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Trojans find key against Flora to bounce back in tourney opener

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EFFINGHAM -- Hitting five shots in a row in his 15-point third-quarter, Flora's Paul Knapp made Charleston look helpless.

Then after the sophomore hit his fourth 3-pointer to tie the game at the start the fourth quarter, the Trojans decided enough was enough.

"At the beginning I was in foul trouble so I had to hang low," Charleston senior Brad Wheeler said. "At the end of the game it didn't matter. I had to get a hand in his face."

Wheeler was the one paying special attention to Knapp once the Trojans went to a box-and-one defense that had the Flora leader missing his next four shots.

Then with Joey Miller getting half of his 22 points in the fourth quarter and Wheeler 11 of his 21 in that period, Charleston pulled away to Monday's 67-56 boys' basketball season-opening win to start the Effingham St. Anthony Thanksgiving Tournament.

"I was pleased that the kids held their poise and made plays whether it was a defensive stop, a rebound or knocking down a shot," Charleston coach Trevor Doughty said.

Maybe that is a change coming off a 10-18 season.

"We're sick and tired of losing," Wheeler said. "We needed to hit some shots."

A loss certainly loomed as a possibility once Flora erased what had once been a 24-15 Charleston lead 3 ½ minutes into the second quarter.

Knapp, who was Flora's scoring leader last season as a freshman, was just 1-for-8 from the field in the first half but then got going. His third 3-pointer gave the Wolves a 38-37 lead with 2:32 left in the third quarter.

"He's a good player," Miller said. "He hit some 3s in transition."

After a Charleston timeout Wheeler regained the lead with a 3-pointer.

Knapp's rebound basket tied it and then on an inbounds play Charleston got the ball into post player Taylor Nead who passed it back to Miller whose buzzer beating 3-pointer put the Trojans ahead 43-40 at the end of the third quarter.

Knapp tied the game once more with a trey but Charleston answered with a 15-5 run in which Miller and Wheeler hit two 3-pointers each pushing the lead to 58-48.

"I really didn't force anything," Miller said. "I just took open shots. I felt better in the second half. I was excited so I was always long on the shots in the first half."

While the Trojans made 11 of 20 3-pointers also helping their cause was Nead with 11 points and seven rebounds and Dylan Doughty with a game-high 10 rebounds.

Knapp finished with a game-high 25 points but cooled off in the fourth quarter.

"We went to the box-and-one and I think it took them out of their offense," Trevor Doughty said. "Brad did a good job on him. He didn't do a bad job in the first half. Brad and Joey hit some 3s and the post players did a good job of getting the ball to them."

Charleston grabbed a 9-4 lead and had a margin that ranged from two to nine points for the rest of the first half with Austin Lewis' banked-in 3-pointer getting Flora to within 26-22 by halftime.

It got closer but Charleston had an answer.

Mattoon's season is to start at 5 p.m. today against defending champion Breese Central in the first of three games of the St. Anthony tournament at the Enlow Center.

Then Mattoon and Charleston are to square off at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday in the second of three games.

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Published on Monday, November 23, 2009 10:26 PM CST

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