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By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports Editor

PARK HILLS - Riley Owens dropped in a layup for the Park Hills Central Lady Rebels in the first 30 seconds of Wednesday night's Class 4 Sectional matchup with the Dexter Lady Bearcats - it would be the Rebels only lead for the rest of the night.

Despite a sluggish start, the Lady Bearcats were able to keep their Show Me Showdown hopes alive with a 64-49 victory. Even with playoff experience, head coach Chad Allen attributed his young team's slow start to nerves.

"It looked like we came out a little nervous, which is to be expected a little bit. We tried to rely on Brittany Harris most of the first half, and we weren't very aggressive offensively," he said. "Give Park Hills credit - I thought they came out and really battled hard. I thought conditioning was a big factor, a big key to this game."


Harris was the lifeblood of the Bearcat offense, accounting for over 50 percent of her team's first half points on the way to a 25 point, 14 rebound double-double.

"She put us on her shoulders in the first half," Allen said of the junior. "We got into halftime and talked about it for a little bit, said we couldn't keep relying on Brittany. I thought the girls responded really well, and looked much more aggressive in the second half."

The Lady Bearcats took the lead on a Harris layup at 5:08 in the first, and never gave it back. Alison Jarrell knocked down a three late in the first to push the 'Cats to a 15-11 advantage.

Briley Merritt hit a trey for Park Hills at the 5:15 mark in the second, but Jarrell answered on the next possession. A three point play from Mackenzie Jones pulled the Rebels within one with just over 40 seconds left in the half, but Erika Cobb buried a three to put DHS up by four at the half.

The Lady Bearcats, much like in Friday's Class 4, District 1 Championship game against Notre Dame, came out with another level of intensity on the defensive side of the court in the third quarter.

"[Our defense was great],  especially in that third quarter; we limited them to four points," Allen said of the second-half defensive resurgence. "I thought we really got after it defensively, and a lot of it came down to conditioning. We wore Park Hills down, especially going up and down the floor so much in the first half, and I thought that was the biggest key to our win tonight."

A layup from Harris and trey from Hannah Noe sparked the Lady Bearcats' offense in the second half, and a deep two from Mollie Whitehead late in the frame nudged the 'Cats to a 49-34 advantage heading into the fourth.

Katelynn Frazier dropped in four points in the fourth quarter, and had a chance for a three point play, but just missed the free throw. Jarrell knocked down her third trey of the contest at the 3:45 mark, and the Lady 'Cats were able to run their delay game for the rest of the contest to take the 64-49 win.

Owens and Skaggs combined 34 of the Rebels' 49 points in the contest. Allen noted the duo as his squad's defensive focus in the game.

"We talked about them all week, about how we were going to limit them," he said.

"Owens is so hard to stop - one on one, she's so hard to stop. She's a good shooter, and she's very fast - I'd say she was as fast as [Summer] Burger from Notre Dame, just a lot bigger. It was tough for our guards to handle her, but they did a good job."

With the win, the Lady 'Cats will advance to the quarterfinal round of the MSHSAA Class 4 bracket, where they will face off against Miller Career Academy - Miller picked up a 69-

56 win over Pacific in their sectional matchup. The Phoenix were able to hand the Lady 'Cats their first loss of the season in the finals of the Farmington Invitational Tournament on Dec. 3.

"They're big, and last time we played them we got beat by 17," Allen said. "We didn't play well that game, so hopefully this time we can give them a better game. There's no doubt in my mind that we can beat them, but we'll have to be much more aggressive offensively."

The Bearcats and Phoenix will rematch on Saturday, March 3 at the Farmington Civic Center. The winner of the contest will move on to the final four and play in the Show Me Showdown, held at Mizzou Arena.

Tipoff is set for 6:00 p.m.

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