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Sports

Vikings' Tracy Finding His Way

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Staff file photo by T.M.
James EMERALD'S
RYAN TRACY

Late in a Region 1-AA opener Jan. 9 against Pendleton, Emerald High School's Ryan Tracy drained an open 3-pointer to pull his team within eight points with just over three minutes on the clock.

The Vikings eventually lost 59-49 and have fallen in two since then heading into tonight's game at Westview Middle School against Liberty. But Tracy, a senior shooting guard, has proven to be the one Emerald wants to have the ball in his hands when the game's on the line. "(Emerald) coach (Robin) Scott tells us when we come in the game to go as hard as we can for as long as we can," Tracy said. "When I come in the game, I just try to play as hard as I can and contribute to my team. "As far as I can see, my role is to hit key shots, clutch shots -- mostly 3s, because that's most of the shots I do. We have a couple of set plays for me to hit a couple of 3s."

Tracy is averaging 10 points per game, and is shooting at a 37.9 percent clip from the 3-point line. Over Emerald's past four games, he's scored in double digits each time and has averaged 13.4 points while nailing at least two 3-pointers each game.

"(Point guard) Dee (Parks) is shooting 3s well too; he's actually got the higher percentage but he's only shot about half the 3s, so we're looking to get 3s out of all these guys with the zones we're seeing," Scott said. "The main difference that I've noticed is that

at the end of the game you can tell, Mookie (Rahmad Strong) and Dee are both trying to get Ryan the ball."

Getting to the point where he's confident enough to hit clutch baskets at critical junctures in a game did not come right away to Tracy. "I could shoot the 3, but I just couldn't like hit them in a game," Tracy said. "Then I worked on it, like me and Rahmad, we'd go to the Y and shoot a little bit and do it in practice. "Once I calmed down in the games, you know, took the time to focus on and shoot it, I started hitting them."

Tracy, playing behind graduated senior Ben McIntosh, showed signs of potential last season, but was inconsistent early on this season. "I was riding him pretty hard to start the year. He couldn't make free throws to start the year and his 3-point shooting was terrible," Scott said. "I just told him, Don't worry about what you think you're doing, just keep shooting

because I know.' "I saw him in practice make 14 in a row the other day. So he can shoot them, it's just a confidence builder. Don't worry if you miss the first couple, keep on gunning. That's got to be the shooter's mentality anyway."

Tracy, who played his first two years at Dorman, has always been a shooter. He first started playing competitively when he was 7, when he was signed up to play in a youth recreation league, but even before that he regularly shot around at home with his father. "I had liked it already because he would take me in the back yard, and we had a (basket) back there," Tracy said. "It was kind of old school, but we went back there and shot. And then I would watch it with him on TV and stuff."

At Dorman, the second-largest high school in South Carolina, Tracy was cut from the boys team his freshman year and struggled to get minutes during 10th grade, so moving to Greenwood and playing at Emerald offered more of an opportunity to stand out. "It was like a new change for me to meet new people and see what this basketball team was about," Tracy said. "I had the choice of going to Emerald or Greenwood High School, and then I chose Emerald and ended up liking it."

Now he has an opportunity if he continues to compete well through the rest of Emerald's region schedule to possibly play beyond high school. "I told him to make up a list of schools that he might be interested in and think small first and let's go from there," Scott said. "If he finishes up as strong as he's been playing lately, somebody may give him an opportunity to do it."