

Emerald Girls Rally To Top NS

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NINETY SIX -- Emerald High School's girls basketball team needed just one game to prove that it's a fairly resilient group. The Vikings rallied from a 10-point first quarter deficit to pull out a 49-45 win against Ninety Six in their season opener Tuesday.

Players and Emerald coach Anarie Duckett hope the comeback victory puts Emerald on the right course for the rest of the season. "It does make us feel pretty good because we're a fairly new team. We have a lot of new people and we work well together as a team," Emerald forward Amber Green said.

Trailing 17-7 after the first quarter, Emerald pulled within one at halftime and took its first lead when Green hit a jumper with 5:50 remaining in the third quarter, putting the Vikings ahead 23-22. Emerald led for the remainder of the game and fended off a late rally by Ninety Six to hang on to the win.

The Wildcats went on a 13-7 run over the final four minutes, but a desperation 3-pointer by Quitta Tolbert missed its mark at the buzzer. "I think we got a little bit out of control, trying to go a little bit too fast, so I tried to calm them down," Duckett said. "I looked over at (Ninety Six) coach (John) Coster one time and he was telling them to hurry up, and I was telling them to slow down."

The Vikings entered the game with an undersized starting five and playing out of a 1-3-1 zone defense, which allowed for some easy baskets inside for Ninety Six. Following the disastrous first quarter, Duckett opted to switch to a man-to-man defense. "We were supposed to be playing a 1-3-1, but we couldn't score and when we went to man, we stopped them, but we couldn't score," Duckett said. "A couple times we did score and played man (and) they turned it over both times, so I said, 'Let's just go man all the time.'"

The strategy worked as the Wildcats were limited to four field goals over the second and third quarters and Emerald outscored them 25-10. "I think we got a little tired. I tried to sub some ladies in and thought that would help us out, but I guess it just didn't work tonight," Coster said. "We didn't execute like we should have."

The Vikings' scorers also began finding their rhythm after being kept silent in the first quarter. Green hit a 3-pointer with 2:03 left in the second to tie the game at 20, and the Vikings went on a 7-0 run late in the third quarter before Ninety Six's Ashley Ehlers ended the period with a jumper, cutting the Vikings' advantage to 32-27.

Green had a team-high 13 points, while sophomore forward Marissa Callaham came off the

bench and provided 12 points.

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