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Mules To Play For State Title

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By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports

COLUMBIA, Mo. - The Bernie Mules once again found themselves playing for another chance at the State Title Thursday (March 17) afternoon. The Mules (27-4, ranked #4 in the state) just had to get by Wellington-Napoleon Tigers (26-1, ranked #1 in the state) to earn their second consecutive shot at the Class 2 State Championship. After a a double-overtime thriller, the Mules came out victorious, winning 73-66.

Wellington-Napoleon's defense was geared towards stopping Bernie standout Jordan McGowan early, but teammates Sammy Walker and Cameron Shipman stepped up for the Mules during the contest. Walker was able to put up 24 points on the night, as well as hauling in eight boards. Shipman, who hit six-of-nine three pointers in the contest, added 21 points to the Mules' tally.

McGowan was still able to chip in 15 points during the game, but only shot four-of-13 from the floor during the game. Most of McGowan's contributions came on the defensive side of the court - six of his seven rebounds were defensive - as well as coming up with two steals and two blocks.

The Tigers had a slight edge in rebounds - 39 compared to 36 for the Mules - and doubled Bernie's takeaway total - eight compared to four for the Mules - but still came up short.

The Mules held a 30-20 lead going into the locker room at halftime, but the Tigers came out in the second half fired up and took over the game. Bernie's lead was cut to four (38-34) after the third quarter, and Wellington-Napoleon exchanged leads with the Mules during the fourth. Blake Seitz had a great opportunity to secure the win for the Tigers - he stole the ball with less than 10 seconds left in the fourth quarter - and took the ball to the hoop, but missed a wide open layup to send the game into overtime tied at 56.

Shipman hit a deep three to give the Mules a 61-58 lead with 2:00 left in the first overtime, but he was quickly answered by Taylor Bryant. Matt Eaves completed a three-point play to put Bernie back on top - 64-62 - with 33 seconds left in the overtime period, but Bryant hit two clutch free-throws to send the game to its second overtime.

Eaves hit another clutch layup for the Mules to give them a 66-64 lead with 3:00 left in the second overtime. The Mules held that lead until McGowan hit two free throws to increase the lead to four with just under a minute left. Shipman hit three of four free-throws in the final minute of the game to push Bernie to a seven-point advantage at the final buzzer.

The Mules will move on to face the Crane Pirates for the Class 2 State Championship. The game will be held Saturday (March 19) at Mizzou Arena in Columbia, Mo.

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Tipoff is scheduled for 6:50 p.m.

The *ShowMe Times* will be at the Championship game Saturday night. If you can't make it, make sure to check our Facebook or Twitter page for periodic score updates, and the games will also be broadcast online by Fox Sports Midwest at http://www.foxsportsmidwest.com/pages/mshsaa_championship_alt/0.

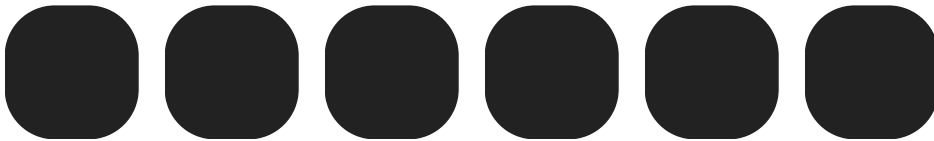
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