

# Bucks take down Watchmen in Casco finale

*The St. Paul boys team grabs a 59-55 home win Thursday against C.S. Lewis Academy*

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ST. PAUL — Thursday's game between the St. Paul High School boys basketball team and C.S. Lewis Academy seemed to have it all.

An important seeding spot in the upcoming Casco League district tournament on the line, a rivalry between two teams that has heated up in recent seasons and a game to finish out the regular season should have been the ingredients for a key league game.

But they weren't.

Even though St. Paul beat C.S. Lewis 59-55, the Watchmen suffered a 52-39 loss Tuesday at Perrydale, relegating them to the No. 4 spot in the upcoming district tournament. A Watchmen victory wouldn't have done anything to derail St. Paul's grip on the league's No. 2 spot.

But the lack of importance in the league standings didn't mean the Watchmen didn't want to win, C.S. Lewis coach Bruce Toney said.

"It really meant something to our team," he said. "We really wanted to beat St. Paul. We wanted to finish strong and not come out here and just go through the motions."

The Watchmen (9-5 Casco League, 14-8 overall) didn't. The two teams went back and forth in the opening quarter before C.S. Lewis post Ivan Soppe, the Watchmen's leading scorer, went up for a shot in the key and crumbled to the floor as he clutched his left knee. He never returned to the game.

Still, the Watchmen stayed close with St. Paul (12-2, 16-5). They were down 32-24 at halftime. Toney said at halftime that the Watchmen wanted to prove a point in the second half: that they were not a team dependent on Soppe and guard Tim Scott. He mentioned last year's game in St. Paul when Scott was ejected from the game in the first half and it seemed as if St. Paul would go on to an easy win. In that game, the Watchmen bounced back in the second half and forced overtime, where they relied on reserves and role players to score a 44-39 win.

"I knew that the kids could step up," Toney said.

The Watchmen started to inch closer to the Bucks in the fourth. With 4:16 remaining, C.S. Lewis Academy's Vas Walker hit a three-pointer to pull the Watchmen within 51-47. The Watchmen pulled within 54-52 after a basket by Andy Keyser with 49 seconds remaining, but St. Paul hit 3 of 4 free throws in the final 41 seconds, along with two key baskets by Ryan Pierson that gave the Bucks the win.

"I'm very happy with the effort the kids gave me," Toney said. "I'm not happy with the outcome because I don't like to lose, but if they always give me that kind of effort, I can't ask for anything more. The rest of the kids stepped up. That's something we haven't had in the last month or so. Every one of the kids stepped up big time."

St. Paul coach Bryce Court said the Bucks weren't their normal selves Thursday, during their last regular season home game.

"We did a lot of things to try and keep them in the game," he said. "It was senior night and I just let the kids play and let them do things they probably shouldn't do in

a game that matters, but it was a great game. Even though the game didn't matter, C.S. Lewis still has a lot of pride."

Court said he liked that St. Paul had to figure out a way to win a close game because the Bucks haven't had much experience in tight games (only five of their games have been decided by 10 points or less).

"We've either been beaten by more than 10 or beaten teams by more than 10, so we haven't had very many close games," he said.

Keyser led the Watchmen with 17 points; Scott added 15. Vas Walker scored 13 for C.S. Lewis. Pierson led the Bucks with 16. Jeff Annen scored 13 and Cody Kirk added 10. Josh Kelly scored nine for St. Paul.

The Watchmen qualified as the No. 4 seed in the Casco League district tournament and they will play at 7 p.m. Monday against the Pirates, a team they just lost to by 52-39 on Feb. 6. The Watchmen struggled offensively as Scott, the team's best outside shooter, went 0 for 9 from the field. Toney said the key to winning Monday's game is to simply shoot better. An effort like their one in Thursday's game against St. Paul would only help, Toney said.

"If they give that kind of effort Monday night, we'll beat Perrydale," he said. "I just need that kind of effort out of them Monday night and I think they will. This game shows the kids that we can play with anyone."

St. Paul won't play until 3:45 p.m. Thursday at McMinnville High School against the winner of Tuesday's Falls City against Willamette Valley Christian game.

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