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LIC Tournament Wolves fend off Red Hill, 56-53

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CASEY - Normally, Red Hill High School's basketball team has you where it wants you when it's facing an uphill battle.

That wasn't true Saturday, when fifth-seeded Flora held off the third-seeded Salukis, 56-53, in the opening round of the Little Illini Conference Tournament.

"Every time we did something right, they'd do something to break our backs," said Red Hill coach Bryan Havill. "We finally did get over the hump, and we kept fighting, but we didn't do enough things right to win."

The Salukis (9-7) trailed throughout most of the game, but appeared to be on the verge of taking control in the closing minutes.

Red Hill's Trevor Albertson looks for room to move against Flora's Jeremy Edwards.

However, Flora's Jeremy Wallace capped a wild sequence of events with 1:05 to play, as his lay-in boosted the Wolves (9-12) into a 53-52 lead. Wallace's basket capped a flurry in which the Salukis turned the ball over twice, and the Wolves once, in a matter of a few seconds.

The Salukis still had chances. Red Hill's Josh Hawkins was called for traveling with 27 seconds to play, but Flora's Dakota Orel missed the front end of a one-and-one with 16 seconds to go.

Perhaps the key moment of the game followed, as Hawkins - flying into the front court - appeared to be bumped out of bounds by a Flora player. Officials ruled there was no contact on the play, however, and returned the ball to the Wolves.

"The kids for both teams worked their butts off all game, and we expect calls to be made down the stretch," Red Hill coach Bryan Havill said. "We expect the official to make the right call, and it didn't happen."

A free throw by Austin Lewis and two more by Bryton Krutsinger stretched the lead to 56-52.

Still, when the Salukis' Trevor Albertson was fouled with 1.9 seconds to play, a sliver of hope remained. Albertson made the first shot, and intentionally missed the second. After the miss, the ball rolled out of bounds, untouched. However, inexplicably, the clock started then the ball hit the floor and time expired.

Flora controlled the opening period, leading by as many as seven points, before the Salukis pulled to within 20-17 at the stop. The second quarter featured four lead changes and two ties, but the Wolves scored the final five points of the half

to lead at the break, 36-31.

Flora continued to lead throughout the third period, building the bulge to as many as eight points, before Eli Latch's 3-pointer pulled Red Hill to within 47-42 entering the final stanza.

Red Hill used a 6-0 run early in the final quarter to set the stage for the last couple of minutes.

Albertson led the Salukis with 13 points, while Matt Wirth - inserted into the starting lineup - contributed 12. All five others who played for Red Hill added at least five points.

Freshman Paul Knapp hit 7 of 13 shots for Flora, including 4 of 7 from behind the 3-point line, and led all scorers with 25 points. Jeremy Wallace added 16 points, half of which came in the opening period.

The Salukis outrebounded Flora, 21-19. Robert Young grabbed six boards to pace Red Hill.

Turnovers were a problem for the Salukis, but only in the final eight minutes. Red Hill finished with 13 miscues, seven of which occurred in the fourth quarter.

The win puts Red Hill into the loser's bracket, as they'll return at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday to face the host Warriors.

"We may be sick about this right now, but we've got to get over it," Havill said. "We'd better not get too down. We have to play the home team Wednesday night."

Flora will face second-seeded Lawrenceville in Tuesday's 7:30 p.m. semifinal game. Top-seeded Marshall (18-0) and fifth-seeded Cumberland (10-7) also won on Saturday, and will start the evening at 6.

Flora 56, Red Hill 53

FLORA (56)

Knapp (g) 7-13 7-8 25, Wallace (g) 6-12 0-0 16, Edwards (f) 4-6 0-0 9, Krutsinger (c) 1-6 2-2 5, Lewis 0-1 1-2 1, Orel 0-3 0-1 0, Greenwood 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 18-41 10-12 56.

RED HILL (53)

Albertson (f) 4-9 3-4 13, Wirth (c) 5-10 2-3 12, White 2-3 3-4 7, Young (f) 1-3 4-7 6, Hawkins (g) 2-6 0-1 5, Latch (g) 2-4 0-0 5, Brian 1-1 3-4 5. Totals 17-36 15-23 53.

3-point shooting: Flora 10-26 (Wallace 4-10, Orel 0-1, Edwards 1-2, Knapp 4-7, Krutsinger 1-5, Lewis 0-1), Red Hill 4-8 (Hawkins 1-2, Latch 1-2, White 2-4). Rebounds: Flora 19 (Edwards 8), Red Hill 21 (Young 6). Turnovers: Flora 12, Red Hill 13. Fouls: Flora 18, Red Hill 15.

Flora 20 16 11 9 - 56

Red Hill 17 14 11 11 - 53

Officials: Dana Anderson, Bob Schlechte, Terry Bartley.