

Handling The Heat

SV boys hold on for 70-67 tourney title win

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Seneca Valley coach Kevin Trost gives instructions to his team prior to the second half of Friday's game against Shaler. The Raiders won their own Christmas tournament by posting a 70-67 victory.

JOHN ENRIETTO/ BUTLER EAGLE

JACKSON TWP — The heat was turned up, but Seneca Valley didn't get burned.

The Raiders led Shaler by 12 with 2:27 left in the Seneca Valley Boys Basketball Christmas Tournament championship game Friday, only to see the Titans go on a 10-0 run to close within 69-67 with 52 seconds remaining.

"They turned up the pressure on us and we had a tough time handling it," SV coach Kevin Trost said. "But our kids are resilient and they held on."

Gabe Lawson sank a free throw with 17.2 seconds left and Shaler's Mekhi Reynolds missed a contested trey before the buzzer as the Raiders (5-3) came away with a 70-67 victory.

"Gabe hit a big free throw for us, then did A great job defending that last shot," said Raider junior guard Mason Bush, the tournament MVP. "He didn't allow them to get a clean look."

The game was tied four times and had 10 lead changes before the Raiders took the lead for good on a Brendan Koken trey with three minutes left in the third quarter. Koken's bucket

began a 10-0 SV run that opened up a 51-43 lead.

A trey by Lawson, followed by a Trey Berringer layup, gave the Raiders a 69-57 lead with 2:27 left in the game before the Titans (7-2) made their final push.

The loss snapped a seven-game winning streak for Shaler.

"I give them (SV) credit because they closed out the win," Shaler coach Rob Niederberger said. "But, no, I'm not satisfied or happy with this.

"We expect to win every game we play. That's how we are."

Seneca Valley missed the front end of two one-and-one's down the stretch before Lawson sank one of two free throws to extend his team's lead to three.

The Raiders sank 29 of 51 shots from the floor — including eight treys — but were just four of 12 from the foul line.

"We have not seen them shoot that well from outside all season," Niederberger said of the Raiders. "They were knocking down shots today."

But not at the foul line.

"We were averaging only 50 percent at the line as a team before this game," Trost said. "We've been working on our free throw shooting and it should improve, because we have good shooters.

"This was a big win for us. Winning any kind of championship is always good when you're trying to build a program."

Bush led the Raiders with 25 points, five rebounds and five assists. Zac Zajacs — who made the all-tournament team — had 13 points and three assists while Berringer had 12 points and three assists.

Koken came off the bench to score nine points, get three steals and dish out three assists.

"Gabe and Brendan are like Swiss Army knives. They can do a lot of things," Trost said.

Justin Desabato made the all-tourney team for Shaler, scoring 24 points, getting four rebounds and three assists, Reynolds had 14 points and four assists, Brennan Fugh 12 points, six rebounds and three steals.

SV's Marcus Might fouled out of the game just before Shaler went on its late 10-0 run. The 6-foot-7 Might had seven points and seven rebounds.

"When you're pressed, the opposition is looking for the mistake pass," Bush said. "We have to calm down and look for the open guy in the middle. We'll get better at that."

Trost agreed.

"Facing that kind of pressure was a good experience for us," he said.

While Seneca Valley had 18 turnovers, Shaler had 21. The Titans had 13 turnovers in the first half, losing the lead on a buzzer-beating layup by Might.

"We gave up four points late in the half that hurt us," Niederberger said. "I thought we played better in the first half ... just too many bad passes."

SHALER 67

Mekhi Reynolds 4-16 5-5 14, Brennan Fugh 5-8 1-1 12, Justin Desabato 8-12 7-9 24, Matt

Bendel 2-8 2-2 6, Luke Bebout 0-1 0-0 0, Colton Schott 2-2 0-0 6, Jake Miller 1-2 1-2 3, Nick Rispoli 1-4 0-0 2. Totals: 23-53 16-20 67.

SENECA VALLEY 70

Gabe Lawson 1-1 1-2 4, Trey Berringer 5-10 1-3 12, Marcus Might 3-3 1-4 7, Mason Bush 11-16 0-0 25, Zac Zajacs 5-14 1-2 13, Connor Lyczek 0-1 0-0 0, Brendan Koken 4-6 0-1 9. Totals: 29-51 4-12 70.

Shaler 16 14 16 21 – 67

Seneca Valley 13 18 20 19 – 70

3-point goals: Reynolds, Fugh, Desavbato, Schott 2; Lawson, Berringer, Bush 3, Zajacs 2, Koken

JV: Seneca Valley, 56-30 (SH: Jake Miller 8; SV: Cole Brooks 13, Connor Lyczek 11, Mason Baldwin 10)

Friday: Central Catholic at Seneca Valley



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I graduated with a Journalism degree from Ohio University in 1979. I started at the Eagle on August 24, 1997. My awards include 2nd place in feature writing from Ohio Associated Press (while working for the Steubenville Herald-Star), media award from Lernerville Speedway and 3rd place in a Pennsylvania AP contest for story feature.