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# Mules Fall To Crane In State Championship

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## Mules Fall To Crane In State Championship

*By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports*

COLUMBIA, Mo. - Last year, in their first trip to the Final Four under coach Brad Botsch, the Bernie Mules lost to Sturgeon 82-80. In the team's second consecutive trip to the 'ship, the Mules would now face the Crane Pirates for the Class 2 State title. At the end of a very physical, back-and-forth game, the Mules again fell short, losing to Crane by 14 points.

"We competed hard, and I don't think for a second that our kids didn't compete hard," Botsch said after the game. "Sometimes the big stage can be tough for the kids, and maybe some of the kids were a little bit timid from that. That's just part of the game.[Crane's] kids were probably the same way. I thought going in with our experience coming back that we'd find a way to get it done, but we just weren't able to do it."

Botsch noted Crane's excellent inside defense, as well as the Pirates' star guard Levi Cook, as key factors in the loss.

"We lost focus a little bit," Botsch continued. "Three different trips down the floor I called our play 'Motion Hound', which is Jordan McGowan's nickname, where we try to get the ball inside to [McGowan]. Three different trips, and we took alternate shots or did alternate things that we didn't want."

“We had to do a little bit of scrambling to figure out how to stop [Cook],” Botsch said of the junior. “We had four or five strategies to try to stop him, but that kid had an answer for every one of them, and hats off to him for that.”

Cook, a 6’ 1” junior, had 42 points and 15 rebounds for the Pirates in the game, and pointed out the Mules’ great full-court defense.

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“They got out and pressured us all over the court - we usually don’t have that,” Cook said. “This was probably one of our first games of the year that we got full-court pressure the whole game. We came out a little slow, figured out how to go against it, and adjusted from there.”

Crane’s head coach Rob Guerin liked the quick tempo that both teams tried to establish during the contest, and noted the Mules’ rebounding ability.

“[It was a] very up-paced game today, that’s kind of the way we like it,” Guerin said. “I’m more confident when we are playing fast. We like it when teams try to press us, try to trap us. We can get transition buckets that way, maybe force some mismatches. I was comfortable, and as long as we’re able to make our passes and hit the shots we need to make, I’m okay with it.”

“They were hurting us on the boards in the first half, and I knew we would have to control the glass if we were going to be successful in this ball game,” Guerin continued. “We came out and were able to control the boards in the second half and get some defensive stops when we needed to, and we put our free-throws in the hole today to come away with the state championship.”

The Pirates were also successful at shutting down Bernie’s three-point game (the Mules shot 8-34 from downtown) and, when coupled with their great inside defense, became too much for the Bernie to handle. Guerin again stressed rebounding in the second half as a key to his team’s victory.

images/Blog Images/Local News/3.19.11 Sammy.jpg

“We knew they were going to shoot a lot of three-pointers,”

Guerin said. “We had to stress to our guards to at least get a hand in their face and make them possibly miss. Our guards delivered, and we were able to handle it. In the second half, we rebounded the ball better, so they only got one opportunity to score. We felt that if we limited them to one opportunity to score, we would be successful.”

The Mules will lose five seniors this year - Botsch went on to credit their hard work as big factors in another great season in Bernie basketball.

“[Jordan] McGowan’s had a tremendous career for us - he set the state record in charges, and is second most in a season for threes made,” Botsch said. “But, he’s going to have a great opportunity to play for one of the best coaches in the country in Gene Bess [head basketball coach at Three Rivers College], and he’s going to do well over there. Sammy Walker had a tremendous year for us - the kid lost his father and still got out here and competed at an unbelievable level all season long. Cameron Shipman had a great year as well; he got as hot as anyone you’d ever see. We really had a good group of kids and I’m proud to have been able to coach them.”

The Mules finished the season with a record of 28 wins and five losses. There will be a reception for the team on Sunday (March 20) in the Bernie High School gym at 4:00 p.m.

**Photos above** *Top Photo: Jordan McGowan drives through the lane for an easy layup during the second half of Saturday’s loss.*

*Middle Photo: Jesse Shelton puts up a tough shot over Crane’s Anthony Vermillion during Saturday’s Class 2 State Championship game.*

*Bottom photo: Sammy Walker drops in two of his 15 points.*

	1st Q	2nd Q	3rd Q	4th Q	FINAL
BERNIE	9	16	14	24	63
CRANE	15	16	14	24	77

**BERNIE:** McGowan - 23. Walker - 15. Shelton - 13. Shipman - 6. Turner - 6.

**CRANE:** Cook - 42. Lumpkin - 10. Atkins - 10. Vermillion - 6. Bowling - 5. Moore - 4.

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