





Game was part of annual John Lomasney Invitational Tournament

Senior all-state guard Kalian Mitchell put up 27 points and was strong through the third and fourth quarters, but Tohatchi had no answer for junior forward Ashley Antone and dropped a Dec. 1 second round John Lomasney tournament game to Gallup, 71-67.

The game was played before a capacity crowd at Gallup High School, most of whom came out to see the Lady Cougars, who won the 3A state basketball championship last year.

As a result of the win, the Lady Bengals advanced to the tournament championship game, but fell to Bel Air of El Paso, Texas, 69-63. Tohatchi lost 54-29 to Carlsbad in the runner up game of the tournament.

“It was a very well-played game by both teams,” Tanisha Bitsoi, head coach of the Lady Cougars, said of the Gallup game. “We made runs in the third and fourth quarters, but just came up short.”

Bitsoi downplayed the 5A (Gallup) versus 3A (Tohatchi) matchup, saying the Lady Cougars (1-2) are up for whatever team that comes their way.

GALLUP LEADS EARLY

The game started with Gallup getting out to lead behind free throw shooting. The Lady Bengals got inside scoring attempts from Antone, and junior guard Kamryn Yazzie was near perfect in setting up teammates for points off of assists, which helped the team get a commanding 24-13 lead after the opening period.

Tohatchi stayed close, even though Mitchell, who has been a first or second team all-star since eighth grade, was passing up shots to get people like sophomore guard Krystal Benally some points. Mitchell sat the bench during a long stretch of the second quarter. When Benally fouled out in the fourth quarter, Tohatchi lost a reliable scoring punch that was the perfect complement to Mitchell.

“We got ahead early on foul shots and that helped us a lot,” first-year Gallup head coach Todd McBroom said. “They are a very good team. Mitchell is a very good player.”

Mitchell hit a 3-point shot late in the third quarter that cut the Gallup lead to 46-43. Benally and junior forward Sherika Watchman of Tohatchi hit a few jumpers and the Gallup edge was 52-50. But the Lady Cougars simply could not contain the roving Antone, who not only scored crucial inside and outside points for the Lady Bengals but also grabbed key rebounds. Gallup had five players who scored in double figures, compared to three for Tohatchi.

THE SHOW

The versatile Mitchell went down swinging and took over down the stretch and hit a driving, off-balanced lay up in a crowd to give Tohatchi a 55-54 lead. Mitchell's speed, intelligence and ball-handling skills allowed her to get inside at-will. Bitsoi called a couple of time outs in the closing minutes of the fourth, but a hustling Yazzie and the roving Antone proved too much. When Antone and Yazzie weren't giving the Lady Cougars scoring and defensive fits, senior forward Journey Gillson picked up the slack. Gillson finished the game with 8 points.

Antone finished with 23 points and junior guard Hanna Toledo chipped in 11 for Gallup. Besides Benally, sophomore forward Samantha Belone fouled out of the game with about six minutes left in regulation.

Gallup is averaging about 70 points a game on offense thus far into the 2017 girls basketball season. Gallup shot 24 of 32 from the foul line and committed 21 fouls. Contrarily, Tohatchi shot 15 of 23 from the line and committed 20 fouls, most in the first half. Tohatchi made seven 3-pointers in the game, three were put in by Mitchell.

By Bernie Dotson
For the Sun