

Vikings Squeak By Rebs

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The Emerald High School boys basketball team began its season last year by dropping its first four games before climbing back into contention. So far the Vikings have avoided those early pratfalls this year.

Emerald won its second game thanks to some strong defense down the stretch and held on for a 52-48 victory over Mid-Carolina on Saturday at Westview Middle School. The win Saturday comes just a few days after the Vikings opened the season with a win against former Region 3-AA opponent Ninety Six.

Emerald kept the Rebels without a field goal for nearly five minutes late in Saturday's game and would've won the game comfortably if it had made more shots down the stretch from the free-throw line. Mid-Carolina committed two intentional fouls in the final five minutes, but the Vikings didn't hit any free throws off those opportunities. "All we had to do was hit some free throws and we wouldn't have to worry about it," Emerald coach Robin Scott said. "We had 12 missed free throws in the fourth quarter, so if you make half of those you don't have to worry about what kind of defense you play on the other end."

With Emerald ahead 50-42 with a 1:05 remaining, Mid-Carolina's Mac Lake hit two 3-pointers to pull the Rebels within two points, but Vikings forward/center Austin Baten hit two free throws with 29.6 seconds remaining to seal the win. "We went zone on them a little bit toward the end to throw them off and it worked for a little while. Then they hit a 3, so we went back to man-to-man," Scott said. "Nobody picked (Lake) up so they cut it to two. Thank God for Austin being able to hit a couple free throws there. That was big."

Antonio Gray missed a few free throws late in the game, but the senior forward managed to make a couple key buckets late and help give the Vikings an advantage inside the paint. With no one taller than 6-foot-2, Mid-Carolina was at a disadvantage on the glass. "We just did a good job boxing out and getting rebounds," said Gray, who led Emerald with 13 points. "We wanted to make sure they didn't get no easy shots."

Mid-Carolina coach Zeb Reid agreed the Rebels were overmatched against Emerald's size. Mid-Carolina was able to work around that in the first half, when it trailed by just one entering intermission, but had less luck over the final 16 minutes. "Our tallest kid's about 6-foot-2, so they've got a little bit more height than us," Reid said. "We were able to use our quickness in the first half....but we're fairly young right now and Emerald's got a pretty strong team."