

deep in the playoffs

by edwin diaz

Sweat. Tension. Frustration. He can feel the heat rising to his head. He knows, along with his teammates, that this game against the Bowie Bears will determine the district championship. Junior Ricardo Abascal refuses to let his light-headedness stop him from doing what needs to be done. With two minutes on the clock and the Bears up by four, Abascal stands at the free throw line. In front of him, Tristen Newton is there to keep two Bears from stealing the ball. Abascal runs to help him but bumps into an opponent. The ref points to him. It's Abascal's fifth foul. He's out. He hears the roar of boos from Bowie fans.

"It felt horrible that they were booing at me," he said. "It made me feel like I was a dirty player, but I knew I wasn't. Coach [Paul Gutierrez] told me fouling out cost us the chance to catch up. I felt if it wasn't for me, we'd could've won the game."

Since the two teams split wins during the season, the title could be decided by either playing a third game or on a coin toss. Gutierrez and Bowie coach Daniel Martinez met at the district athletic office. Their strategy couldn't have been more different. Gutierrez wanted a third game, Martinez wanted a coin toss to decide who got the district title.

"I'm always confident in my boys," Gutierrez said. "I

wanted to show them what my players are made of."

As the first coin was tossed, Bowie's coach called heads. Heads it was. Gutierrez lost. There would be no third game. The second coin toss would determine which school would win the title. Coach Gutierrez called tails. The coin falls to the floor. It's tails.

"Even though we didn't get another chance to play them," Gutierrez said, "we still were able to achieve something no other campus boy's basketball team has, which was to compete in the 'Sweet 16.'"

The Mustangs hosted Hanks in the bi-district match-up. It was no contest. The Mustangs easily won 50-41. Next up, the area round against Canyon in Seminole. The team made it look easy, ending the Eagles' season with a 72-46 loss. The playoff road made its way to the regional quarterfinals. The team squeaked by Hereford 49-46. The round of "Sweet 16" was next. Ahead the entire first half, the boys let the game slip. They lost to Dunbar 62-53.

"In those last few minutes, I knew this was going to be the last game I'd play with my team," senior Ivan Cazares said. "Even though we lost, it was a great experience. I'm glad I was able to do this with the greatest team in El Paso."

SPEEDY STRATEGY

Faster than the Irvin defense, senior Jordan Thorson heads down court for a lay-up. "I tried to help my team as much as I possibly could," he said. "We were challenged by Irvin's physical contact. However, we got used to it and used it to our advantage by drawing more fouls toward their main players." Thorson made four consecutive three-pointers in the game.



IN A PINCH

No open teammates, senior Bryce Simmons, a first team All-District selection, kneels in for a pass while being cautious of his Address opponent. "I was trying to prevent getting a foul charge," Simmons said. "They tried to take a lot of 'sham' falls, so the referee would give them free throws. This happened to me twice with different players during the game. I was getting frustrated because they wouldn't give up." Simmons shared co-captain duties with junior Deion Bauman. (photo by genesis barraza)

TROPHY TIME

Filled with joy, the Mustangs celebrate their area win against Canyon. "It was a great feeling because we worked really hard to accomplish this goal," senior Martin Varela said. "We noticed that Canyon wasn't communicating with each other and slowly getting tired. Although we were in the lead, we still played our hardest."



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GAME PLAN

Searching the court for open teammates, junior Deion Bauman avoids getting the ball taken away from an Irvin Rocket. "We did what we had to do offensively and defensively," Bauman said. "The fact that they could steal the ball quickly and score was enough for us to play better than they did. We had to help each other out on the court and play as one." Bauman was chosen the MVP of the district. He also received All-Region and All-State honors.

record

DISTRICT

| | | | | |
|-----------|-------|---|---|-------|
| Chapin | 64-39 | W | W | 69-54 |
| El Paso | 85-40 | W | W | 57-34 |
| Jefferson | 87-38 | W | W | 73-49 |
| Canutillo | 76-42 | W | L | 49-42 |
| Address | 62-41 | W | W | 68-52 |
| Austin | 71-41 | W | W | 70-27 |
| Irvin | 66-32 | W | W | 73-36 |
| Bowie | 70-49 | W | L | 32-28 |

BI-DISTRICT

| | | |
|-------|-------|---|
| Hanks | 50-41 | W |
|-------|-------|---|

AREA

| | | |
|--------|-------|---|
| Canyon | 72-46 | W |
|--------|-------|---|

REGIONAL QUARTERFINALS

| | | |
|----------|-------|---|
| Hereford | 49-46 | W |
|----------|-------|---|

SWEET 16

| | | |
|--------|-------|---|
| Dunbar | 62-53 | L |
|--------|-------|---|

WIN-WIN SITUATION

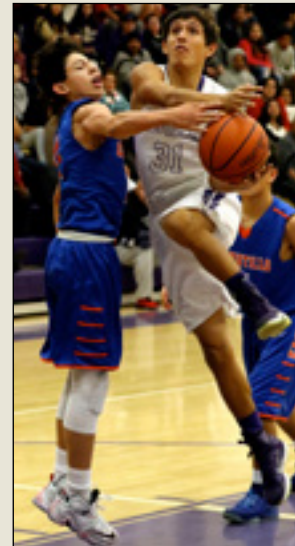
Height to his advantage, junior Odell Graham tries to break loose against two Jefferson Foxes. "I caught the ball right at the free throw line," Graham said. "I was disappointed that they were able to stop me and get the ball, but in the end, we were able to defeat them." The Mustangs handed the Foxes a 87-38 loss.



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DEFENSE IN THE WAY

Hoping to make the two-pointer, senior Matthew Amézaga gets stopped by the Canutillo Eagles. "My opponent pushed me from behind and I still got fouled," Amezaga said. "I didn't get to play much, so once that happened I was mad at myself because all I wanted was to score."

JUST NOISE

Chants fill the gym as sophomore Jerald Newton leans in for a lay-up against the Bowie Bears. "The crowd was really loud," Newton said. "We've always had problems with Bowie. I didn't want the crowd to distract me from losing a shot. I had to be focused because their players are tough." Newton was chosen first team All-District.

"As soon as the buzzer rang, my heart dropped.

It was very hard to deal with the fact that we lost to

Dunbar, I didn't want to face the reality

that this happened to us." -tristen newton-09