

Smith-Drahos' career night lifts Hawks

Written by Mike Condon

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Prairie junior Max Smith-Drahos loaded up on the pasta before Friday's battle with Washington.

Then the 6-foot-1 junior proceeded to unload on the Warriors.

Smith-Drahos exploded for a career 34 points, 17 in each half, as the Hawks built a 17-point lead in the third quarter before holding on for a 77-72 victory at Washington, snapping a five-game losing streak.

As he was being congratulated by Prairie fans following the contest, Smith-Drahos said it was the pregame meal that led to his career night.

"Judy, Jake Eilers' mom, makes the team meal for every away game," he said. "She made fantastic food. It helped me prepare for tonight."

What may have been a bigger key for the crafty junior was regaining his health.

"He was under the weather a couple weeks ago," Prairie coach Jeremy Rickertsen said. "He didn't play a couple weeks ago in the Xavier game and he has kind of been working his way back."

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"Tonight, it was fun to see the real Max back."

Washington held a 13-12 lead early in the second quarter before Smith-Drahos took control. He scored 13 of the Hawks' 23 points in the period, pushing Prairie to a 35-29 lead at the break.

"Before the game, the coaches just told me to have fun," Smith-Drahos said. "I was just trying to attack and have fun. Wash had some bigger guys, but the coaches told us to keep being aggressive."

Rickertsen was pleased with the way Smith-Drahos approached the game.

"We've talked to Max about letting the game come to him," Rickertsen said. "His defense creates a lot of his offense and that showed tonight."



Senior Cal Clark combined with Smith-Drahos to help the Hawks build the lead. He connected on three 3-point baskets in the quarter while Smith-Drahos put another 11 on the board, pushing Prairie's lead to 60-44 after three quarters.

"I really like what we did on defense," Rickertsen said. "We did a real good job on on block outs and, for the most part, did a good job keeping

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the ball in front of us because they are a little more athletic than we are."

The fourth quarter was a parade to the foul line as Washington fouled in an attempt to get back into the game. Clark was just 5 of 12 from the stripe in the quarter, but still finished with 23 points.

The Warriors (4-6, 2-5) kept battling, but never got closer than the final five-point margin. Keion Wills led the Warriors with 20 points. Hunter Strait added 17 and Dallas Hobbs had 11.

Jalen Rima finished with 11 points for the Hawks (5-6, 3-4).

With the five-game losing streak gone, Rickertsen is hopeful that more good things are ahead for his team.

"I really hope so," he said when asked if he thought Friday's performance could be the turnaround moment of the season. "The one thing through the ups and downs has been the effort. The effort has always been there.

"With the exception of the North Scott game, they have played teams hard," continued the Prairie coach. "If our shots are going and we continue to bring the effort we have been, I think we are going to win some more games."

Smith-Drahos echoed his coach.

"We've been working harder in practice," he said. "I think we're turning things around. If we play like we did tonight, we're going to keep

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getting better."

PRAIRIE (77): Copeland 0 4-4 4, Clark 7 5-12 23, Smith-Drahos 11 10-12 34, Eilers 1 0-0 2, Rima 4 3-4 11, Hook 0 1-2 1, Serbousek 0 0-0 0, Oxley 1 0-0 2, Johnson 0 0-0 0. Totals: 24 23-34 77.

WASHINGTON (72): Wills 5 10-13 20 Strait 7 2-2 17, Hobbs 5 1-4 11, Thomas 3 3-3 9, Jackson 3 0-0 8, Williams 2 3-5 7, Dawson 0 0-0 0, Beard 0 0-0 0. Totals 25 19-27 72.

Halftime - Prairie 35, Washington 29. 3-point goals - Prairie 6 (Clark 4, Smith-Drahos 2). Washington 3 (Jackson 2, Strait). Total fouls - Prairie 19, Washington 23. Fouled out: Strait, Eilers. Technical fouls - none.