

THE INDEX-JOURNAL

Sports

Emerald's Parks Key In Vikings Season-Opening Victory

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Published: Wednesday, December 3, 2008 12:40 AM EST



Emerald's Ryan Tracy, left, shoots a jumper over Ninety Six's Bareko Johnson on Tuesday in a varsity boys basketball game. (Staff photo by T.M. James)

NINETY SIX -- Some multi-sport high school athletes find it a difficult transition from football season to basketball. Emerald guard Dee Parks isn't one of them. Parks made a couple of key driving layups late in the Vikings' season opener against Ninety Six and the Vikings dominated the second half on the glass to emerge with a 63-54 win.

Emerald won the Region 3-AA title last season, but didn't win its first game until several weeks into the season, so earning a win in their opener was big for the Vikings. "It's a big plus," Emerald coach Robin Scott said. "We've been talking about that since before we started -- we're not going to start out 0-4 this year. Already we're not going to do that. "We might be 1-3, but we're not going to be 0-4, so that's good."

The play of Parks, who's also an All-Lakelands running back on the Vikings' football team, was key in that effort. With the game tied at four and 5:14 remaining in regulation, Parks hit a layup to give Emerald a 46-44 lead. Just under two minutes later, Parks drove the lane past a couple defenders for another tip-in that put Emerald ahead by five, 53-48. "They went box-and-one in the second half on Mookie (Rahmad Strong) and that kind of made us go really stale for a while until they realized we could run the offense around him," Scott said.

For some of the players who play both football and basketball, the transition takes time, but one game in, Parks appeared at ease on the court. Parks' key buckets late were still a factor thanks to Emerald's improved performance on the boards in the second half. Through the first two quarters, the inside game was dominated by Ninety Six center Nathan Prater, who had 15 of his game-high 24 points in the first half. "That's the one thing we talked to them about at halftime," Scott said. "At the start of the game, I thought we rebounded pretty well, but the whole second quarter it was like we lost focus on who to box out. "Prater was killing us inside. He's tall and long and gets in good position, so if you don't keep him off the boards, you're going to have trouble winning."

The Vikings switched to a zone defense in the second half and were able to neutralize

Prater, who was held to three field goals. They also began crashing the boards, tallying 28 second-half rebounds. Forward Antonio Gray had a game-high 13 rebounds. "They really hustled on the boards," Ninety Six coach Ike Dickey said. "We're always at a loss there, but it was a big deficit (Tuesday)."

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