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Sports

BEARCAT CLASSIC: No Rally Necessary for Emerald

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Emerald's Ashley Norton, left, attempts to shoot over Ninety Six's Sireena Boyd on Saturday. (Staff photo by T.M. James)

In its first two contests against Ninety Six High School's girls basketball team, Emerald fell behind in the first quarter before rallying for wins. Saturday, the Vikings had a much different first quarter and thankfully for them, the result remained the same.

Emerald built a 10-point lead after the first quarter and maintained that lead through almost the entire game in a 49-42 win over the Wildcats in the Bearcat Classic semifinals at Lander's Finis Horne Arena. The Vikings play Greenwood in the tournament finals at 7 p.m. Monday. "I thought we played much better tonight than we have the previous two games we played against them," Emerald coach Anarie Duckett said. "We worked a lot on our man-to-man defense at practice the last few days before we started playing this tournament, and I think we did pretty well."

Trailing by 11 at halftime, Ninety Six (4-5) got to within 27-22 after a Sireena Boyd layup and cut the lead to five again early in the fourth quarter, but each time the Wildcats cut into the deficit, the Vikings (7-1) pulled away.

Ninety Six was in a position where it had to come back due in large part to poor early free-throw shooting. The Wildcats trailed 25-14 at the half, but it could have been much closer, as they were just 2-of-9 from the foul line in the first half. "I thought we could penetrate, penetrate, penetrate, but it just wasn't working for us," Ninety Six coach John Coster said. "Then not hitting the free throws was huge, too. When you get that free throw, you've got to make those. We need to practice on them a little bit more."

Aneisha Bell led the Vikings' offense, scoring a game-high 24 points, most of them in the post from the halfcourt offense. "I guess posting them up and just calling for the ball (worked) and making sure my teammates saw that I was open," Bell said. "They know if I'm not open not to pass it in."

Ninety Six, which had 39 of its 42 points come from Boyd and Ashli Washington, was hurt by the lack of a third scorer. The Wildcats should get back guard Quitta Tolbert, who has been out with an injury in recent games, when they return to action Jan. 6 against Batesburg-Leesville.

Emerald, meanwhile, plays Greenwood in a reprise of last season's championship game, which the Eagles won 44-22. "We'll come out and do the best we can against them and you never know what happens," Duckett said. "If we play well, we've got a shot. You've always got a shot."

NINETY SIX (42): Sireena Boyd 20, Ashli Washington 19, Cierra Curreri 2, Denise Pope 1.

EMERALD (49): Aneisha Bell 24, Marissa Callaham 11, Courtney Scurry 8, Amber Green 6.

Ninety Six 5 9 16 12 ♦ 42

Emerald 15 10 11 13 ♦ 49

3-point goals: Emerald 3 (Callaham 3). Fouled out ♦ None. Technicals ♦ Ninety Six: Jenny Bailey.

Records: NS (4-5); E (7-1).