

Cedar Valley boys exit to standing ovation

Written by Jim Ecker

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LONE TREE - They won 13 games, reached the second round of the state playoffs and gave the 10th-ranked team in the state a real scare Tuesday night.

All in all, Cedar Valley Christian enjoyed its first season as a member of the Iowa High School Athletic Association.

The Huskies made a spirited rally Tuesday before falling to Lone Tree, 76-63, in the Class 1A district semifinals at Lone Tree.

When it ended, the several hundred CVC fans who made the trek gave the Huskies a standing ovation. And the Huskies, standing on the court with Coach Jeff Pospisil, returned the applause and pointed to the crowd in appreciation.

"We're a small school, but we're all close to each other. We support each other," said junior Jeremy Strutz, who sparked a second-half rally with a flurry of baskets.

Cedar Valley trailed by 18 points early in the third quarter, but the Huskies pulled within seven points in the last three minutes of the game and made Lone Tree nervous.

The Huskies (13-10) scored only 15 points in the first half, then torched the nets for 48 in the second half. "We challenged them to go out and play with guts, and they did," said Pospisil, summarizing his halftime oration.

Bryan Forbes stood between Cedar Valley and an upset victory. The Lone Tree junior poured in 38 points despite missing several stretches with foul trouble.

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"That number 55 is just tough. He's just a really, really tough player," said Pospisil.

Forbes averages 19 points, but he doubled that against the Huskies with nine field goals and a 17-for-20 performance at the foul line. He scored inside and outside and was too much to handle.

Strutz led the Huskies with 15 points. Jon Landis scored 14 points and Will Muhlbach finished with 13 despite twisting his ankle. Landis tossed in four 3-pointers, including three in the second half to help fuel the rally.

Cedar Valley Christian switched from the Northern Illinois Christian Conference to the Iowa High School Athletic Association this year and proved it can play with IHSA clubs.

"I feel like we've done really well for the first year," said Strutz. "We played 19 road games. It's tough to play on the road, in other people's gyms where they play all the time and where they practice and where they have the fans.

"I feel we played really well and next year should be better."

Cedar Valley began the season with an 82-61 loss at Lone Tree, then played much better in the rematch Tuesday. "They've improved a great deal," said Lone Tree Coach Tom Squiers. "They knocked down some shots and made a really nice run at us."

The Huskies had four juniors and only one senior in the starting lineup. Their three leading scorers Tuesday - Strutz, Landis and Muhlbach - are all juniors. So is Spencer Zielke, who started and hit a pair of 3-pointers.

Cedar Valley will lose seniors David Sperling, Nick Henderson and Luke Long from the rotation, but will have a strong nucleus for next year's team.

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"We get another year with these guys," said Pospisil. "We're looking forward to that."

Cedar Valley learned Tuesday that it likely will become a member of the Tri-Rivers Conference for the 2013-14 school year, which will correct the imbalance of road games. The Huskies scrambled to put a schedule together this season and got a grand tour of eastern Iowa.

"I'm proud of these guys," said Pospisil.

Lone Tree (20-3) will play Iowa Mennonite in the district finals Thursday night.

CEDAR VALLEY (63): Henderson 3 0-0 6, Zielke 2 0-0 6, Koch 0 0-0 0, Long 0 1-2 1, Landis 5 0-0 14, Muhlbach 6 1-2 13, Strutz 5 3-6 15, Sperling 4 0-0 8. Totals 25 5-10 63.

LONE TREE (76): L. Forbes 0 0-0 0, Larew 2 6-6 10, Lorack 3 0-2 8, Sieverding 0 2-6 2, Dodson 4 2-3 11, Gosnell 1 2-2 5, Quigley 1 0-0 2, B. Forbes 9 17-20 38. Totals 20 29-39 76.

Halftime - Lone Tree 29, Cedar Valley 15. 3-point goals - Cedar Valley 8 (Landis 4, Zielke 2, Strutz 2), Lone Tree 7 (Forbes 3, Lorack 2, Dodson 1, Gosnell 1). Fouled out - Zielke, Landis.