

New Orleans has 'something special'

With so much emotion and energy, the New Orleans Saints are beginning to look like a team destined to win the Super Bowl. The Saints are carrying a hurricane-ravaged city on their back, and - after beating the Eagles 27-24 to advance to this Sunday's NFC title game - have the feel of a team with that 'something special'.

As New Orleans (11-6) prepares to play the Chicago Bears for the NFC championship this Sunday at Soldier Field for the right to go to the Super Bowl for the first time, things are starting to just feel right for the suddenly media darling Saints. I don't know how to describe it, but the Saints have 'it'.

If you watch football then you know that it's possible to spot the team with the most energy or chemistry or whatever you want to call it. With just four team left - New Orleans, Indianapolis, Chicago, New England - the Saints really look like the team with that unidentifiable quality.

Think about it. The Colts (14-4) stumbled into the playoffs with shocking losses to non-playoff teams like Houston and Tennessee. Even superman himself, Peyton Manning, has looked human, throwing two interceptions and no touchdowns in their win last week over Kansas City. Come on, the Colts are traditional playoff chokers anyway, they'll probably choke it up this week against New England.

Speaking of, even the three-time Super Bowl champion New England Patriots (14-4) don't give you that 'special' feeling either. The Pats got lucky last week to beat the favored Chargers thanks to numerous bone-headed plays by San Diego. New England has had trouble all season getting their passing game going with a crop of new receivers and the immortal quarterback Tom Brady hasn't been as dominate either. Brady threw three interceptions last week and actually looked like a beaten man on the sidelines, that is until the Charger miscues gave him new life.

That bring us to New Orleans' opponent for this Sunday, the 14-3 Chicago Bears. Of the four teams left, the boring Bears

actually look the most pathetic, as far as team spirit and chemistry are concerned. Quarterback Rex Grossman and the Chicago media have been at odds all season over the signal-caller's erratic play. Grossman has had a Jekyll and Hyde season. At times the former Florida Gator has been dominate - like in the Bears win over Detroit early in the season where he threw four touchdowns. But he can also look terrible, like in the Bears season ending loss to Green Bay in which he completed just 2-of-12 passes and threw three interceptions. But regardless

of which Grossman shows up, deep-down the Bears just don't believe in him. That's the kind of underlying negativity that can and probably will keep the Bears from the Super Bowl.

That leaves us with the Saints. Think about it, if you've watched football this year, this is the team with everything going their way. Even in the pre-season when they hit the jackpot and drafted Heisman Trophy winner Reggie Bush, signed a veteran quarterback in Drew Brees, and handed over the reigns to first-year head coach Sean Payton, things appeared to be headed in the right direction for the Saints.

Now Brees is the top-rated quarterback in the league, Payton was named Coach of the Year, and even Reggie Bush has apparently broken the Heisman-jinx and seems headed for stardom.

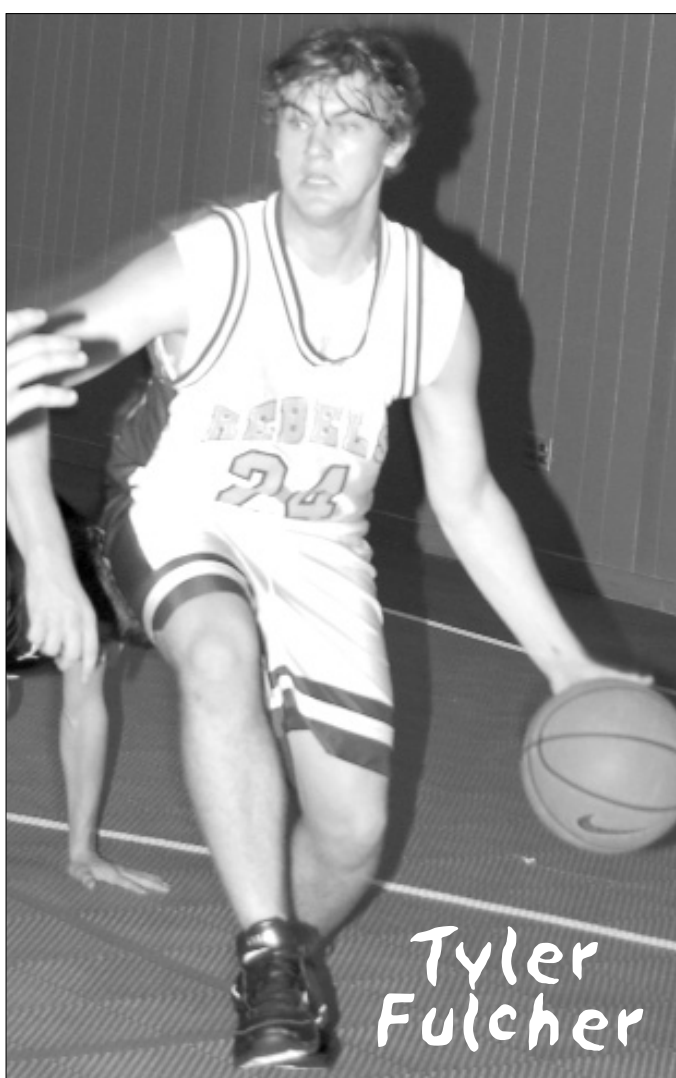
If you saw the post-game celebration in the Superdome when the Saints beat the Eagles last week, then you know what I mean. The Saints have something the other teams left don't, call it what you want - spirit, fire, chemistry, drive, gumption, voodoo, whatever - but whatever it is, they have it in bunches.

So, regardless of who or where the Saints play, it certainly looks like destiny might finally be on the side of the long-suffering New Orleans football team.

Despite the weather and the vaunted Bears defense, I like the Saints to win 24-12 over Chicago and advance to the Super Bowl to meet the Colts, who will beat the Patriots 28-24.



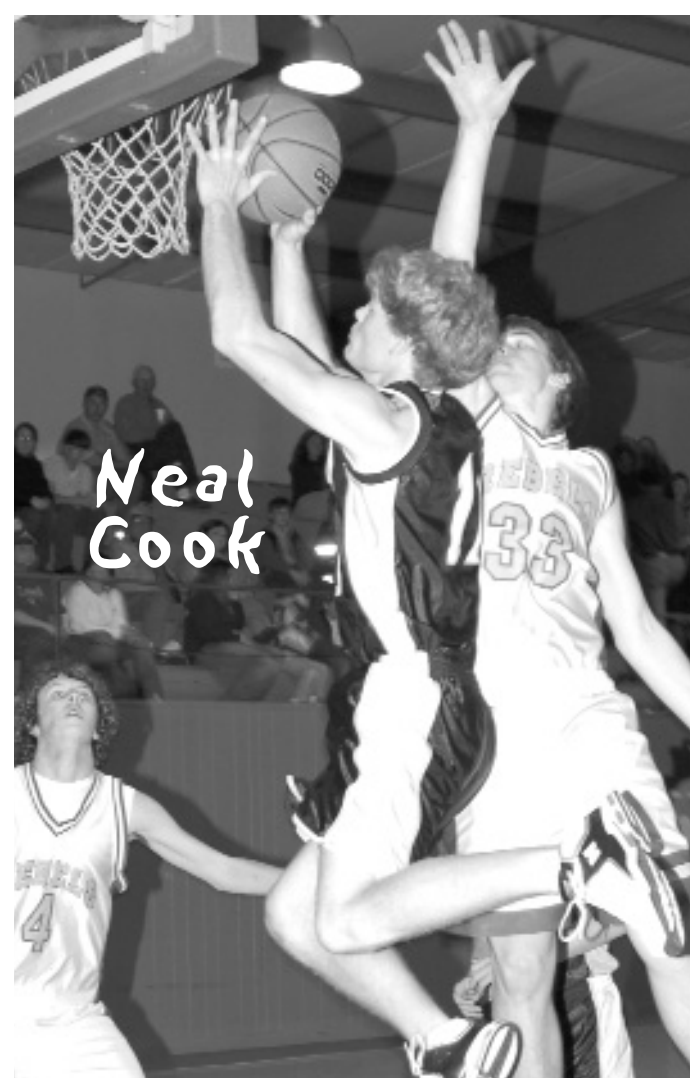
For What it's Worth
By Colin Merritt
Sports Editor



Tyler Fulcher

Rebels roll over Patrician

TOXEY -- Tyler Fulcher led South Choctaw (6-12) with 13 points in their 52-42 win over Patrician in Toxey on Monday. Ten Rebels scored in the win, including Austin Butler and Trent Gibson with ten points each.



Neal Cook

PA falls to SCA, tops Southern

Neal Cook had back-to-back good games for Patrician. The senior hit 17 in PA's loss to Toxey on Monday, then scored a game-high 15 in their 30-27 win over Southern. Jake Lill had eight in the win and 19 in the loss for PA.



Trystan Mosley

Kylie Lewis

THREE From 1B

"We came back from an 11 point deficit to win that game," Barr said referring to the 18-7 first period Rebel lead. "That's what pleased me the most. We regrouped after the Marion loss and rallied to beat a good team on the road in a tough place to play." This win improved the 3rd-ranked Saints to 18-2 overall, while dropping South Choctaw to 13-6 on the year.

The Saints used a 21-point second period to close the Rebel lead to 35-30 at the half. The rally was sparked by a 10-point first half from senior Anna Lewis and a seven point half from classmate Nancy Dasis.

The third period was a draw with both teams scoring six points, sending the game to the fourth with South Choctaw still up by five.

In the fourth, the suddenly sloppy Rebels could manage only two Arielle Campbell baskets while suffering through cold shooting and turnovers.

Patrician rallied to take the lead for the first time with just under two minutes to play when senior guard Kylie Lewis hit a big 3-pointer. The Saints would then ice the win down the stretch with two baskets from Stephanie Caudle and four free throws from Shayna Jimerson.

After the game, Rebel head coach Charlie Taylor praised Patrician for beating his Rebels for the third time, an accomplishment that he wasn't expecting at the start of the year.

"I sure thought we would take two out of three from them, but Patrician has really done a great job preparing for us this year," Taylor said.

"The second half hurt us, we scored 35 in the

first half, but just ten in the second. We let this one get away though, we just made bad decisions at critical times."

Both Taylor and Barr, however, were very quick to point out that the games mean virtually nothing to their mutual goal of winning a state championship since Patrician is still Class 2A and South Choctaw is now Class 1A.

Last year the teams split their two games when both competed in 2A.

In the win over SCA, Patrician was led by Anna Lewis and Codi Stafford with ten points apiece. Kylie Lewis finished with nine, Nancy Dasis had seven, Stephanie Caudle had six and Shayna Jimerson added five for the Saints.

South Choctaw got 13 apiece from seniors Arielle Campbell and Kate Dahlberg, with seniors Bridget Kwasiak hitting four and classmate Trystan Mosley scoring three. Junior Koen Lindsey added five for the Rebels.

Patrician picked up another win on Tuesday night with a 47-15 whipping of Southern thanks to 20 points and 10 rebounds from Stephanie Caudle.

Patrician (18-2) will now host Marion Friday night in Butler in a rematch of their 56-45 road loss last week.

The Saints need a win to force a tie-breaker for the top-seed in the upcoming area tournament. If they win, the tie-breaker will be overall in-class record, if they lose they will take a two-seed into the tournament.

South Choctaw (13-6) can wrap-up the top-seed in their area tournament with wins over upcoming opponents Cornerstone and Shelby Academy. SCA travels to Cornerstone on Friday and then to Shelby Saturday (1/20).

This Week's Hoops Schedule

Friday, January 19th
SCA at Cornerstone
Coffeeville host Fruitdale
PA host Marion
SCHS host R.C. Hatch
Saturday, January 20th
J.V. Lady Saints vs Lowndes/Sparta
Milry at J.U. Blacksher
SCA at Shelby
Monday, January 22nd
Milry host Sweetwater
SCHS host Leroy
SCA at Wayne

Coverage of Alabama's Junior Miss in the Midweek Sun

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