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Wyalusing takes down rival Canton

By RYAN LEMAY Staff Writer

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Wyalusing's Blake Morningstar shoots a turnaround jump shot with Canton's Isaiah Niemczyk contesting on Saturday afternoon.

TOWNADA — It was always destined that the Wyalusing boys basketball team would meet Canton for a third and decisive matchup in the District IV playoffs.

Led by Grady Cobb and Blake Morningstar, the Rams locked down Canton on defense, and flipped a switch on offense in the second half to top the Warriors 54-44 in the District IV Class AA semifinals.

Wyalusing tends to play a fast paced brand of basketball, but in the first quarter, it was Canton who dictated the pace of play. The Warriors slowed the game down and every basket was a grind to earn.

“(Canton head coach) Brock Kitchen does such a great job of preparing his kids and they played so hard defensively and so did we,” Wyalusing head coach Brent Keyes said. “They struggled to score and we struggled to score but sometimes in the playoffs that’s what it takes to win.”

Morningstar nailed two three pointers and Wyalusing led 8-5 after the first eight minutes of action.

Canton’s half-court offensive woes continued in the second quarter. Wyalusing didn’t do enough to capitalize and pull away, and the Rams led by just 20-14 at halftime.

“The first half was probably the best defensive half we have had only giving up 20 points and we could just not put the ball in the ocean in the first half,” coach Kitchen said. “In the second half we tried to double team Morningstar but he played great and I would consider him one of the front runners for the MVP of the league.”

Both offenses began to wake up in the third quarter, playing right into the hands of Wyalusing.

The Warriors spread the ball around and scored 12 points through five different scorers.

Morningstar scored six straight points and Cobb chipped in five, as part of a 15 point quarter for the Rams.

Wyalusing led 35-26 heading into the final quarter.

Canton’s Caiden Williams cut the lead to 39-30 but Cobb and Morningstar answered right back to put the Rams up 43-32.

With just under four minutes remaining in the game, Canton attempted to make Wyalusing win the game at the foul line and the Rams answered the call.

Cobb scored six straight free throws and Abram Bennett nailed his two attempts to help seal the win for Wyalusing.

“We were excited to play Canton for a third time and we were ready to show them that we were not going to lose to them two times in the same year,” Morningstar said.

Morningstar scored a team-high 21 points for Wyalusing and Cobb finished with 18.

“(Morningstar) has always had ability but he is on another level and he is in such great shape right now,” Keyes said. “He just plays so hard and is talented. You put those things together, you have a special kid and that’s what he is.”

Weston Bellows led the Warriors with 14 points, and Isiah Niemczyk and Williams each scored 11.

Canton finishes its season 18-7, which coach Kitchen believes is the best record for any of the teams he has coached during his tenure.

“Congratulations to coach Kitchen on such a great year and to his great group of kids,” Keyes said. “You get to know the kids really well and there is so much mutual respect there and it is so sad that this time of year someone has to lose.”

Niemczyk, Williams, Cooper Kitchen, Conner Foust, Ashton Rockwell, and Gavin Morse all played their final game in a Warriors uniform.

“They’re the first graduating class to make the playoffs four years in a row and that’s never happened before,” coach Kitchen said. “These kids put in their time since they were five years old and the last time you do anything is going to be the hardest and they put it all out there so I am proud of them.”

Wyalusing advances to play Muncy in the District IV championship game. The time and date are yet to be decided.

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