

By JOHN HENSON

Harlan County Sports.com

LOG MOUNTAIN — Known best throughout her long high school career for her offensive skills, Harlan County's Miranda Davenport is developing into a defensive stopper as a senior.

Davenport held Bell County star Maci Morris to eight points on three-of-12 shooting as Harlan County led from start to finish in a 46-41 victory Monday at Bell County.

"I think she did a tremendous job," Harlan County coach Anthony Nolan said. "Morris is a great player. She can hurt you inside, outside or off the dribble. Miranda really focuses on containing the ball. She has done it effectively all year long. Morris is a very tough player to defend and they do a good job setting her up."

"She did a good job on Maci," Bell County coach David Teague said. "The other kids have to step up and score. I thought Makayla (Neal) did a good job of doing that, and Morgan (Garnett) hit some shots, but we can't just do that for two minutes. We have to do that for four quarters. Teams will key on Maci, and we have to have other kids scoring."

Eighth-grade guard Brooklyn Massingill helped Harlan County (14-4 overall, 2-1 district) get off to a good start with two 3-pointers in the first quarter and finished with a team-high 14 points. Davenport added 13.

Other than a few stretches, Harlan County struggled offensively.

"They guard the ball hard as well," Nolan said. "Our timing was off, and there is no excuse for that after 18 games. We had opportunities to stretch the lead and didn't convert due to bad decisions and not getting the ball where we needed to. I thought we were pretty good defensively except for a couple of possession."

Neal, a senior guard, led Bell County (9-8 overall, 1-2 district) with 13 points.

Bell shot only 25 percent (four of 16) in the first half as Harlan County led the entire way. Two 3-pointers by Massingill got the Lady Bears off to a good start. Davenport and Keisha Mimes added baskets late in the period as HCHS built a 13-7 advantage.

Another trey by Massingill capped an 8-2 run to start the second quarter as the Harlan County lead grew to 21-9.

Makayla Neal had the only basket in the quarter for Bell midway through the period.

Harlan County also went ice cold with only one basket, a jumper by Davenport, in the final four minutes of the period. Two free throws by Neal cut the deficit to 23-14 at halftime.

"We were very sluggish offensively the first half," Teague said. "We got some looks, but we couldn't make shots."

Morris, a freshman guard, had her first basket with 5:22 left in the third quarter and added a second with 2:26 to play in the period as Bell cut a 12-point deficit to four.

Morris was called for her third and fourth fouls seconds later, one for pushing Davenport on an out of bounds play, and the Lady Cats' momentum followed Morris to the bench.

Davenport nailed a 3-pointer and then a jumper as HCHS reclaimed control with a 33-24 lead going into the final period.

"That kind of broke our spirits our little and our momentum," Teague said. "Maci picked up those two fouls real quick and that hurt us, because we had cut it to four. They stretched it back out to eight or nine, and we had to crawl back out again."

Baskets by Kaitlyn Stittums and Sarah Evans gave Harlan County a 40-30 lead with

4:33 to play, but Bell fought back once again. A basket by Morris and two free throws by Neal cut the deficit to 44-41 with 38 seconds to play. Davenport hit one of two at the line with 26.9 seconds to play and Mimes also hit one of two after grabbing a rebound to put the game away.

"This is always a tough place to play, and they are back full strength with Neal back," Nolan said. "It's a big-time victory. Even though it wasn't pretty, we found a way to win. That's what's special about this group. We found a way. Keisha made some big plays for us defensively. Once we get more consistency from some positions, I think we'll be a tough out. We still have some growing up to do to be where we want to be."

The two teams meet again Friday at HCHS in the first game of a girls/boys doubleheader.

HARLAN COUNTY (14-4)

Miranda Davenport 4-13 4-6 13, Brooklyn Massingill 4-7 3-5 14, Kaitlyn Stittums 2-4 1-1 5, Kalee Carroll 3-7 0-2 6, Sarah Evans 2-3 1-2 5, Lauren Lee 0-1 0-0 0, Keisha Mimes 1-1 1-3 3, Bella Noe 0-1 0-0 0, Madison Cornett 0-2 0-0 0, Shannon Shackelford 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 16-39 10-19 46.

BELL COUNTY (9-8)

Jessica Sanders 1-5 0-1 2, Makayla Neal 3-8 6-6 13, Morgan Garnett 3-7 2-2 9, Maci Morris 3-12 2-2 8, Paige Robbins 2-2 1-2 5, Taylor Wilson 2-3 0-0 4, Jamie Boatright 0-1 0-0 0. Totals: 14-38 11-13 41.

Harlan County	13	10	10	13	—	46
Bell County	7	7	10	17	—	41

3-point goals: Harlan County 4-9 (Massingill 3-4, Davenport 1-5), Bell County 2-11 (Neal 1-5, Garnett 1-5, Wilson 0-1, Boatright 0-1, Sanders 0-2, Morris 0-5). Rebounds: Harlan County 23 (Stittums 7, Evans 5, Carroll 3, Mimes 3, Davenport 2, Massingill 1, Cornett 1, Shackelford 1), Bell County 16 (Sanders 4, Wilson 4, Morris 3, Neal 3, Robbins 2). Turnovers: Harlan County 17, Bell County 16. Fouled out: Bell County (Garnett).

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LOG MOUNTAIN — With a 17-0 run to close the third quarter Monday, the Harlan County Black Bears demonstrated just how good they can be when everything is clicking and showed why 13th Region coaches picked them to win their first regional championship.

With the score tied at 25-25 early in the third quarter after a basket by Bell County's Kyle Lee, the Bears took over and took down the defending 13th Region champions with an almost flawless seven minutes of basketball. The Bears hit seven of 10 shots during the stretch as they executed their offense to perfection while turning the ball over only once and outrebounding Bell 10-4. The loss was the first against a regional opponent since last February for the Bobcats, who are the defending regional champions.

"We didn't play a lick. We just came out and stood around the third quarter," Bell County coach Lewis Morris said. "You can't do that against good teams. We've got some young kids out there who haven't figured it out yet. Harlan County smacked them in the mouth and they took it. Hopefully, we'll learn from it. Harlan County has a good ballclub and does a lot of things well. You have to compete for four quarters in order to have a chance. In the third quarter it was one pass, one shot and no movement. I hope it will help us down the road."

James Bond, a junior swingman, came off the bench to lead the third quarter run as he scored seven of his 11 points. He alternated baskets with junior point guard Tyler Brewer as HCHS took control of the game. Senior center Chase Calton and freshman forward Tyler Miller also had field goals as the Bears built a 42-25 lead.

"(Bond) bounced back. He didn't play a lot against Clay County, but he bounced back and gave us some good minutes and hit some big shots," Harlan County coach Mike Jones said. "Miller played well off the bench. Calton also played well. He has to defend and rebound, and when he does that it makes everyone else a better defender."

Chad Massingill led the balanced Harlan County attack with 16 points. Brewer scored 13, Bond added 11 and Calton contributed 10 as the Bears improved to 15-2 overall and 3-1 in district competition.

"It's a good win. Bell has been playing real well," Jones said. "It was a really good third quarter. I just want us to finish the games better. If we're up four or five, I want to finish the game. If you win by four or five, then you win by four or five. If we're up 18, I want to win by 18."

Harlan County led by as many as 19 points early in the fourth quarter, but Bell fought back after going to a press that led to nine turnovers by the Bears in the final period. Bell got as close as eight on a free throw by Jake Patterson with 2:47 left. Two straight baskets by Massingill put the Bears back in control.

"We did some good things. I thought they competed after they got behind, but you can't get behind Harlan County like that. If you do, you're in trouble," Morris said. "They're the team to beat. I hope by the end of the year we can grow up a little bit. We've just had some bad quarters."

Lee, a senior guard scored 21 to lead the 14-5 Bobcats, who fell to 2-1 in district competition. The Bobcats' two other seniors, guard Tanner Lefevers and center Ryan Cox, added 11 points each.

Harlan County appeared in control early after racing to a 10-2 lead, but junior forward Aaron Caldwell was assessed a technical after he and Cox were both assessed fouls and the Bobcats went on a 14-1 run to go up 16-11 after one quarter. The game was tied three times late in the second quarter before a basket by Calton gave the Bears a 25-23 lead at the break.

"We couldn't get our kids to go after the ball hard, and we had kids running on top of each other, but we'll correct that by Friday," Jones said of the Bears' problems in the first half.

The two teams meet again Friday at Harlan County.

HARLAN COUNTY (15-2)

Tyler Brewer 4-8 4-5 13, Alex Sergent 1-6 0-0 2, Chad Massingill 6-15 4-9 16, Aaron Caldwell 0-1 0-0 0, Chase Calton 4-5 2-2 10, James Bond 4-5 2-2 11, Tyler Miller 3-6 1-2 7. Totals: 22-46 13-20 59.

BELL COUNTY (14-5)

Tanner Lefevers 4-7 1-2 11, Jake Patterson 1-6 1-2 3, Kyle Lee 7-17 6-6 21, Tyler Potter 0-6 0-0 0, Ryan Cox 5-9 1-2 11, Jesse Green 0-1 0-0 0, Ben Collett 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 17-46 9-12 46.

Harlan County	11	14	17	17	—	59
Bell County	16	7	2	21	—	46

3-point goals: Harlan County 2-7 (Bond 1-1, Brewer 1-2, Sergent 0-2, Massingill 0-2), Bell County 3-20 (Lefevers 2-4, Lee 1-8, Patterson 0-4, Potter 0-4).

Rebounds: Harlan County 29 (Massingill 9, Miller 7, Calton 6, Brewer 3, Bond 2, Sergent 1, Caldwell 1), Bell County 20 (Cox 9, Patterson 4, Lee 4, Patterson 2, Lefevers 1). Turnovers: Harlan County 15, Bell County 16. Fouled out: Bell County (Lefevers). Technical fouls: Harlan County (Caldwell).