

March 25, 2006

RANGERS REPEAT AS CLASS 2A STATE CHAMPIONS

In the first rematch of a championship game since 1928, top-ranked Forest Park won its second state title in as many years defeating Harding, 61-55, for the Class 2A state championship.

The Rangers (25-3) became the second team in Class 2A to defend their title (Westview 1999-2000) and it was their 3rd title game appearance in four years.

Junior Clint Hopf led Forest Park with 20 points and 10 rebounds to lead the balanced Forest Park attack. Senior Brandon Hopf contributed 17 points and 14 rebounds and junior Nathan Allen added 11 points off the bench.

Like last year's game between these two teams, this one went down to the wire again. Tied at 44-44 heading into the fourth quarter, the lead changed hands twice early before the Rangers took the lead for good on an offensive rebound and basket by senior Brandon Hopf at the 5:49 mark for a 49-48 lead. Harding never gave in though. Trailing 56-50, junior Deaundre Muhammad hit a 3-pointer with 1:02 left and the Hawks quickly called time out. On the next play, Muhammad stole the ball and scored on a layup to cut the Ranger lead to 56-55 with :50 left. Forest Park sealed it at the line hitting 5 of 6 free throws down the stretch for the final margin.

Coached by Al Gooden, Harding was led in scoring by Muhammad with 16 points, senior James Humphrey with 14 and sophomore Pryce Underwood finished with 11. The Hawks ended the season with a record of 17-10 with 10 of those games against 4A schools preparing them for their tourney run. Humphrey set a 2A title game record with five blocked shots and the Harding defense set a record with 17 steals.

Harding dominated the offensive glass early on and used it to take a 10 point lead early in the first quarter but Forest Park closed on a 9-1 run though to pull even at 17-17. Harding owned a 27-26 lead at halftime and finished the game with 19 offensive rebounds while their press created 25 Forest Park turnovers.

Coached by Tom Beech, Forest Park ended the season riding a 19 game winning streak, second only to Lawrence North which will go for its 45th win the Class 4A championship game later tonight.

FOREST PARK'S TIM JAMES WINS TRESTER AWARD

Forest Park senior guard Tim James is the 2005-06 Boys Basketball Class 2A recipient of the Arthur L. Trestler Mental Attitude Award as selected by members of the IHSAA Board of Directors.

James is a two-year starter for the Rangers, helping coach Tom Beach's team to the 2005 Class 2A championship. The two-time all-conference selection is captain of the Rangers' top-ranked squad this season. James will finish his career as the school's all-time leader in three-point accuracy, hitting 48 of 109 treys (.440) coming into the final game. The versatile James also plays baseball for the Rangers, earning an invitation to the Junior All-Star Showcase.

James ranks first in his senior class with a perfect 4.00 cumulative grade point average. The National Merit Scholar is an Honor Roll student. He is active in the Beta Club (president), National Honor Society, Key Club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes (president), Peers Educating Peers, and Students Against Destructive Decisions. James also is a member of the school's Variety Show Band.

James serves as a volunteer teaching guitar lessons, the organist for his church, and a youth basketball camp instructor.

"Tim is the ultimate positive example of how young men should be," said Forest Park principal Jeff Jessee. "He is an excellent role model for our young students and his values of honesty and moral character are impeccable. Tim is one of the finest young men that I have met in 20 years."

The recipient, nominated by his principals and coaches, must excel in mental attitude, scholarship, leadership, and athletic ability in boys basketball.

The award is named in honor of Trestler, the IHSAA's first commissioner who served from 1929-44.

Indiana Farm Bureau Insurance, IHSAA corporate partner, presented a \$1,000 check to Forest Park High School in the name of Tim James.

James, the son of Anthony and Kathy James, will be attending the University of Evansville this fall.

VSN MEANS ACTION PHOTOGRAPHY

Visit our friends at Visual Sports Network, the IHSAA's official photographer for all state championship events and one of the leading action photographers in the Midwest. VSN, which was on site on Saturday, has captured hundreds of images from this year's State Finals and will have them ready for viewing and purchase beginning Monday.

CHAMPIONSHIP MERCHANDISE STILL AVAILABLE

For t-shirts and other merchandise commemorating this year's tournament or for any of our events, visit our friends at Morris, Inc.

STATE FINALS PROGRAMS AVAILABLE

Couldn't be there for the state finals? You can still purchase a copy of the official souvenir program while supplies last! Programs are \$3.00 if you purchase in person at the IHSAA Office (9150 N. Meridian Street in Indianapolis) or \$5.00 by mail (postage included). To order, have your Visa or MasterCard ready and call us at 317-846-6601 during business hours (Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. EST).

POST-GAME QUOTES

Tom Beach, Forest Park Coach

"Every state championship is great. Harding made it tough on us. They have a great team. But our guys were just a little bit better."

"It was a fantastic win for us. It was our worst free throw exhibition of the season. But these guys got it done for us."

“Harding came right at us in the beginning, but our kids really stuck with it. We kept our composure. We thought there would be runs and that is exactly what happened.”

“Our defense throughout the tournament has been fantastic. Today, once we got going after those first four minutes, we played great. Defensively we had to adjust to the pace of the game.”

“Our big men (Hopf & Hopf) were great underneath. In addition, our guards were able to get them the ball.”

“We call our fans the ‘Ranger Nation,’ and they have backed us all year.”

“The game went like I thought it would. We weren’t very happy with the start. They played with a lot of emotion. We can’t simulate the way they play in practice. The one thing we talked about all week was composure, whether you are ahead 10 or behind 10. We did a good job of keeping our heads in the game.”

“We made good adjustments on the floor. We just didn’t do anything different than we did in practice all week. We just said play—and that is what we did.”

“These six seniors have been leaders all year. When you play in a state tournament you want to win a state championship—these guys did it twice.”

Al Gooden, Harding Coach

(on making it to the state finals)

“No one thought we had a chance to be here (in the state finals). As a coach, you ask the kids to play hard and give you everything they’ve got. All 11 of my guys left it on the floor today. I’m real proud of them for that.”

(on being a state runner-up in 2002, 2005 and 2006)

“How many teams do you know that would like to be here right now? It’s hard to be disappointed or frustrated when your team is here fighting for a championship. Yes, we are disappointed with the result, but, overall, I couldn’t be happier for this group.”

(on his team’s 16-6 start)

“We had a nice start, but it’s a long game. Give Forest Park credit. They are a good basketball team. They did a nice job of coming back.”

(on his team’s fourth-quarter run)

“We scored when we got the ball to the right places. In the fourth quarter, we rebounded and started to make some shots, but that wasn’t enough to get us over the top.”

(on shooting and turnovers)

“We didn’t shoot the ball well today, but still had a chance to win. I think we also turned it over too often. It’s hard to win when you have 25 turnovers.”

Harding senior James Humphrey

(on playing against the Hopf cousins)

“They are both really tough. You go to block out one, and the other comes in to grab the rebound. They are both strong and tall. They were tough to deal with all afternoon.”