

Aztec girls overpower Gallup, 52-40

Written by By Bernie Dotson For the Sun
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Gillentine, McCaskill too much for Gallup

The Aztec Lady Tigers sat back and took it relatively easy during the early part of the first quarter, but didn't decide until later to make a definitive scoring move against Gallup in a 52-40 5A win Jan. 27 at Gallup High School.

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As a result of the win, the Lady Tigers improved to 7-10, 1-3 in district play and Gallup fell to 13-7, 2-2. Both teams are in the midst of the season-ending stretch of 5A contests. Gallup was coming off a 49-48 road win against Bloomfield (16-4, 3-1) on Jan. 25. That game was the first district loss for the Lady Bobcats.

Gallup controlled Saturday's game for the better part of the first quarter. But they seemed to have no idea that senior guard Myra McCaskill and junior guard Jessi Gillentine were laying back and waiting to get things started on Aztec's end.

The Lady Bengals won the first quarter 14-5 behind a variety of scoring from junior guard Ashia Smith and sophomore forward Laila Etsitty. Etsitty hit a 3-pointer late in the opening quarter and it looked like lights out for Aztec.

Junior forward Ashley Antone hit seven straight points in the first two quarters, but unexplainably went ice cold after that. Antone, Gallup's leading scorer over the 2017-1018 basketball season, hit a few free throws later, but wasn't her versatile and roving self throughout the latter parts of the game.

Aztec used junior forward Reigan Weaver — at 6-feet-1-inches the tallest player on the court — to score early inside points against the Lady Bengals in the first half, but Weaver fouled out later and, in spite of that, Gallup simply had no answer for McCaskill and Gillentine.

"Our two guards are very capable and very intelligent when it comes to reading offenses and player style," Aztec head coach Robert McCaskill said afterward. "They relied on (Reigan) early on, but when she went out they basically rallied and took things amongst themselves."

The Second Quarter

To say the least. Both teams battled back and forth with lead changes taking place at least three times in the second quarter. Weaver got more aggressive on the offensive and defensive boards and McCaskill started driving the ball, and when there were not chances to score she dished to Weaver or found Gillentine or senior guard Sierra Sanders for shots. To Gallup's

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chagrin, both hit their shots.

McCaskill hit a long 3-point shot to start the second quarter, but the shot didn't give the Lady Tigers the lead. Antone hit some foul shots midway through the second quarter, but was otherwise quiet. That was the time in which Aztec made runs, outscoring the Lady Bengals 15-4 by the end of the second. Antone hit a jumper later in the second, but Gillentine was just getting warmed up.

The Third Quarter.

Aztec led 20-18 going into the third quarter. The Lady Tigers were fierce on defense and Antone went out of the game for a short period, which allowed Weaver to make some noise. The scoring pace was slow in the first and second halves, but the Lady Tigers managed to hold onto leads, up 26-21 with 6:22 left on the game clock in the third quarter. Gallup went flat on offense, which didn't help the cause going forward.

"We can't get behind and expect to come back strong," Gallup head coach Todd McBroom said. "We had some breakdowns on defense, but also went into moments where we couldn't find the basket."

Meanwhile, Gillentine was running the offense alongside McCaskill. At one point, the Lady Tigers went into a 4-corners offensive set, with Gillentine, McCaskill or Sanders shooting at the first opportunity. Aztec led 32-27 with 1:16 to go in the third. Gallup's Smith tried to make things happen with jumpers and inside shots, but nothing fell.

The Fourth Quarter

The Lady Tigers were leading 32-29 at the start of the fourth quarter. Aztec later led 40-32, and Weaver fouled out with 3:38 to go in regulation. That's when the intelligence and foresight of McCaskill and Gillentine kicked in. The two seemed to have things figured out down the stretch. Gillentine drove at-will on Gallup and so did McCaskill and they scored or dished most of the time.

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When neither scored on drives, they went to the line and hit foul shots. The Lady Tigers committed just 12 fouls in the game. Aztec also hit four 3-pointers to Gallup's 2.

Gillentine ended with a game high 18 points and McCaskill poured in 13. Weaver chipped in 12 points and garnered six rebounds. Gallup's Antone scored 13 points, including the seven straight in the first half. Antone was the sole Gallup player to score in double-digits.

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