

Wildcats Boys Best Emerald

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The Ninety Six High School boys basketball team dropped its first game against Emerald despite a strong presence in the paint. That advantage, as well as a strong transition game, made the difference in the second meeting. Blocking out and utilizing its superior speed, the Wildcats avenged their earlier loss to Emerald with a 60-53 victory Friday night at Westview Middle School.

The Wildcats led by just two entering the fourth quarter, but made a couple key runs in the final six minutes to seal the win. With Ninety Six ahead 55-52 and 45.3 seconds remaining, the ball was at Emerald's end of the floor and a scramble for rebounds ensued before Ninety Six point guard Trey Smith came down with the ball and sent it up court to Wildcats forward Kelcey Washington. He laid the ball in, was fouled, then made the free throw to put Ninety Six up 58-52. "I thought (Smith) was going to take it. I didn't know he was going to pass it," Washington said. "I just tried to make sure I finished."

Washington finished with a team-high 13 points, scoring primarily off turnovers in transition. "I just had to finish. I knew if I finished, we'd win the game," Washington said. "You just have to play hard the whole time."

The Wildcats' presence on the glass dissipated in the second half of their first game against Emerald, but Ninety Six continued to hold its own over the final two quarters Friday. "One thing I'm really proud of my team for is at the end they did not give up on the boards," Ninety Six coach Ike Dickey said. "We've had a problem in a few games not closing out and we've really worked hard on closing out. "They showed a lot of heart and want-to (Friday) and hitting the boards when we needed to."

Emerald appeared to pick up the momentum early in the fourth quarter. With the game tied at 41 and just under six minutes left, Ninety Six's Bareko Johnson picked up a technical foul and Emerald's Austin Baten made two of three free throws to put the Vikings up by two. Moments later, Emerald missed several shots before forward Lucas Mathis got the rebound and dropped the ball in to give Emerald a 45-41 lead with 5:40 remaining.

The Wildcats' presence inside and a few key fouls called against Emerald kept Ninety Six in the game. "I thought we hit the boards pretty good, but I didn't think we hit the boards on their offensive end," Emerald coach Robin Scott said. "And we missed so many easy put-backs. We just missed shots that we should've made."

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