

With another super start, Bearkats revive memories of 'Big Three' season

Written by Jerry Byrd

Sunday, 30 December 2012 00:55 -

Here we are, in the final hours of another year, approaching the end of the 2012-13 high school basketball season.

Coach Jeremiah Williams' Bossier High Bearkats, off to a 13-3 start after a few impressive wins last week, have a shot at a fifth straight 30-win season.

After early losses to Class 5A Ouachita (Monroe), 60-44, and Class 4A St. Thomas More (Lafayette), 50-48, the Bearkats won 10 in a row before losing to Ouachita 43-42 in the finals of the Doc Edwards tournament Saturday night.

Four Bearkat starters are averaging in double figures, led by 6-2 junior Devonte Hall at 13.5 points per game and 6-4 senior Tevin Robertson at 12.0. The other double digit scorers are 6-2 senior Demonta Wills and 5-10 senior Deorvion Robinson. Wills is the Bearkats' leading rebounder, averaging seven per game.

The Bearkats' success under Williams revives fond memories of the "Big Three" season in 1962-63, when Bossier, Byrd and Fair Park were considered the best three high school basketball teams in the state, regardless of classification.

Bossier, then coached by George Nattin, was 29-7 that season, with all seven losses to Byrd and Fair Park by a combined margin of 13 points. Fair Park, coached by Clem Henderson, won its first state basketball championship (and the first for any Shreveport school in 23 years) with a 32-5 record and Byrd, coached by Scotty Robertson, was 32-5. Byrd was the only member of the "Big Three" that lost a game to anybody else, with Minden handing the Yellow Jackets their first loss after a 20-0 start, 44-26, in the Bossier Invitational Tournament.

That Bossier High team was led by Tommy Thigpen, who went to LSU, and Bobby Misso, who went to Louisiana Tech. Gyms were packed every time two of the "Big Three" went head-to-head in the 1962-63 season.

Bossier High won its first state basketball championship in 1960, when a team coached by John McConathy posted a 41-4 record — a win total no other local school has matched. Cecil Upshaw and Dennis Kile were All-Staters on that Bearkat team, which won the Class 3A championship (then the top class) with a 39-35 victory over DeLaSalle of New Orleans. That game was played in the tiny gym at the end of the Bossier High school building that is now known as the girls' gym, with a seating capacity of 600. The "new" gym was built several years later.

It was the last time a state championship was decided in the home gym of one of the competing schools. The Louisiana High School Athletic Association started the Top Twenty (now Top 28) state tournament a year later.

The first six Top Twenty state tournaments were held at Shreveport's Hirsch Coliseum, with attendance climbing each year from 12,945 the first year to 24,554 in 1966. The tournament didn't make any money the first two years, but survived because Joe Monsour, who directed the Louisiana State Fair, wrote off the Hirsch rental fee the first year and only charged a token fee the second year. By the fourth year, when the Top Twenty was a guaranteed money-maker, the LHSAA took over the operation of the event and moved it to Alexandria, a central location, in 1967.

Attendance soared in Alexandria, reaching 49,395 in 1970, but after the integration of Louisiana public schools the numbers steadily dropped before a record of 69,269 was set at Lafayette in 1999.

With another super start, Bearkats revive memories of 'Big Three' season

Written by Jerry Byrd

Sunday, 30 December 2012 00:55 -

Jerry Byrd is the former sports editor of the Bossier Press-Tribune and an award-winning columnist. You can contact him by E-mail at jbsportswriter@comcast.net