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Sports

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## BEARCAT CLASSIC: Panthers Dispatch Emerald

By MATT ANDERSON/Index-Journal sports writer

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A year ago, the quickness of Abbeville High School's boys basketball team helped overwhelm Emerald in a pair of non-region victories. This season, Abbeville and Emerald are both in Region 1-AA and the teams' meeting was in a tournament setting; it didn't do much to change the result because of one important similarity -- the Panthers' speed and quickness advantage.

Abbeville led wire-to-wire and the outcome was never in doubt in a 80-50 win over the Vikings (4-4) in the semifinals of the Bearcat Classic. The Panthers play Greenwood in the tournament finals at 8:30 p.m. Monday. "At the very beginning, we just felt like we had to come out with more intensity than we did last night (in a win over Saluda)," Panthers forward Michael Jackson said. "We just had to come out and ball."

On their first offensive possession, the Panthers (4-1) scored on a Quay Watt layup, then got a steal and a Jimmy Thackson transition layup on the following Emerald possession. That series was telling, as Abbeville proved too swift to consistently keep out of transition and too quick to defend in the halfcourt. "We tried everything that we could think of to try and come up with a way to complement their speed," Emerald coach Robin Scott said. "It's just hard to do."

Abbeville had three scorers in double figures, led by Sammy Head who scored a game-high 16 points. Despite a significant size disadvantage, the Panthers held their own inside. On the strength of forwards Watt and Jackson and help from their guards, Abbeville benefited from numerous second-chance opportunities on offense. "We don't even look at size anymore," Panthers coach John-Mark Scruggs said. "We looked at it a little last year, but we've got a couple kids that work really hard inside and our guards play really hard."

Monday night's Abbeville-Greenwood championship game is a rematch of a semifinal in last year's Bearcat Classic, which the Panthers won 81-80. Greenwood and Abbeville have split their first two meetings this year, with the Eagles winning 54-53 on a last-second Marquavius Lewis putback Dec. 12 and the Panthers winning 89-84 in overtime Tuesday. "Anytime you play a team as good as they are, it only can make it better," Scruggs said. "We're a smaller school and any time we can play someone bigger with athletes it's going to benefit us in playoff time and down the road in the region."

ABBEVILLE (80)

Sammy Head 16, Jericho Jackson 14, Michael Jackson 12, Quay Watt 8, Jimmy Thackson 7, Marquavius Franklin 7, Bobby Hall 5, Gavagio Enwright 5, Hakeem Power 3, Terrel Waller 3.

EMERALD (50)

Ryan Tracy 13, Rahmad Strong 6, A.J. Jones 5, Dee Parks 4, T.O. Curry 4, Lucas Mathis 4, Ozan Koktem 3, A.J. Jones 3, Jared Norman 3, T.J. Peppers 2, Antonio Gray 2, T.J. Edwards 1.

Abbeville 25 15 24 16 ♦ 80

Emerald 11 10 14 15 ♦ 50

3-point goals: Abbeville 3 (Waller 1, Head 1, J. Jackson 1), Emerald 3 (Tracy 2, Koktem 1).

Fouled out ♦ Abbeville: Watt, Power. Technicals ♦ None.

Records A (4-1 overall); E (4-4).