

POSTED ON [FEBRUARY 20, 2018](#) BY [KEVIN COLLEY](#)

Minford falls in heartbreaker to Ironton, 54-53

SPORTS

By Kevin Colley - kcolley@aimmediamidwest.com



Minford's Kelton Kelley brings the ball up the floor for the Falcons.

Kevin Colley | Daily Times



Minford's Elijah Craft shoots a three on Monday evening against Ironton as Fighting Tigers' head coach Mark LaFon looks on.

Kevin Colley | Daily Times



Minford's Nathan McCormick moves around the perimeter on Monday evening.

Kevin Colley | Daily Times



Minford's Kelton Kelley holds the ball out on the left side of the floor on Monday evening against Ironton.

Kevin Colley | Daily Times



Minford's Breydan Tilley drives to the rim against Ironton.

Kevin Colley | Daily Times

JACKSON — Games like Monday evening's Division III Sectional Semifinal contest against the Minford Falcons' boys basketball program and the Ironton Fighting Tigers' boys basketball program are a prime example of why a team should always be ready and alert for any and all scenarios that can happen.

With nine first-half threes to its credit and a well-balanced scoring effort in tow, Minford looked like it was going to run away with the affair and earn a return trip to Jackson to face Wheelersburg on Friday evening at 8 p.m. as the Falcons held a 39-21 advantage at the halftime break.

However, Ironton's low-post play in the second half, as well as its play out in transition — which have been Achilles heels for Minford all season long — proved to be key components in a heartbreaking loss for the Falcons.

Despite hitting 11 threes and sprinting out to the aforementioned 18-point halftime lead, Josh Shoemaker's club connected on just four field goals in the second half as the Falcons connected on just two field goals over a span of 14:45 during the second half of action. In that same period of time, Minford was outscored by a 28-6 tally as the Fighting Tigers of Ironton clawed their way to an incredible comeback with a 54-53 victory on Monday evening.

For Shoemaker, it was simply a tale of two different halves of basketball.

“Our kids did a good job of taking care of the basketball in the first half,” Shoemaker said. “The guys found the open man, they hit the open shots, and they played with confidence. In the second half, Ironton got physical with us, we turned the ball over immediately, and we didn’t get back in transition in the same manner that we did in the first half, which led to easy buckets and allowed Ironton to gradually come back in the game. When we did get it inside, we missed open layups. We didn’t do anything right in the second half to win a basketball game.”

The outset, however, was all money for Minford.

From the get-go, the Falcons wasted no time splashing threes all around the court as Minford’s five first-quarter treys put the Falcons up by a 22-14 margin at the end of the opening quarter of action. Cameron Dalton, Kelton Kelley, Nathan McCormick, and Breydan Tilley each nailed treys in the frame, with Dalton providing a team-leading six off of his pair of treys to help give the Falcons an eight-point advantage.

The strong play continued in the second frame for Minford as the Falcons got solid work done on both ends of the floor. A quarter-opening three-pointer from the left wing by Elijah Vogelsong-Lewis was quickly followed by eight straight points from Elijah Craft, who added a pair of threes from the right corner and used a dazzling set of moves to put up a crafty layup that allowed the Falcons to go on a 12-0 spurt over the first 3:44 of the second quarter. McCormick then added yet another three-ball from the right side as Minford ultimately took a 20-point advantage, 36-16, before settling for a 39-21 halftime advantage.

“It was good to see Elijah Craft play that well in his final game,” Shoemaker said. “Breydan’s been strong all season for us. Our seniors, Elijah, Breydan, and Logan Boston, provided great effort and attitude over the last four years. They represented Minford basketball in the way that we want players to do.”

But as sizeable as the lead was, it, however, wouldn’t last.

After turning the ball over three times over its first four possessions to start the second half, Ironton got rolling as the trio of Reid Carrico, Charlie Large, and Ethan Wilson began to do major damage in the open floor.

The trio, as a matter of fact, ultimately combined for 14 of Ironton’s 18 points in the quarter as turnovers and missed layups/runners kept Minford without a field goal in the quarter until McCormick drove into the lane and scored with 8.7 seconds to play in the third quarter of action. The sophomore’s field goal, along with two free throws apiece from Dalton and Darius Jordan, were the Falcons’ only saving graces in the quarter as Minford’s once sizable advantage was cut to just 45-39 at the end of the frame.

After a made free throw from Ethan Wilson cut the Minford lead to 45-40 at the beginning of the fourth quarter, Dalton knocked down a bucket through contact with 7:17 to go to put the Falcons up by a seven-point margin.

The momentum, however, proved to be short-lived as Carrico battled back by supplying six consecutive points — from tough finishes in traffic to open layups in transition — as Ironton cut the deficit to a single point. Another Minford miss was then followed by a foul on Wilson, and the 6-2 junior guard followed by hitting both free throws in the one-and-one situation to give Ironton a 48-47 advantage. Two buckets by Large inside then followed that as Ironton increased its lead to a 52-47 advantage with 2:16 left to play in the contest.

Tilley, however, didn't let Minford go quietly into the night. Less than 10 seconds later, the senior pulled up and knocked home a trey, then, following an Ironton turnover, made the Fighting Tigers pay by canning a second three-ball with 35.3 seconds to go in the contest to cut the deficit to 54-53.

After fouling Wilson and sending the junior to the line, Minford would, at worst, have a chance to tie and send the contest to overtime. But when the guard missed both of his free throw attempts, the Falcons obtained greater life. With less than seven seconds to play — and after a couple of passes were knocked out of bounds by the Fighting Tigers — Minford effectively got to the middle of the floor, and, after a couple of swings, got Dalton an open look from the right corner. Dalton's buzzer-beating three-pointer, however, glanced off the side of the rim and fell short right into the waiting arms of Large, who cradled the ball as time expired.

"We told our kids at halftime that Ironton was going to be physical in the second half, and that it was going to be similar to the Eastern Pike game," Shoemaker said. "We said, 'You've got to play even with them. If they cut it down to eight, 10 points in that fourth quarter, they're going to start getting a lot of confidence, and we're going to lose it.' That's exactly what happened. We didn't attack, we didn't focus, we didn't take care of the basketball, we didn't rebound, and we didn't guard. That's how you lose a game after having an 18-point first-half lead."

With the loss, Minford will not only have to say goodbye to Boston, Craft, and Tilley, but gear up to a further degree after an unusual sectional semifinal exit. It's the first year that the Falcons haven't won at least one postseason contest in six years.

"It is what it is," Shoemaker said. "We've got a large group returning, but they're going to have to work. Just because you're a year older doesn't mean you're a year better. They're going to have to work hard, they're going to have to get into the weight room, they're going to have to focus on their crafts, and from this year until next, they're going to have to become smarter."