

Boys basketball: Warren jumps past Rolling Meadows to earn state semifinal berth

Dick Quagliano

It was all about being comfortable for Warren.

The Blue Devils made themselves at home sitting on same bench they did when they lost a year ago in the NIU supersectional. This time Warren made Rolling Meadows uncomfortable early and defeated the Mustangs 60-48 Monday night in DeKalb.

“This is incredible,” said Warren sophomore Jaxson Davis, who finished with 14 points, 5 rebounds and 5 assists. “We came up short last year. We were In the same spot. We walked into the same locker room. It felt like it was yesterday. But we wanted to make sure that it would not happen again. We just wanted to win.”

Warren (26-10) advanced to the Class 4A semifinals Friday for the first time since 2010 when it finished second in the state. The Blue Devils will meet Rich Twp. in Champaign at 7:45 p.m. Friday.

“I think it helped playing here last year,” said Warren coach Zack Ryan, who celebrated his 39th birthday in style.

“It was kind of a motivation for us. We talked about it a lot during the summer and during the season. We wanted to get back to this spot and come out a winner.”

Warren came out red-hot in all phases of the game.

The Blue Devils converted 10 of 15 shots in the first quarter. They also crashed the boards, grabbing 8 of the game’s first 9 rebounds.

“I got a little emotional during warm-ups, coming back here and having that feeling again,” said Banks, who finished with 13 points, 4 assists and 4 rebounds.

“We watched a lot of film. They main thing that coach prepared us was to rebound. That was the main thing was to rebound. They are a good rebounding team. But we knew they would have a tough time with our defensive pressure because we are one of the best defensive teams in the state.”

Warren also did a solid job on Rolling Meadows on the defensive end. It limited the Mustangs to just 3-of-9 shooting.

Leading 6-5, the Blue Devils scored 10 unanswered points. That spurred a 16-2 run and a 22-10 lead.

And Warren wasn’t done.

The Blue Devils continued their hot shooting and opened the second quarter on a 9-2 run to lead 31-13 on a basket by Javerion Banks with 4:17 left in the half.

Rolling Meadows (30-5) then began to find its range and went on an 11-0 run. The Mustangs got 3-pointers from Lazar Lazarevic, Ryan Meyer and Ian Miletic. Rolling Meadows also got a pair of free throws from Miletic to cut the lead to 31-24.

A Davis three-point play just before the end of the half ended a four-minute scoreless streak for the Blue Devils and gave them a 34-24 halftime lead.

Buoyed by their play at the end of the first half, the Mustangs went back on the attack. They ran off six consecutive points, with the final four of those coming on driving layups by Gavin Escobedo, and suddenly they cut the Warren lead to 34-30 with 5:18 left in the third quarter.

But it was all Warren from there.

Braylon Walker had a three-point play and then followed with a pair of free throws. That ignited a 12-0 run that was culminated by a 3-pointer by Banks as the Blue Devils opened a 46-30 lead with 2:10 left in the quarter.

Rolling Meadows never got closer than 11 from there.

Zack Ausburn had 14 points and 11 rebounds while Walker finished with 11 points for Warren.

“We put it together tonight,” Ryan said. “We talked about getting off to a better start because we have not done that. And they have been down at half and come back. But we held them off.”

Miletic finished with 21 points. He ended his senior season leading his team to its first sectional title since 1990.

“This is a great group of guys,” Miletic said. “It is tough in this moment, but I couldn’t be more grateful. You can tell these guys care.”

Lazarevic finished with 8 points and Meyer 6 points and Patrick Coen 5 points.

Rolling Meadows coach Kevin Katovich, who guided his team to a school-record 30 wins and a MSL title, said this group was special.

“I am so proud of this group with all the things that they have accomplished,” Katovich said. “We talk all the time at our school about legacy and this certainly a team that made its mark.”

Katovich said that quick start by Warren hurt his team.

“They just got off to too fast of a start,” Katovich said. “We were uncharacteristic offensively and defensively to start. They had a lot to do with that. They obviously jumped us good.”