

By JASON EPP Leader & Times



Three previous times this season the Tyrone Bobcats have faced the Balko Bison, and all three times Balko prevailed. But Tyrone took advantage of a big first quarter to sneak past Balko 52-46, and advance to the consolation finals of the Class B Regional tournament. “We started out on fire and they were cold,” Bobcats coach Clay Witt said.

Sometimes a simple explanation says it all. While Tyrone burned up the nets in the first quarter, Balko was ice cold.

Tyrone led 15-0 by the end of the first quarter.

“We went to a zone because we knew it was a difficult gym to shoot in,” Witt said. “We had played there the night before and got a little used to how big it is, while they played at Buffalo.”

Balko got back on track in the second quarter, outscoring the Bobcats 16-8 to cut Tyrone’s lead to seven (23-16) by half.

In that quarter Tyrone’s point guard Tanner Hurst went down with a knee injury and senior guard Nerlin Rivera had to sit with three fouls.

“We kind of went cold and stopped doing some things that had made us successful early,” Witt said. “With our guards out they started to pressure us we struggled with ball handling with those two out.”

Balko cut the Bobcats lead again in the third quarter with a 17-14 advantage and only trailed by three (37-33) heading into the final period.

But Tyrone turned to one of their seniors in the fourth quarter, Ethan Reese answered and the Bobcats won by six.

“Ethan was huge and wanted the ball late,” Witt said. “If he didn’t come up big we don’t win. Nerlin hit two big threes early. Our two seniors were the reason we were able to win.”

The two seniors ended the game as the Bobcats top two scorers. Reese finished with 17, and Rivera with 12.

For Balko it was Grady Frantz with 13, Tristan Villians with 11, and Jordan Busch, Wyatt Casper, and Dakotah Jackson with six each.

Balko’s season ends with a record of 14-11.

Fourth time a charm as Bobcats finally beat Bison

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Tyrone (15-9) advances to take on Buffalo Saturday at 3 p.m. with a trip to next week's Area tournament on the line.