

# Hesston's first half leaves Colby boys behind

By Joey Falkoff

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For the Colby Eagle boys' basketball team, Thursday was their first time back on the grandest stage of 4A high school basketball since 2004.

Unfortunately, their opening act left much to be desired.

Colby's four-month joyride came to a resounding halt as Hesston exploded for 40-first half points and easily held on to defeat the Eagles 68-47 in their first round state tournament game at the BiCentennial Center in Salina.

"It's tough," said Eagle head coach Beau Sheets. "You build up to this all year, and it's tough to end like that. But to be one of the final eight teams, you can't beat that."

Colby finished the season 18-6. Hesston improved to 22-2 and plays Topeka-Hayden in the state semifinals today.

"They were just ready to play more than we were," said senior Ethan Stover, who finished his career with a team-high 13 points. "It was a good season. We can't complain, because we got to state."

Whether playing at the spacious BiCentennial Center or just in the backyard, the game is still the same by scoring points.

Hesston did so frequently, especially in the first half where they shot close to 52 percent and were 7-12 from behind the three-point line. Four of their seven came from reserve guard Brett Liechty, who finished with a game-high 16 points.

"I thought all those three's killed us," said junior Levi Schlick. "They run a flex offense and it was tough to defend, because they set double-screens on the backside."

Hesston also got double-digit scoring from Michael Janzen, who finished with 14 points and 16 rebounds.

The Eagles never could get on track offensively and finished the game 16-54 (29.6 percent) from the field. They were also 4-19 (21.1 percent) from behind the three-point line.

Consequently, they found themselves down 40-23 at the half

and never could make a serious charge.

"They came out and hit seven three's and we shot 29 percent. It makes it pretty tough," said Sheets. "They got a good streak going and we were playing catch-up."

Colby's top three scorers, Stover, Levi Schlick and Stephen Dinkel went a combined 11-41 (26.8 percent). Stover was 3-16 (26.8 percent) from the three-point line. Dinkel was 2-12 from the field with nine points and Schlick finished 6-13 with 12 points and nine rebounds.

"They all felt good. They just rimmed out," said Stover.

Hesston's bigger guards made life tough for Stover, who rarely got any daylight for his shots.

"We knew Stover and Schlick were their top two scorers," said Hesston head coach Ty Rhodes. "I thought we did a nice job getting in Stover's face when he shot the ball."

The Eagles shot over 50 percent in their substate final win over Nickerson, but in their other three post-season games it was a struggle.

"You could kind of tell our team wasn't shooting the ball well once the post-season got around," said Schlick. "It's tough that it happened right now after we'd been shooting the ball so well all year. Hopefully, it won't happen next year."

Hesston set the tone right away as they jumped out to a 9-2 lead in the first four minutes.

"A lot of us were nervous before the game," said Schlick. "We've all watched games here before when we were kids and thought it would be cool to play on this court. You kind of expect that with as young as we are."

Starting point guard Cade Carter returned for the first time since Feb. 4 and knocked down a three-pointer right away to make it 9-5, but three Liechty three-pointers helped Hesston open up a 19-9 lead with 2:10 remaining in the opening quarter.

"He's always been capable of doing it," said Rhodes. "He shot 50 percent from the three-point line last year as a junior. He looked really confident out there."



Colby's Ethan Stover takes a jump shot over Hesston's Rob Moore Thursday during first round action at the state high school basketball tournament in Salina. Hesston won 68-47.

Colby finally settled down on the offensive end and another Carter three-pointer to end the quarter cut the deficit to 21-16. A Stover three-pointer to start the second quarter got the Eagles within two.

The Eagles had a chance to tie, but Schlick was whistled for an offensive foul going up for a shot.

From that point on, it was all Hesston as they reeled off 14 straight points to go ahead 35-19.

"We just let up," said Stover. Hesston's seventh three-pointer of the half by John Reimer with five seconds remaining extended their lead to 17.

"If that call goes the other way,

maybe we tie it up," said Sheets. "Next thing you know, you look up and we're down 17 points."

Hesston shot just 35 percent and was 1-5 from the three-point line in the second half, but the 17-point deficit was too much to overcome. Colby continued to struggle, hitting just 28 percent of their shots. "When you're down that much it's tough to catch up," said Stover.

The Eagles got as close as 15 points on four different occasions in the second half, but never put a serious run together. Hesston made 11-17 fourth quarter free throws to seal the deal.

Colby came into the game with no state tournament experience. It left with puzzling memories.

"I thought we would be ready to play," said Sheets.

But that wasn't the case. The Eagles now have the whole off-season to figure out what it takes to compete at the highest levels of Kansas 4A basketball.

"First of all I learned you have to be really physical and use your head," said Schlick. "I think 4A is

the toughest class in the state."

The finale was disappointing, but the Eagles felt the season as a whole was something to be proud of.

"For Colby, being a small town in western Kansas, I think this was a great season," said Schlick. "It speaks a lot for our league. We gave it our all."

Colby (18-6) 16 7 9 15-47  
Hesston (22-2) 21 19 9 19-68  
Colby (47)- Ethan Stover 13, Cade Carter 6, Chaz Winger 3, Stephen Dinkel 9, Cory Sager 4, Levi Schlick 12  
Hesston (68)- Jared Redding 2, John Reimer 7, Lee Voth-Gaeddert 5, Nebel 3, Brett Liechty 16, Michael Janzen 14, Rob Moore 5, Michael Petrocci 8, Alex Roth 8  
Rebounds: Colby 32 Hesston 37  
Turnovers: Colby 13 Hesston 10

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