

## **Burlingame is the Cinderella story of Class 1A-I girls state**

DODGE CITY – It's been a whirlwind of a week for Jeff Slater.

The Burlingame Bearcats' girls basketball coach first welcomed his third child into the world over the weekend, a daughter A.C. Secondly, he turned 35 years of age on Thursday while coaching his team in the Class 1A-I State Tournament at United Wireless Arena.

Last, but certainly not least, he watched his upstart Bearcats, making their first-ever, yes their first-ever state tournament appearance, knock off the No. 3 seeded Little River Redskins, 45-39, to advance to Friday's 8 p.m. semifinal against unbeaten and No. 2 seeded Centralia, a 59-42 winner over Spearville.

"That was sweet, as good as it gets," an elated Slater said moments after his team overcame a slow start, trailing 11-9 after one quarter and 26-23 at halftime.

In retrospect, the rally likely began at the end of the second period when the Bearcats' Kenna Masters was fouled attempting a desperation 3-pointer with 0:02.8 seconds on the clock before the break. Masters made 2-of-3 free throws to cut their deficit to 26-23 at intermission.

That little momentum switch seemed to ignite the Bearcats as they came out firing on all cylinders to begin the third as Isabella Tyson and Gracie Simmons knocked down consecutive 3-pointers and Kaylin Noonan added a charity shot for a 7-0 run that put them up 30-26 with just over five minutes to play in the quarter.

"We've been really good in clutch situations all year, and the girls show a lot of poise," Slater said of his team, which seems bent on making all sorts of history for the school. "We had a goal all along that we wanted to be playing on the weekend and now we're there."

Three main goals for his Bearcats – winning the Lyon County mid-season tournament, winning sub-state, and winning a game at state. The rest of this is icing on the cake.

It was Daelyn Winters who provided the spark, playing all 32 minutes and scoring 12 points but more importantly playing the floor general role and getting her teammates involved.

“She seems to be the driver of our car,” Slater said of the guard who missed an earlier season game against Little River when the Bearcats lost by 14. “We needed her leadership.”

As if the end of the first half wasn’t enough, the Bearcats got a clutch 3-pointer from Winters with 0:02 showing on the clock to cap off the 15-9 third quarter difference maker.

Taking a 38-35 lead to the final eight minutes, the Bearcats used a patient offense that resulted in a march to the free throw line where they missed six free throws and also endured a free throw lane violation. But they also cashed in seven made charities without making a single field goal in the last eight minutes.

Little River also struggled in the fourth, scoring just four points with those coming on a 3-pointer by Lilyan Boughfman at the 3:34 mark and a single free throw by Elsie Boughfman with 2:44 to play. That was it for the Redskins. They had a chance to cut the lead to two but couldn’t convert.

“I thought we executed our game plan really well,” Slater said. “We wanted to challenge No. 24 (Lilyan Boughfman) and make her uncomfortable and I thought we accomplished that. Our guards did a great job rebounding.”

Noonan finished with a double-double by scoring 13 points and grabbing 10 rebounds. Winters finished with 12 and Gracie Simmons added 10. Noonan was 9-of-14 at the stripe as the Bearcats finished 17-of-29 while the Redskins were only 4-of-9 at the line.

Neither team shot the ball particularly well, with Burlingame making 11-of-32 for 34.4 percent and Little River finishing at 15-of-51 for 29.4 percent. Both teams committed 18 turnovers and each team had 10 steals. Rebounds were a wash at 32-all, Aubrey Olander leading the Redskins with 13 boards.

Burlingame improves its season record to 21-2 while Little River’s campaign ends at the same mark.

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## **LITTLE RIVER VS BURLINGAME**

Burlingame 9 14 15 7 -- 45

Little River 11 15 9 4 -- 39

Burlingame (21-2) – I. Tyson 1-1 2-3 5, Noonan 2-7 9-14 13, Winters 3-9 4-9 12, Simmons 4-12 0-0 10, Masters 1-2 2-3 6, Crook 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 11-32 17-29 45.

Little River (22-2) – Stephenson 1-9 0-0 3, Eck 2-8 0-0 6, Olander 2-6 1-5 5, E. Boughfman 2-6 1-2 6, L. Boughfman 5-15 0-0 11, Sneath 2-3 0-0 4, Ellwood 0-2 0-0 0, Welsh 1-1 2-2 4, Renken 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 15-51 4-9 39.

3-point goals—Burlingame 6-16 (I. Tyson 1-1, Winters 2-6, Simmons 2-7, Masters 1-2), Little River 5-19 (Stephenson 1-6, Eck 2-4, E. Boughfman 1-1, L. Boughfman 1-5, Elwood 0-2, Renken 0-1). Rebounds—Burlingame 30 (Noonan 10), Little River (Olander 13). Assists—Burlingame 7 (Noonan 3), Little River 9 (Eck, Olander 2 each). Fouls—Burlingame 11, Little River 21. Fouled out—None.