

How Sweet it is!

■ Chris 'Sweetpea' Carter's last second tip-in sends Choctaw County into sub-regionals with thrilling win over rival Sumter

By Colin Merritt
The Choctaw Sun

GREENSBORO — On Friday night in Greensboro at the 3A Area 5 tournament, the Choctaw County Tigers faced a win-or-go-home game against Sumter County. With just six seconds left and trailing by one, it appeared that the Tigers would be the team back at the house, until senior Chris 'Sweetpea' Carter saved the day.

Tigers
45
Sumter
44

After almost single-handedly erasing a five-point Sumter lead with one minute remaining, Sweetpea put the Tigers up 43-42 after two free throws with just :11 seconds to

play. On the ensuing possession, however, the Tigers bailed Sumter out with a foul deep in the backcourt. Sumter would make both free throws to regain the lead, 44-43, with just six seconds to play in the ball game.

With one chance left, Choctaw County's Cordarius Smoot had an 8-foot jumper go off the backboard and off the rim. As the ball gently rolled off the rim it seemed Choctaw County's season was over. That's when Sweetpea saved the day, tipping in the rebound just as the buzzer sounded to give the Tigers the improbable 45-44 victory. The thrilling buzzer-beater sent the jubilant Tiger fans on to the floor to celebrate.

"It was a crazy scene," Tiger Head Coach Clinton Thomas admitted of the post-game party at center court that must have involved over 100 fans. "We really wanted that one. That's a big win for us. It keeps our season alive and it ends Sumter's all at the same time. It

was sweet, baby!"

An exuberant Thomas went on to praise Sweetpea for his effort in the second half that culminated with the game winning basket.

"He was huge for us in the second half," Thomas said of his senior, who scored all 17 of his points after the break, highlighted by the last tip in. "His career was on the line. Sweetpea's a senior, so if we lose, he's done. Sweetpea wanted it tonight."

After struggling through the first half with no points and his team trailing 22-18, Sweetpea started the third with a bang, scoring six quick points to go with a period ending dunk that really started things rolling for Choctaw County in the second half. The dunk put Choctaw up, 32-31, for the first time since midway through the first half, but Sumter crushed the momentum on the last shot of the third with a 3-pointer to go back up 34-32 heading for the final period.

In the fourth, Sumter built on their momentum and jumped out to a 39-34 lead with just under two and a half minutes left to play.

Things really looked bleak for Choctaw County at this point, until Sweetpea scored the Tigers next 11 points in a row - including the game winner, to knock third-ranked Sumter from the state playoffs and advance the Tigers into the area championship game.

In the win, Sweetpea led Choctaw with 17 points, while freshman Demetrick Goodwin had eight. Trent Ruffin hit seven for Choctaw County, Charles Ruffin five, and Dondricus Pringle four.

Choctaw County (17-9) will play Greensboro on Monday (2/12) after presstime in the area final.

If CCHS wins, they will host a sub-regional playoff game on Friday (2/16) in Butler, if they lose, they will have to travel for the game.

Chris 'Sweetpea' Carter celebrates after his game winning shot in the closing moments of Choctaw County's 45-44 win over Sumter in the 3A Area 5 tournament on Friday night in Greensboro. Notice the scoreboard still hasn't posted Sweetpea's bucket, even though the clock is at zero. The one-point win guarantees CCHS a spot in next Friday's (2/16) sub-regional, while ending third-ranked Sumter's season.

More photos on 4B!

Choctaw Sun photo by Colin Merritt

Free throw woes end Lady Saints' season

■ Defending champ Patrician misses 23 free throws in one-point loss to Sparta at the Elite Eight in Montgomery

By Colin Merritt
The Choctaw Sun

MONTGOMERY — Cold-shooting has doomed Patrician in their last two games, a 33-29 area championship loss to Marion in which the Saints let an 8-point second half lead slip away, and their season-ending 35-34 defeat against Sparta in the Elite Eight on Thursday where they missed 23 free throws.

Lady Saints

34

Sparta

35

"We haven't shot well over the last few weeks," admitted Saints Head Coach Wendell Barr of his fourth-ranked team's demise over the last two weeks. "We even worked on our free throw shooting in the days leading up to the game, but it didn't work."

The loss ended Patrician's chance of defending

last year's Class 2A state title with a record of 24-4.

Patrician fell behind 5-0 to start the game against Sparta before going on a 13-2 run to apparently take command of the Lady Warriors, a team the Saints had already beaten twice on the season.

Patrician actually took their largest lead of the game, 18-10, midway through the second after a 3-pointer from Kylie Lewis. Sparta would rally a bit before half, but Patrician still led 22-17 at the break.

The third period was uneventful and Patrician still led 27-24 heading into the fourth. Sparta would score the first four points in the final period to regain the lead, 28-27, for the first time since leading 5-0 to start the game.

In the fourth, the game would go back-and-forth with both teams exchanging the lead. Then, with just fifty seconds left, Patrician's Nancy Dasis knocked down a critical 10-foot jumper to put the Saints ahead 34-33.

However, Sparta would go back to the free throw line on their next possession and regain the lead 35-34 with under thirty seconds to go. Patrician, needing a basket for the win, would be unable to score on two possessions in the game's closing moments.

In the loss, Stephanie 'Doodle' Caudle paced Patrician with 13 points and 13 rebounds and Codi Stafford added eight points and five boards. Seniors Kylie Lewis and Nancy Dais scored three points, while classmate Anna Lewis added two. Junior Shayna Jimerson scored four for Patrician.

The one-point loss was especially disheartening, according to Coach Barr, because this squad had played so well all season long despite losing six seniors off last year's title team.

"We didn't have a lot expected of us coming into this year," Barr said of his 2006-07 team that basically had a new starter at every position. "But as the season went on, I knew we had something special. I thought we had a chance to get back and win it again. So for it to end this way, missing all of those free throws in a one-point loss, is certainly frustrating."



Even leading-scorer Stephanie Caudle had trouble at the free throw line as Patrician fell to Sparta by one-point after missing 23 free throws in their Elite Eight contest in Montgomery on Thursday.



Two wins away

■ SCA's Kate Dahlberg leads Lady Rebels into Final Four with 52-30 whipping of Sumter. Next up, Crenshaw Christian.

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