

By JOHN HENSON

Harlan County Sports.com

MIDDLESBORO — Reaching the 20-win plateau two days before February arrives would be a notable accomplishment for most high school basketball teams.

Harlan County coach Mike Jones doesn't celebrate anything in January, which he reminded a reporter who asked what he thought about the Bears' 20-2 record.

"I thought we'd be 22-0," Jones said. "We want to get better. We're still trying to separate ourselves, and you can't do that playing like we did the first quarter. I'm trying to make points to the kids every day. We have to start playing every game like it's the last one."

Middlesboro scored the first six points and led throughout the first quarter and part of the second as the Bears turned the ball over five times in the first period and hit only five of 14 shots from the field.

"We knew they felt it was a really important district game for them," Jones said. "Evidently, our kids weren't convinced of that. We stood around offensively. We stood around defensively. We gave up too many open shots. When we finally settled down, we did some good things defensively. We were active and started attacking the basket like we want to. We have to start making the free ones better."

Junior guard Alex Sergent led the Bears with 17 points. Tyler Brewer scored 14. Aaron Caldwell added 13 points and 10 rebounds. Chad Massingll scored 10.

Middlesboro (13-10 overall, 1-4 district) was led by junior forward Derek Smith with 15 points.

Harlan County scored the final five points of the first half to take a 29-24 lead, then took over in the third quarter. The Bears forced six turnovers, leading to several transition buckets as they outscored the Jackets 20-6.

The Jackets' offense grew progressively worse. After hitting seven of 16 shots in the first quarter, Middlesboro hit three of 10 in the second quarter, two of 11 in the third and two of 14 in the fourth.

"I think how physical the game is wears on us, mentally and physically," Middlesboro coach Russell Thompson said. "I thought they took advantage of us physically in the third quarter. It ended up getting our guys in foul trouble. We were doing too much fouling out on the floor, and we weren't able to finish our shots.

"Overall, my guys saw they could play with them and what we have to do for four quarters to beat a team like Harlan County. We have to better defend them. They are able to get in the paint. When they aren't hitting their shots, we're fouling them. That's frustrating as a coach and frustrating as a player. I think we could be there by district tournament time, but our guys are going to

have to continue to work to get to a level Harlan County is at right now." Massingill and Sergent each had two baskets in the third quarter as the lead grew to 49-30.

Caldwell and Sergent took over in the fourth quarter as Harlan County pushed its lead to 24. Freshmen Cody Bumgardner and Trey Sanders and sophomore Derek Akal scored in the final minute as the HCHS reserves closed the game with a 10-2 run.

Middlesboro plays host to Lynn Camp on Tuesday. Harlan County travels to Harlan on Thursday for a district doubleheader.

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#### HARLAN COUNTY (20-2)

Tyler Brewer 6-12 2-8 14, Alex Sergent 5-14 2-8 17, Chad Massingill 3-8 4-9 10, James Bond 0-2 0-0 0, Aaron Caldwell 6-13 1-1 13, Tyler Miller 3-3 2-2 8, Shamil Clark 1-1 0-2 2, Zach Caldwell 0-0 0-0 0, Cody Bumgardner 0-0 1-2 1, Trey Sanders 0-0 2-2 2, Cole Wilson 0-1 0-0 0, Derek Akal 1-1 2-2 4. Totals: 25-55 21-36 71.

#### MIDDLESBORO (13-10)

Michael Wilson 2-9 0-2 5, Blake Davis 2-10 2-2 8, Jarrell Stephney 1-1 0-0 2, Cameron Rancher 0-7 0-0 0, Zach Riddle 3-6 0-0 6, Jake Taylor 0-1 1-2 1, Donnie Foister 0-4 3-5 3, Derek Smith 6-8 3-5 15, Austin Poindexter 0-0 0-0 0, Boone Bowling 0-1 0-0 0, Cole Frazier 0-3 2-2 2, Major Edwards 0-0 0-0 0, Tyler Prater 0-1 0-0 0. Totals: 14-51 11-18 42.

Harlan County	12	17	20	22	—	71
Middlesboro	15	9	6	12	—	42

3-point goals: Harlan County 0-6 (Massingill 0-1, Brewer 0-2, Sergent 0-3), Middlesboro 3-19 (Davis 2-8, Wilson 1-5, Taylor 0-1, Frazier 0-2, Foister 0-3).

Rebounds: Harlan County 34 (A. Caldwell 10, Massingill 5, Brewer 4, Sergent 3, Bond 3, Akal 3, Miller 2, Z. Caldwell 2, Clark 1, Wilson 1), Middlesboro 33 (Rancher 8, Davis 5, Smith 4, Wilson 3, Bowling 3, Riddle 2, Foister 2, Poindexter 2, Taylor 1, Frazier 1, Edwards 1, Prater 1). Turnovers: Harlan County 14, Middlesboro 18. Fouled out: None. Technical fouls: Harlan County (Massey).

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MIDDLESBORO — There are hundreds of theories on the best approach to winning basketball games.

Stopping the other team from putting the ball in the basket is still one of the best.

Harlan County held Middlesboro without a field goal in the first half, building a 27-6 lead, on the way to a 55-32 district victory Monday.

"We were playing hard defensively," Harlan County coach Anthony Nolan said. "The last time we played, (Ashley) Mason and (Anajae) Stephney

scored most of their points. Stephney is very athletic and attacks the basket real strong. Mason is capable of hitting some shots. We didn't want them to get comfortable.

"I was worried at halftime when they didn't have a field goal. I knew they'd come out aggressive. It took us a couple of timeouts to get straightened out, then we had another run."

Middlesboro missed all eight of its shots from the field in the first quarter and all 10 in the second quarter.

"We just still continue to have trouble putting the ball in the basket," Middlesboro coach Elgie Green said. "I think our defense is good enough, if we hit shots, to be in games. But it's been the same story over and over and over. We always have one or two quarter when we can absolutely not score. We're just not good enough to come back from 20 down."

Senior guard Miranda Davenport scored 21 points to lead Harlan County, which improved to 16-6 overall and 3-2 in district action. With the help of Bell County's win Monday over Harlan, the Lady Bears can force a three-way tie for the first seed in the 52nd District Tournament with a win at Harlan on Thursday.

Both teams struggled on offense early as Brooklyn Massingill had the only two field goals in the opening four minutes as Harlan County led 5-3 before closing the quarter with a 10-0 run. Carroll and Davenport each had four points in the run that was capped by a jumper from Madison Cornett. Two straight baskets by Davenport and one by Kaitlyn Stittums stretched the lead to 21-6 midway through the second quarter. Davenport had the final six points of the half as the Lady Bears stretched their lead to 27-6.

Emily Pannochia brooked the drought with a basket at the 7:36 mark of the third quarter. With the Lady Bears struggling to score, Middlesboro battled back to within 12, at 31-19, Stephney had two baskets and Bailey Hensley hit a 3-pointer in a 7-0 run.

"They did a good job of getting up and guarding the ball," Nolan said. "We've been trying to teach the kids how to read defenses and take what the defense is giving. Tonight we were settling at times when we should have attacked and got to the free throw line. That's something we have to improve in February, and the kids are working on that in practice. I thought we missed a lot of easy shots and made them look a little tougher than what they were." Davenport had two baskets and Massingill added one as Harlan County reclaimed control with a 7-0 run of its own, pushing the lead to 38-19 heading into the fourth quarter.

Harlan County outscored Middlesboro 17-12 in the fourth quarter, led by five points from Lauren Lee. Sarah Evans had the last basket for the Lady Bears as she made her return after missing several games with a sore knee. Evans led the Lady Bears with nine rebounds, including seven in the second quarter. Harlan County returns to action Thursday at Harlan in a girls/boys

doubleheader.

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HARLAN COUNTY (16-6)

Miranda Davenport 8-19 5-6 21, Brooklyn Massingill 4-10 0-0 8, Kaitlyn Stittums 3-4 0-0 6, Keisha Mimes 0-0 1-2 1, Kalee Carroll 3-4 1-2 7, Sarah Evans 1-4 0-0 2, Shannon Shackelford 1-1 0-0 2, Bella Noe 0-2 1-2 1, Madison Cornett 1-1 0-0 2, Lauren Lee 2-2 0-0 5, Shauntae Lewis 0-0 0-0 0, Rachel Carmical 0-1 0-0 0, Melissa Stewart 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 23-47 8-12 55.

MIDDLESBORO (5-16)

Ashley Mason 1-8 1-2 3, Rayann Moyers 1-4 0-0 3, Kelsie Hensley 1-2 0-0 2, Anajae Stephney 4-17 6-11 14, Emily Pannochia 1-4 2-4 4, Bailey Hensley 2-4 0-0 6, Taylor Prater 0-0 0-3 0, Amanda Biscardi 0-1 0-0 0. Totals: 10-41 9-20 32.

Harlan County	15	12	11	17	—	55
Middlesboro	3	3	13	13	—	32

3-point goals: Harlan County 1-11 (Lee 1-1, Carmical 0-1, Massingill 0-3, Davenport 0-6), Middlesboro 3-9 (B. Hensley 2-2, Moyers 1-3, Biscardi 0-1, Mason 0-3). Rebounds: Harlan County 36 (Evans 9, Davenport 5, Carroll 4, Mimes 4, Stittums 3, Massingill 3, Shackelford 3, Noe 3, Cornett 1, Lee 1). Turnovers: Harlan County 18, Middlesboro 19. Fouled out: None. Technical fouls: Middlesboro (bench).