

Solomon rally stuns No. 2 seed Norwich in 1A-I quarterfinals

By Brett Marshall

DODGE CITY – For Kyler Stein, the trip from central to western Kansas for his Solomon Gorillas to play in a state tournament for the first time in 104 years was more than worth the wait.

1918 is certainly a long time to return to a state tournament.

Stein, a native of nearby Spearville, was all too familiar with the spacious United Wireless Arena, having played on two Southern Plains/Iroquois Activities Association league championship teams (2014/2016).

And the once in a century trip will now continue for the Gorillas as they rallied from 12 points behind to start the fourth quarter with a 20-6 flurry of a finish to knock off the No. 2 seed Norwich Eagles, 45-43, here Wednesday night in an opening quarterfinal game of the Class 1A-I State Championship.

Now, the Gorillas (17-7) will play the winner of Wednesday's late game between South Gray and Ness City at 6 p.m. Friday with a shot at reaching the state title game on Saturday.

"They never give up," Stein said afterward just outside the doors of a wildly celebrating locker room. "You get here once in a lifetime maybe so why not go out in style?"

It didn't look like the Gorillas were going anywhere but back home when the third quarter ended and they were on the short side of a 37-25 score thanks to a Norwich run of 16-2. Solomon had led 23-21 with just more than five minutes remaining in the third before the Eagles surged behind Jace Gosch, whose exclamation slam dunk seemed to ignite the No. 2 seed.

Instead, as Stein related afterward, it didn't set well with his kids.

"They (Norwich) were in a celebratory mood and we did not like it," Stein said. "It kind of fired us up."

When the final stanza began, it was a team effort in every sense. Five players contributed to the scoring in the fourth as the Gorillas employed a seldom-used half-court trap to speed up the Eagles. It worked.

By the 2:28 mark they had pulled to within four, 43-39, and then proceeded to score the final six points, the winning basket coming on a nifty pass from under the basket from Makaen Hastings to Dylan Hines, who laid it in with only five seconds remaining.

Norwich had to go the full length of the floor after a couple of timeouts but was unable to get a final shot off. The Gorillas began an immediate celebration of their own. It had been 1918 since the school had last played in a state tournament. The century-long drought was over and now it continues.

Hines finished with a double-double of 10 points and 10 boards. Gosch had game-high honors with 16 points and his own double-double with 10 rebounds. Dax Rosenhagen contributed 10 points to the Norwich effort.

The Gorillas played the Eagles on even terms over the first 16 minutes, keeping pace at 8-8 after one quarter and 20-all at halftime.

Gosch was the top player for Norwich in the opening half with eight point while Hines had six for Solomon. The Gorillas had six players score despite only having 20 points on the board.

The winner advances to Friday's 6 p.m. semifinal against the winner of Wednesday's late game between South Gray and Ness City.

SOLOMON 45, NORWICH 43

Solomon 8 12 5 20 -- 45

Norwich 8 12 17 6 -- 43

Solomon (17-7) – Krause 1-2 1-2 4, Coup 3-8 2-3 8, Hastings 2-9 3-4 8, Hynes 5-5 0-0 10, Smith 3-7 0-1 6, Baxa 2-5 0-0 4, Duran 2-4 0-0 5. Totals 18-40 6-10 45.

Norwich (22-2) – Rosenhagern 3-4 2-3 10, Schroeder 2-7 0-0 5, Gosch 7-13 2-2 16, Hilger 4-10 0-1 8, Hibbs 2-7 0-1 4, Smith 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 18-42 4-6 43.

3-point goals—Solomon 3-15 (Krause 1-2, Coup 0-5, Hastings 1-6, Duran 1-2), Norwich 3-7 (Rosenhagen 2-3, Schroeder 1-2, Hilger 0-1, Hibbs 0-1). Rebounds—Solomon 21 (Hynes 10), Norwich 21 (Gosch 10). Assists—Solomon 11 (Hastings 3), Norwich 11 (Hibbs 6). Fouls—Solomon 10, Norwich 16. Fouled out—Norwich (Schroeder).