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Slater's buzzer beating three lifts Bobcats over Felt

By JASON EPP
Leader & Times

TYRONE, Okla.—The Tyrone gymnasium is small; almost like a large shed. And when freshman center Willie Slater's 3-point basket swished through the net as time expired to cap a wild comeback, the packed house erupted into a deafening celebration that seemed to shake its foundation.

A 13-3 run over the final three minutes included three lead changes in the final 18 seconds, and the game winner at the buzzer that allowed the Tyrone Bobcats to claim the High Plains Tournament championship over the Felt Bulldogs, 46-45.

"Super proud of these guys," Bobcats Coach Clay Witt said. "I told them at half you can lie down or make them fight and claw for this championship. We fought and just found a way to win it at the end."

Tyrone freshman Tanner Hurst hit a runner in the lane with 18 seconds left to give Tyrone its first lead of the game since the first quarter. Felt's Braden Schauer answered with his fifth trey of the game with 7.4 seconds left to put the Bulldogs back on top 45-43.

The Bobcats inbounded to Slater who brought the ball up court, and without hesitation launched the game-winner that sent the place into pandemonium and the student section rushing the court to celebrate with the team.

Pretty heady stuff for a pair of freshman, but it did not happen without the help of a senior, Nerlin Rivera. Rivera, who was named the tournament's MVP, scored the first ten points of the fourth quarter for the Bobcats, including a pair of threes. Rivera was also huge at the defensive end with a pair of steals in the game's final minutes.

But Rivera had to watch the final seconds from the bench after fouling out with 30 seconds left in the game. His last foul sent Schauer to the line for a one-and-one. It was the second time in the final minute Felt went to the line in such a situation. Both times they failed to convert the front end. Felt was just 4 of 12 from the line in the game.

It had been Schauer's fourth three of the game that put the Bulldogs up 40-27 with 1:21 left in the third quarter, and seemingly put Felt in command. But the Bulldogs made the fatal mistake of beginning sit on their lead to try to limit Tyrone's opportunities for a comeback.

What it ended up limiting was the Bulldogs offense.

Tyrone began to whittle away at the Bulldogs lead, scoring twice in the final minute of the third to cut the lead to nine.

But with three minutes left, Tyrone still trailed by nine, leading to the furious finish.

"They slowed the game down, and for a while it worked," Witt said. "We were finally able to get

enough turnovers, and made enough shots to pull it out.”

The game had started with Felt on fire, jumping out to a 9-2 lead. Tyrone answered back with an 11-2 run to take the lead, 13-11. Felt's Schauer finished off the first quarter with two 3-pointers in the final nine seconds to put the Bulldogs back on top, 21-16. Schauer scored 15 of his game-high 22 in the first quarter.

Tyrone tied the game at 21 early in the second quarter, but failed to score in the final five minutes of the half as Felt ran off 12-straight points to go up 33-21 at the half.

Rivera led the Bobcats with 15 points; Slater added 13, and Hurst 11.

Tyrone (7-1) is off for the Christmas break, and will return to action when they host Beaver, January 7th.

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