

Tohatchi girls blast Rehoboth, 80-34

Written by By Bernie Dotson For the Sun
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Lady Cougars to face Loving at Tohatchi March 2 at 6 PM

TOHATCHI, N.M. — Do-it-all senior point guard Kalian Mitchell tore through Rehoboth Feb. 24 and catapulted the Lady Cougars into a first round state playoff game against Loving (14-11, 3-5). That game is March 2 at Tohatchi High School at 6 pm. Tohatchi won the state 3A girls basketball championship last year.

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The Lady Falcons are coming off a 53-44 District 4-3A tournament loss to Dexter on Feb. 20, which was Loving's last game of the season. The Rehoboth game was Tohatchi's last game of 2018.

During the Feb. 24 District 1-3A championship, Mitchell scored a game high 26 points and was a difference maker in the outcome of the game. Mitchell was named district tournament Most Valuable Player and Tohatchi head coach Tanisha Bitsoi was named 3A Coach of the Year — the second consecutive year Bitsoi has received the honor.

"I think this came down to defense," Bitsoi said. "We were good on defense the last three quarters. But [Kalian] played a very good game and that helped us a lot."

Mitchell, an all-state guard since the 8th grade and a top player in the Four Corners, scored the first two points of the game for the Lady Cougars, which came as the result of a steal. Rehoboth answered with a 3-point shot by junior guard Jayme Daniels who was hot from the field early-on, only to cool off later. Mitchell went on to score the next seven points for Tohatchi — and the score stood at 9-4 with 5:33 left in the first quarter.

The Lady Lynx hung around as long as they could in the first quarter, but steals, turnovers and drives by Mitchell killed any momentum Rehoboth attempted to create. Also, Rehoboth senior guard Haile Lizer was kept in check by a swarming Tohatchi defense. Lizer finished with 2 points in the game — one of her lowest point totals this season.

The Second Quarter

The Lady Cougars went into the start of the second quarter leading 22-9, with junior forward Sherika Watchman hitting back-to-back 3 pointers. And it was Mitchell who created the space for Watchman to get open and nail the shots. Rehoboth junior forward Kennedy Chapman hit inside shots frequently, but that was short-served due to the Tohatchi defense. Kennedy grabbed key rebounds and some led to second chance points for the Lady Lynx, but Tohatchi scored nearly every time it had the ball in the second quarter.

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“We couldn’t hit shots,” Rehoboth head coach Adrian Pete said. “Give Tohatchi credit. We tried to play up close on their guards, but (Mitchell) is simply a very good player.”

Turnovers plagued Rehoboth toward the end of the second quarter and the Lady Cougars were able to get points off the turnovers. Daniels continued to get open “looks,” but not much else was flowing for the Lady Lynx.

Pete called consecutive time outs within the time span of seven minutes, for what it seemed like to break Tohatchi runs. But Mitchell was, again, too much. On one play Mitchell stole the inbounds pass and set up sophomore teammate Cameron Tsosie for an easy layup. The play repeated itself several more times throughout the game, albeit with a different recipient from Mitchell.

The Third/Fourth Quarters

Mitchell scored 9 points in the first half, but got hot even more in the third quarter. Pete called two straight time outs at the start of the third, apparently sensing that the tide was turning for the worse. Mitchell hit a 3-pointer Tohatchi senior forward Voneisha Cecil stole a Rehoboth pass for a conversion. The score was 59-28 with less than five minutes on the game clock in the third quarter.

Bitsoi, an all-state player for the Lady Cougars back in the early 2000s, emptied the bench at the start of the fourth quarter. Sophomore center Sarah Begay got rebounds on offense and put back in a few missed shots.

Begay ended with four points and Watchman was the closest player besides Mitchell in double figures with 9 points. Daniels led Rehoboth with 11 points and was the sole opposition player to hit in double-digits.

Tohatchi goes into Friday’s game with a record of 21-6, 8-0. Rehoboth is 19-10, 5-3.

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