Win is first in THS team sport history

Junior point guard Kalian Mitchell scored a team high 20 points and senior teammate Cheyenne Begay poured in 18 as the Tohatchi Lady Cougars beat Eunice 57-50 in the championship

game of the New Mexico Class 3A girls basketball division March 10 at WisePies Arena – also known as the Pit at the University of Albuquerque.

Tohatchi came into the game ranked No. 3 in 3A across the state and Eunice was the tournament's top seed at No. 1.

"It was a very tough game. We hung in there," Tohatchi head coach Tanisha Bitsoi said after the game. "This is a very exciting moment for Tohatchi High School. The girls worked hard all year long and stuck to our game plans in each of the games we played."

Tohatchi jumped out to a three-point lead in the first quarter behind jump shots by Mitchell and layups by Begay. For most of three quarters, the early lead was the only lead that the Lady Cougars claimed throughout the game.

The Lady Cardinals shot well and played more than decent defense against a Tohatchi team that was averaging nearly 30 to 40 points a half over the 2107 basketball season. Tohatchi, with Mitchell running the show, was able to control the early tempo of the game, and led 9-8 at one point in the first quarter, but Eunice came back and was able to maintain leads through the next two quarters.

Junior sensations Harria Mendoza and Jada Jones were specular for Eunice and each played the complete floor game. Mendoza scored 25 points in the game and Jones scored 18. The two were the sole Eunice players who scored in double figures. Just two more Eunice players scored points in the game.

"We had a couple of turnovers late in the game and that played a role in the loss," Eunice head coach Jimmie Jones said. "Tohatchi played a very good game."

Mitchell, an all-state player each of her years at Tohatchi High, fouled out in the game as did Eunice senior shooting guard M'lee Vinson. Tohatchi ended the game with 16 fouls, compared to 14 for Eunice.

The Lady Cougars ended the 2017 with an overall record of 26-5, 8-0. Eunice finished the 2017 basketball season at 27-4, 9-0. Eunice opened the season with a 47-43 away loss to West Las Vegas, but regrouped after that and that was a plus for the season, the team's head coach said. The Lady Cardinals beat Laguna Acoma 44-38 a couple of days prior to the championship game to earn the right to play Tohatchi. The game was the first team sports championship in Tohatchi history.

"What an awesome performance put in by the Lady Cougars on the court," John Brooks, athletic director at Tohatchi, said of the championship game. "This is the first state championship in a team sport for Tohatchi."

TOHATCHI'S VICTORY CELEBRATION

March 17: Gym Set Up and final planning meeting. The high school gym will be available on Friday starting at 6 pm to decorate the gym. Drinks and other donations can be brought to the gym at this time.

March 18: Parade. Line up starting at 9 am at the gas stations. At 10 am the parade will start to proceed along the route going through Tohatchi community housing (the route that is used for Homecoming Parade) ending up at the mid-school parking lot. We are asking fans to line the street along the community housing.

Pep Rally and Cook Out: Following the parade there will be a pep rally and cook out at the Al Grinsdale Gym. There will be GMCS and Navajo Nation officials that will speak to celebrate the success of the GBB team. The girls basketball players will be introduced and a Pep Rally held.

There will be grills on hand to cook hotdogs. Community members can bring their own grills and help cook.

By Bernie Dotson

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