

Griffins Win Holiday Tournament In OT For Second Year Straight

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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CENTRALIA – It was an eventful weekend for the Father McGivney girls' basketball team.

On Friday night in the semifinals of the Christ Our Rock Lutheran Winterfest Tournament, the Griffins handed Staunton its first loss of the season. The Bulldogs came into that game riding high on a 14-game win streak, but McGivney looked dominant in a 45-33 win.

A day later, McGivney took on and beat the Greenville Comets by a score of 39-34 to win the tourney in back-to-back seasons. Last year McGivney beat Staunton in the final 49-44 in overtime.

It once again took OT to determine a winner in Centralia.

Down by a basket with 17.3 seconds left in the game, McGivney's Devin Ellis inbounded the ball from the baseline straight to Mia Lieberman who put it up and in to tie the game at 32-32.

It wasn't the exact play call that Griffins' head coach Jeff Oller had in mind, but he didn't care.

“ was just in the right place at the right time,” he said. “We just had Mia kind of use her size and her ability. She's been getting more comfortable each game and she made a big play. It was awesome to see.”



That was just to get the game to OT.

In overtime, Greenville's Haylee Clark was the first to score, going ahead 34-32. Lieberman made a free throw to make it a one-point game before Emily Johnson scored to go ahead 35-34. Lieberman extended that lead with another basket in transition and then Ellis scored a couple of free throws to put the game to bed.

“It felt pretty familiar,” coach Oller said about the overtime period. “We’ve had a lot of big moments as a program in this gym.”

Johnson led the Griffins with 14 points, the most she had scored in the tournament. Eight of her points came from the foul line as she shot 8-of-14.

“She’s stepped into a lot bigger role than she did last year, and she’s done a great job of it,” Oller said. “She’s one of our leaders and we need her to score like that.”



The Comets got off to a 4-0 lead to kick off the game after Natalie McCullough and Katie Campbell scored back-to-back baskets. Greenville made it a 6-1 lead at one point before the Griffins went on a 7-0 run to end the first quarter. The Griffins turned it around and led 8-6 after one.

The game was close throughout and saw 10 lead changes. Six of those lead changes occurred in the second quarter.

Greenville led 13-12 before Natalie Beck’s layup regained the lead for McGivney. Ellis made her team’s only three-pointer of the game to push that lead to 17-15 at halftime.

Immediately into the second half, Greenville tied it at 17-17 before Lieberman and Johnson both scored to go ahead 21-17. Greenville would tie again at 23-23 after Campbell sunk a couple of free throws. Shayna Henderson's three-pointer gave the Comets a 26-23 lead after three quarters.

Henderson scored again to open the fourth and push it to 28-23. The Griffins trailed the entire quarter until they tied it up at 32-32 to force overtime.

Coach Oller agreed that his team played probably its best defense all game in overtime.

"There's definitely a sense of urgency," he said. "Defense is something that we've really been working on a lot. These last three games of the tournament, we've played our best defense all year, so hopefully, we can keep that momentum going."

The win brings McGivney to 11-4 on the season. It was the Griffins' fifth win in a row. Meanwhile, Greenville falls to 9-5.

Thanks to her performance in the championship game, Lieberman landed herself on the All-Tournament team. Sami Oller won tournament MVP. Lieberman had nine points in the championship game.



Oller is her team's leading scorer this season. She averaged 10.5 points per game throughout the tournament with a single-game high of 15 points against Johnston City.

Oller finished the championship game with six points, Ellis had five, and Beck had four and Izzie Venarsky had a single point.

The Comets were led by Campbell's 18-point performance. Henderson scored seven points while Emma Veith scored five. McCullough and Clark each scored two.

Overall, it was another successful year in Centralia for the Griffins.

"It's a great tournament," coach Oller said. "We love it because we get to see a lot of different teams. We get to play a lot of challenging opponents, and different styles of play. I'm just proud of how the girls performed."

The Griffins have two tough away games to kick off the new year against Lift For Life Academy (10-2) and Highland (11-7) before returning home to host Christ Our Rock Lutheran (5-8) on Monday, Jan. 8.