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Minford makes quick work of Piketon, 57-30

SPORTS

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Maddie Slusher passes the ball to a teammate during a prior contest.

Kevin Colley | Daily Times

The saying is that defense wins championships.

And if the Minford Falcons' girls basketball program's defensive effort on Saturday afternoon was any indication, its fellow Division III District competitors are in for a rude awakening down the pike.

In a Division III Sectional Final held in Lucasville on Saturday, the Lady Falcons held Piketon to just three points in the first quarter and two field goals over the entire first half en route to establishing a 34-7 halftime advantage. That defensive pressure, along with another balanced effort that included eight points or more from four different Minford players, proved to be too much for the Piketon Lady Streaks to have as the Lady Falcons disposed of Piketon, 57-30, on Saturday afternoon to advance to the Division III District Tournament in Waverly.

For Scott Caudill, the energy and effort that came from the defensive end proved to be contagious across the entire roster.

“We came out pretty energetic, and played great defense,” Caudill said. “Our offense was just pretty sluggish. We had been shooting the lights out of it the last several games, and on Saturday, our percentages were down. We were struggling on that end, and we were slow coming out of the gate there as a result. However, in the second quarter, our girls really came alive and started knocking down some shots. Ashley (Blankenship), Erin (Daniels), and Marissa (Risner) all hit big shots for us, and it really just opened up the gates from there.”

Throughout the opening half of action, the components that make up Minford’s roster proved to be too much for Piketon to handle as the Lady Falcons used a blend of man, zone and press defenses to keep the Lady Streaks off balance throughout the course of the affair. Piketon didn’t connect on a single shot from inside the three point line in the first half, and star guard Grace Lightle — who scored 28 points against West on Monday evening — was held to just three points over the opening pair of stanzas. Ally Crothers had the only other three for Piketon, who only hit one basket apiece in each of the first two quarters of play.

“Our girls did a really nice job,” Caudill said. “We ran different types of defenses and we ran some different full-court presses. We mixed things around to confuse Piketon and get them out of their rhythm by doing some things they hadn’t seen. If they’re catching the ball from different directions, then their shot is usually not as consistent. Our girls did a really good job communicating, getting in their sets, and getting back in transition.”

Minford’s defense effort proved to be huge because the effort allowed the Lady Falcons to overcome the slow start that it had in its own right offensively as Minford only hit five shots from the floor in the opening quarter but still obtained a 14-3 first-quarter advantage thanks to its defensive work.

“They’ve got a good program over in Piketon,” Caudill said. “They do a really nice job of getting up in the passing lanes, pressuring the ballhandlers, and making them turn the basketball over. They did a really nice job defensively. Hat’s off to Piketon and Brett Coreno (Piketon head coach). He does a really good job with those kids. They’re very fundamental and their effort and attitude was there all game.”

The quartet of Blankenship, Daniels, Risner, and Caitlyn Puckett, however, proved to be too much for Piketon to handle. Blankenship and Daniels combined for 13 second-quarter points as Minford put together a 20-point frame, then Blankenship added nine points on her own in the third stanza while Daniels and Risner combined for 11 third-quarter tallies to put the game away. Blankenship (18 points), Daniels (16 points), and Risner (10 points) all finished in double-figures, while Puckett added a basket in each quarter en route to an eight-point output. None of the four players played beyond the third quarter, with Daniels putting up her 16 points in just 12 minutes of playing time.

“You look at those four kids, and you can’t leave any of them open or they will make you pay and hurt you throughout the course of a game,” Caudill said. “That’s what makes us such a strong team, though. We’ve got good senior leadership and girls who have bought into their roles. It’s a blessing to have the tools that we have.”

With the victory, Minford will turn its attention to a massive showdown with Albany Alexander on Thursday evening at 6:15 p.m. in Waverly. In that contest, the Lady Falcons will look to put their district semifinal losses to the the Lady Spartans in 2016 (53-42) and 2017 (50-36) to bed, once and for all.

“We think the world of their coaching staff,” Caudill said. “However, when they knock you out of the tournament three years in a row, you begin to develop some animosity. You want to win. These girls are very hungry, and these are some experienced kids that have been through some trials. Several of those trials have been at the hands of Albany Alexander. However, we’ve got to face them them on Thursday evening, and it’s all in the girls’ hands from there.”