSH WILKIE
 Small forward



JON VAN DORP
 Point guard

PK crowned premier champs

BY JEFF HANSEN
 Staff Writer

O'Leary High School – When the Paul Kane Blues needed a hero, Jayden Bordian put on his Superman cap and played the role to perfection in Saturday's championship triumph.

The bespectacled, tattoo-inked Grade 12 guard sank five out of six free throws in the last 15.3 seconds of play as the Blues squeaked out a 72-69 win over the resilient Bev Facey Falcons in Saturday's thrilling metro Edmonton premier men's basketball final.



JAYDEN BORDIAN
 Game star

"I wanted to be that man at the line. I wanted to be the person with the ball in my hands at the end of the game. I like the pressure," declared Bordian after the Blues were awarded the Van Vliet trophy for the third time in the last five years.

Paul Kane's top-scoring hoopster with 18 points displayed incredible nerves of steel when the game was too close to call.

"He's got ice in his veins. He's hit some big shots for us, as you saw right before halftime," said head coach Rick Stanley, pointing to the buzzer-beating bomb by Bordian from an inbound play with less than two ticks on the clock that drew a standing ovation from the loud and proud Paul Kane supporters.

It was 67-65 for the Blues when Bordian dropped two in a row from the charity stripe.

After a Facey bucket, the transfer student from M.E. Lazerte High School was fouled with 9.7 to go. He salted away a pair to put the Blues up by four.

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CHRIS COLBOURNE/St. Albert Gazette

BUSTING A MOVE – Harrison Laforest of the Paul Kane Blues goes around Sean Haliburton of the Bev Facey Falcons in the metro Edmonton premier junior men's final Saturday at O'Leary High School. The Blues won 61-59.

Paul Kane champions

Continued from page 50

Facey refused to quit however and cut the lead in half with 3.7 on the clock.

With the Blues back on offence, Bordian was fouled again with 1.6 remaining. He tossed in the first attempt to seal the deal. The second shot was a rare miss.



TYLER WISE Post

Was the game star feeling the heat with the championship at stake?

"No. Not at all," said the short and stocky Bordian. "We've spent time in the gym working on lots of free throws in practice so it just came natural to me."

Knowing that Facey had to foul somebody in the dying seconds to get the ball in hopes of completing their comeback, Stanley's instructions to his troops was give it to Bordian.

"Jayden is a good free throw shooter, very consistent. We knew that he is the kind of guy who can go in there and do the job and that's why we drew up two plays for the ball to go to him," Stanley said.

Bordian's heroics were the talk of the post-game celebration.

"Clutch, that's all I can say. He was just in a zone. He knocked down everything he needed to. He came up huge for us," said teammate Tyler Wise.

The wiry six-foot-five Grade 11 post was no slouch either at the line. He hit a free throw with 56.2 left to put the Blues up 65-63, then sank two in a row 25 seconds later to increase the lead by four.

"It was pressure-filled for sure but

I tried to zone everything out and just knock them down," said Wise, another instrumental performer for the Blues with 15 points.

"We weren't winning this game without Tyler. There is no question about it," Stanley said.

Dramatic finish

The Blues almost blew it after leading by 12 after three quarters.

"It was a very tough battle. It might have been a little bit closer than we wanted it to be but we really pushed hard at the end," Wise said. "It just came down to us maybe going on little spurts, as well as clutch free throw shooting and that's what won us the game."

It was gut-check time for the Blues as Facey willed its way back into contention.

"They were tough. They worked hard and I was worried," Stanley said. "I just said to our guys, 'You're going to get a test and here it is.'"

Alex Pritchard's 20 points led Facey. He was pumping in shots from every spot on the floor, including some wicked three-balls that helped fuel the comeback charge.

"[He] was a factor. He was the guy that was hurting us. We lost him a couple of times when we made some dumb errors," Stanley said.

After Facey rattled off nine straight points to make it a one-point contest, Wise deposited two free throws to make it 62-59 with 3:06 to play.

Facey once again pulled to within one of the Blues with a pair of free throws, but the Blues replied with a put-back by Sean Allen after a missed shot by Connor Bradley with 1:49 left to lead 64-61.

"We needed to work hard down the stretch," Stanley said. "We had the lead for most of the game and that was the difference. Had we been down we may not have won the game but we did our job in the beginning stages to control that." The Blues never surrendered the



RAY WATKINS/Supplied photo

PREMIER CHAMPIONS – The Paul Kane Blues won the metro Edmonton premier men's basketball championship Saturday by a score of 72-69 over the Bev Facey Falcons at O'Leary High School. It was the third premier title in five years for Paul Kane. The Blues also qualified for provincials next week at Ross Sheppard High School. Their next game is Thursday against the Edmonton public league champion Harry Ainlay Titans. Tip-off is 7 p.m. at Concordia University College. The winner will be the Edmonton zone's top seed at provincials.

lead after the second minute of play. It was 16-7 after the first quarter, 34-27 at halftime and 53-41 after three quarters.

Among the team's top offensive contributors was Bradley with 15 points, including three three-balls. The energetic Brandon Best chipped in with eight points, highlighted by consecutive buckets to kick-start the third quarter.

"Our team played hard. Everybody contributed. We just had a great overall good game, especially at the end when we played tough," said Bordian, who tacked up 10 points in the first half and finished the final with three three-balls.

Adding to the drama in Saturday's barnburner was some shaky officiating. Stanley and his Facey counterpart, Hal Souster, spent the bulk of the game giving the refs grief. It was rough and tumble basketball, which gave the capacity crowd reason to vent. At times it looked like a rugby match had broken out on the

floor. One jokester at courtside suggested both teams were holding football tryouts in the playoff tilt.

"Yes, we were both working them and calls went both ways, good or bad, but it wasn't favourable any way," said Stanley who was more diplomatic about the state of officiating after the win than he was throughout the wild affair.

4A provincials

Up next for the Blues is Thursday's showdown against the Harry Ainlay Titans, the Edmonton public league champions. Tip-off is 7 p.m. at Concordia University College. Admission is \$3. The winner will be seeded first in the zone at the 4A provincials next week at Ross Sheppard High School.

The Titans are ranked second in Alberta and the Blues are ninth.

"It will be a good test for us going in to provincials. We're really excited," Wise said.

Saturday's outcome also punched Paul Kane's ticket to provincials.

"That's huge for us. We're beyond excited for that," said Wise, 16, one of nine returnees on the 15-man roster.

The Blues storm into the zone playdowns with a 28-9 overall record, plus a 14-1 mark in premier.

"My concern is that we go into provincials thinking, 'Oh, we won the city championship and we're just happy to have that,' but I said to our guys we're not happy to be here. We need to move on," said Stanley, who believes the Blues have been short-changed by the basketball pundits, as well as local press coverage. "A lot of people have kind of swept us away because we've lost to Magrath earlier in the year and we lost to Cardston [4A honourable mention] in Calgary. We've lost to some teams that maybe we shouldn't have. However, I think we've won 15 of our last 17 and I feel we're very underrated. We're kind of the best hidden secret around."

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