Late heave stabs Bearcat boys as Liberty-Benton survives in district semis

Written by Jim Metcalfe Friday, March 09, 2012 1:33 PM - Last Updated Friday, June 27, 2014 4:06 AM

jmetcalfe@delphosherald.com

LIMA — Jim McKay became known for his signature introduction on ABC's "Wide World of Sports" — "The thrill of victory, the agony of defeat."

Spencerville's boys basketball team found out that reality out first-hand Thursday night versus Liberty-Benton at the Division III Lima Senior District semifinal.

The Bearcats had battled back from a horrible start to be on the verge of overtime before Eagle sophomore John Darnall swished home a 3/4-court buzzer-beater to seize a 62-59 victory. Spencerville had come all the way back from a 14-0 hole in the first four minutes of the first period to trail 47-42 to start the ultimate quarter. A deuce by junior Derek Goecke (18 points, 11 boards) and a 3-ball by senior Dan Binkley (19 counters, 5 treys) at 6:30 tied the game but the Eagles (19-3) never let them get the lead. Battling severe foul trouble: starters Rob Rucki (6-6 senior; 18 markers with 3 treys), Darnall (9 counters, 3 dimes) and Mitch Linhart (9; the only one to foul out) all had four fouls from the third period and Adam Cytlak (6 boards, 6 assists) joined them in the fourth; the Eagles got a triple from Ryan Geise (15 counters, 3 bombs) at 5:52 to retake the lead.

They pushed that lead to 57-50 on the second-of-2 singles by Linhart at 2:31. However, back came the Bearcats (15-8). Goecke started it with an all-alone layup at 2:04 and a Binkley trifecta at 1:52 got them with 57-55. Cytlak hit the 1st-of-2 tosses at 54.2 seconds. Spencerville went three times for the tying basket on the same possession but the ball refused to go down; however, they got the rebound all three times. Finally, junior Cole Roberts got a deuce on a putback with 13 ticks showing got a 58-57 deficit and head coach Kevin Sensabaugh called time with 12.4 ticks left. After nearly causing a miscue, they fouled Rucki with 9.6 ticks left. He sank the 2nd-of-2 and Spencerville advanced the ball before calling time at 7.2 seconds. Binkley drove to the baseline and was fouled for two shots in the double-bonus. The senior calmly sank both with 2.5 seconds left to knot the score at 59. With Libery-Benton out of timeouts and having to go the length of the floor, everyone was looking to an overtime session but Darnall had other ideas. Getting the inbounds pass along the left sideline, he one-armed a shot from 3/4-court and hit nothing but net as time expired to shock the Bearcat players and partisans and bring the Eagles' rooters joy.

Both coaches agreed that the final play was something they'd never seen before in their careers.

"Obviously, it's a difficult way to lose a game like this. This was a heck of a basketball game and you're all but set on overtime and then that," Sensabaugh noted. "I just got done telling the kids that I couldn't have been prouder of a group of guys than I was then. For Dan and Eli (Bowers), they won't be back. I don't know what I will tell them yet but they have been great leaders for me all season. They have been great players for four years for me."

L-B coach Steve Williman has won over 500 games in his 31 seasons at the Eagle helm. "I have never had that happen for me. I figure I am due," he joked. "We had an end-of-game play drawn up but Spencerville took it away. We adjusted on the fly and we got a fortunate play

Late heave stabs Bearcat boys as Liberty-Benton survives in district semis

Written by Jim Metcalfe Friday, March 09, 2012 1:33 PM - Last Updated Friday, June 27, 2014 4:06 AM

to win this game."

Darnall noted how they usually work on half-court shots after practice but nothing like that. "I wasn't sure when it left my hand that it was going in. I starting hoping that it would and when it did, obviously, it's incredible," he asserted.

They will now face Lima Central Catholic, a 64-48 victor over Elmwood, at 7 p.m. Saturday. The Black Pack couldn't have started any worse, nor could the Eagles have started any better. A 14-0 spurt, with Liberty-Benton hit its first six shots (21-of-32 for the night, an inhuman 10-of-14 downtown, for 65.6%) — Rucki had seven — established that span. The Bearcats finally got on the scoreboard at 3:36 when senior Eli Bowers (11 points) banked in a drive but the Eagles ended up with a 19-6 advantage with Geise canned two singles at the 49.8-second mark.

The Bearcats showed character in coming back in the second period. They chipped away at the deficit — as foul troubles began to creep into the Eagles' armor — and got within 26-21 as Goecke put back his own miss at 2:05. However, back-to-back trifectas by Rucki and Linhart stopped the momentum. Bowers hit the 1st-of-2 at the line with 28.4 seconds showing to get the Bearcats within 32-22.

The Bearcats had a game plan in the third period — get to the basket. It worked very well as Rucki picked up his third and fourth fouls (5:22), Linhart his third and fourth (4:34) and Darnall the same (3:06). Spencerville was in the double-bonus at the 45.6-second mark. They had gotten within 42-40 on a triple by Binkley at the 2-minite mark but Benton staved them off, grabbing a 47-42 edge on the second-of-2 singles by Chase Cook with 3.3 ticks on the clock. Spencerville had a chance to get closer but canned 7-of-12 free throws in the third (12-of-23 for the night for 52.2%). At one span in the third and fourth, they missed six in a row. "I give my guys so much credit. They showed so much character, composure and poise to come

from behind after a terrible start," Sensabaugh acknowledged. "We didn't defend very well to begin with but once we settled in and started to adjust to their sets, we got much better. We missed some big opportunities at the line to get been closer or get the lead but we showed so much heart to even be in that position."

Spencerville ended up shooting 21-of-45 from the floor (5-of-18 beyond the arc) for 46.7 percent; outboarding the Eagles 26-20, including a 15-4 dominance on the offensive glass; 19 fouls

"Their dribble-drive offense gave us a ton of problems on the defensive end; we were struggling to find an answer. We even tried 2-3 and 1-3-1 zones to try and slow them down but it only worked occasionally," Williman added. "They also killed us on the offensive boards. When we did force them to miss a shot — or they just missed — they got second and third chances." Liberty-Benton was 10-of-18 at the line (55.6%); had 12 miscues; and 21 fouls.