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## Vikes, Tracy Defeat Tigers

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Emerald High School boys basketball coach Robin Scott said a week ago following the Vikings' season opener against Ninety Six that Emerald's big men, like Ontario Curry and Lucas Mathis, were still adjusting from football.

Just a few days later, the Vikings have taken big strides inside the paint and used that newfound strength to outlast Saluda 67-65 on Wednesday at Westview Middle School. The Vikings trailed by one entering the fourth quarter, but Emerald's ability to pull down offensive rebounds intensified and it went on a 12-0 run that put the Vikings ahead 60-49.

Emerald's tenacity on the glass salvaged some disastrous free-throw shooting, which nearly let Saluda back in the game. The Tigers made three 3-pointers over the final couple minutes to pull within two points. "What we missed in free throws we made up for in being able to pound the boards a little bit at times," Scott said. "We tried a new defense (Wednesday), a little combo defense, and had a little bit of trouble adjusting to it, but overall I thought we played as hard as we've played all year."

With 5:30 left in the fourth quarter, the Vikings trailed by three when following a missed shot, Emerald center Austin Baten scored on the rebound. Moments later, Emerald pulled down several boards on the offensive side before Lucas Mathis laid the ball in the basket. "The coaches had been talking to us about how we needed to work on our boxing out stance more," Mathis said. "We kind of picked it up after we started getting more of a feeling for it. Also, the offense started opening up more opportunities for us."

Emerald had been dominating the glass throughout the game, but it wasn't until some lapses in Saluda's defensive pressure that the Vikings were able to pull away. "The whole game was like that. We kept subbing guys at the four and five positions, trying to find somebody to box out," Saluda coach Charlie Jenkins said. "I think that's one thing coach Scott stresses is getting offensive rebounds. They did a good job of it because they sometimes had four or five guys crashing the glass."

Mathis and Curry are defensive linemen on the Vikings' football team and are still making the adjustment to basketball. "They still miss a lot of easy shots inside, but they really play hard," Scott said. "(Ontario) has really started to come on. I thought several of our inside guys played their best game of the year."