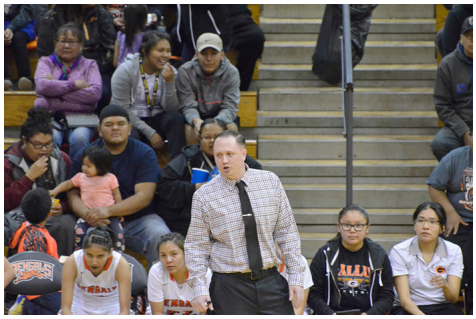
Gallup overcomes Mitchell-led Tohatchi, 65-44

Written by By Bernie Dotson For the Sun
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Mitchell puts up 22 in 3A/5A loss

Do-it-all senior point guard Kalian Mitchell scored the first nine points of the game and it looked as though the Lady Cougars would ride that wave toward victory in a Dec. 19 girls basketball contest between Gallup and Tohatchi, played at Gallup High School.

Gallup won the game 65-44.

Mitchell, an all-state player at Tohatchi since the 8th grade, hit short and long-range jumpers and a 3-pointer to get the Lady Cougars out in front early. The Lady Bengals appeared dazed and confused by Mitchell's skills.

But somewhere along the line, Gallup (7-3) figured things out and got their superstars into the offensive and defensive flow of the game. That was witnessed by a 26-point second quarter onslaught in which the Lady Bengals hit on all cylinders and outscored Tohatchi 26-4. It was also a time in the game in which Mitchell went to the bench with three fouls.

"We grew up and we just figured out what we needed to do," first-year Gallup head coach Todd McBroom said in post-game comments. "They have a good team. Mitchell is a great player."

THE MITCHELL EXPERIMENT

The Lady Cougars (3-4) got out to 8-0 lead before junior guard Hanna Toledo hit a shot to get Gallup on the scoreboard. Still, Gallup had all it could handle in Mitchell, who was a one-woman scoring machine on offense. But Mitchell was a little too aggressive on defense, going for steals at every chance, and the Lady Bengals seemed to take advantage of the over-aggressiveness.

“Stay close. Stay close. Don’t foul,” Tohatchi head coach Tanisha Bitsoi told her players at intervals during the first and second quarters. “Take it easy,” Bitsoi instructed.

Once the Lady Bengals saw Mitchell sit the bench, junior forward Ashley Antone began to maneuver around the floor to receive assists from Toledo. When Antone couldn’t hit shots, senior forward Journey Gillson was there for mop up duty, which resulted in rebounds to keep balls alive or inside points by either Antone or Gillson.

The unsung hero of the game for Gallup was senior center Leona Smith. Smith grabbed rebounds and threw overhead half-court passes to Toledo junior guard Amanda Mitchel to ignite fast breaks. On offense, Smith drove the lane at-will from the left and right sides to increase Gallup leads. By the time the third quarter ended, Gallup led 53-31.

“There were quite a few of turning points,” McBroom said. “Again, we settled down and got into paying Bengals basketball.”

SCORING TAKES

Smith ended with 19 points. The versatile Antone scored 11 and Mitchel hit 6 points. Junior guard Ashia Smith put in 10 points for the Lady Bengals. Mitchell scored a game high of 22 points for Tohatchi and was the sole Tohatchi player in double figures.

The Lady Bengals take on Cleveland on Dec. 29 in a home game. Tohatchi plays Shiprock Dec. 21 at Tohatchi. The Lady Bengals were coming off a 47-35 away loss on Dec. 15 to Rio Rancho. Tohatchi beat Thoreau 62-39 last week at Thoreau. Tohatchi has played few 4A and 5A teams thus far in the 2017 girls basketball season.

Tohatchi and Gallup played Dec. 1 at Gallup in the annual John Lomasney Invitational Tournament. Gallup won that game 71-67 behind 23 points by Antone. Mitchell scored 27 in that game.

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