

Fort Jennings – State Champions

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Kevin Grothause will never be the biggest person on a basketball court, but down the stretch Saturday, he came up very big.

Grothause delivered three big shots in the fourth quarter Saturday afternoon as upstart Fort Jennings became part of basketball history in Ohio.

Ft. Jennings, the smallest school (size-wise) in the state tournament, delivered a blow for the small guy as they knocked off St. Henry 64-58 in the Division IV title game Saturday afternoon at the Value City Arena in Columbus.

The Musketeers (24-3) captured their first state title in their very first trip to the state basketball tournament, while the Redskins (24-3) lost their first state tournament game in four appearances.

“These guys came down here on a mission and they didn’t forget why they came here,” Ft. Jennings coach John VonSossan said. “I had so many people back home tell me they played in a state tournament, but they were so thrilled to be here that they forgot to play. These guys, absolutely, didn’t forget why they were here. They had a dream and that was to win it all.”

Despite the Musketeers inexperience in the title game, it never showed on the court. The Redskins were able to make a run in the fourth quarter, but Grothause and crew were there to answer every move they made.

“We kept going and they kept answering,” St. Henry senior Neil Schmitz said. “They never let us get anything going. They hit a couple of three’s right after we hit a couple of big three’s and that was big.”

St. Henry opened the fourth quarter down four points, but took a three point lead with 4:50 left as Brent Bohman dropped in a pair of free threes. Grothause quickly tied the game as he dropped in a three-pointer from the top of the key.

Kurt Woeste came right back to give the Redskins the lead with a three-pointer only to see Grothause hit another three-pointer from the left wing. After Schmitz scored for the Redskins and Matt Metzger

hit a driving lay up for Fort Jennings, the Musketeers defense came into play.

After forcing St. Henry to miss a shot, Scott Gasser dropped in a lay up for Ft. Jennings. Then after a St. Henry turnover, Grothause drove in for a lay up and was fouled sending him to the line where he converted the three point play.

“We knew we had to get the lead back, Grothause said. “I was going to do whatever I could to get us the momentum and get the lead back for us the rest of the game.”

With the Musketeer fans starting to sense a bit of history, Metzger was fouled on a rebound. The junior forward dropped in both shots giving Ft. Jennings a seven point lead with 47 seconds left.

The only points St. Henry scored in the final 47 seconds were by Ryan Post as he hit a pair of free throws with 19 seconds left. Ft. Jennings added a point as Scott Gasser dropped in the second of two free throws with 17 seconds left.

“It was tough to come back after making a three only to see them get one” St. Henry’s Woeste said. “We’re used to having a big run somewhere. It looked like we going to hit it in the fourth quarter, but the kids came back and nailed two three-pointers for them. They just had the answer for us.”

While Grothause and company found the necessary offense, it was their defense that helped control the Redskin offense.

St. Henry came into the game with a knack for putting up the three-pointer having hit a state record of 25 3’s in the district finals and had taken 42 three-point shots in the regional finals. Saturday they took 33 shots behind the arc, but managed to make just 10 of them for 30 percent.

“There three-point shooting was a big concern,” VonSossan said. “They hit 7 of 17 shots in the second half and they took 42 of them in the regional

finals. We had to slow that down. If they take that many, we are not in the ball game. I think

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somebody forgot to tell them we play a little defense.”

The Musketeers defense came in the form of their patent man defense and a variety of zones, especially a 1-3-1 zone in the fourth quarter. The 1-3-1 allowed Ft. Jennings to plug up the middle with an extra man and also allowed them to jump out quickly on the perimeter and get a quick hand in the face of the St. Henry shooters.

“In the second quarter we went to a 1-3-1 and that slowed them down. They got a little hesitant on offense,” VonSossan said. “In the fourth quarter we kept mixing up our presses and defenses to keep them guessing. The 1-3-1 allowed us to plug up the middle and get an extra man in the middle for rebounding. They were beating us on penetration in the middle so the 1-3-1 allowed us to jam up the middle some. We also stressed boxing out outside the paint. The three’s allow for a lot of long rebounds and we didn’t want them coming up with the long, rebound or getting past us after getting rebound.

“They area very quick team out front,” Schmitz said. “They have quick hands and are tough to penetrate on and that’s what we wanted to do. They also move their feet very well, which is why we didn’t get to the line as much as we’re used to.”

St. Henry attempted just five free throws Saturday sinking four of them. Ft. Jennings was 8 of 12 at the line for the game and 6 of 20 from behind the three-point arc.

Another thing that helped Ft. Jennings was getting the lead early and not having to play catch up all day like St. Henry did. The Musketeers grabbed a nine point lead in the first quarter and led by four points at the end of eight minutes. In the second quarter St. Henry battled back to take a one point lead before Ft. Jennings scored the next seven points for a six point margin. They would lead by three points at the break.

The third quarter could have been the most dangerous for the Musketeers. St. Henry connected on five three-pointers in the quarter, but never led by

more than two points as Ft. Jennings never became discouraged and battled back to lead by four points going into the fourth quarter.

“This group is very even tempered,” VonSossan said. “They know what they have to do and they go out and do it. We were going back and forth. This was a real cat and mouse game for a while. We had some guys step up and do what they had to do. Then we hit some shots at the right time.”

Grothouse led the Musketeers with a game high 23 points, while Metzger added 17 points and grabbed a team high 10 rebounds along with three assists and four steals. Aaron Utrup pulled in eight rebounds and Kyle Liebrecht had four assists.

St. Henry was led by Schmitz with 19 points and 10 rebounds. Despite a broken hand Ryan Post had 12 points; Brent Bohman dished out five assists and had seven rebounds to go with eight points.

Post broke his left (non-shooting) hand in Thursday night’s semi-final win over Worthington Christian. He found out about 5:30 p.m. Friday he could play in the championship game once he had the hand taped up.

Fort Jennings 19-30 6-20 8-12 64

S. Gasser 2-1-2-9; A. Utrup 2-1-0-7; K. Liebrecht 4-0-0-8; K. Grothouse 5-4-1-23; M. Metzger 6-0-5-17; M. Boehmer 0-0-0-0; J. Ricker 0-0-0-0.

St. Henry 12-29 10-33 4-5 58

K. Woeste 0-3-0-9; B. Bohman 3-0-2-8; N. Schmitz 5-3-0-19; B. Gase 0-0-0-0; A. Wourms 0-1-0-3; N. Schwieterman 1-0-0-2; C. Kaiser 0-0-0-0; J. Uhlenhake 0-0-0-0; T. Boeckman 1-1-0-5; R. Post 2-2-2-12;

Fort Jennings	15	11	20	18	64
St. Henry	11	12	19	16	58

Rebounds: Fort Jennings 32 (Metzger 10, Utrup 8); St. Henry 36 (Schmitz 10, Bohman 7). **Turnovers:** Fort Jennings 17 and St. Henry 14. **Assists:** Fort Jennings 7 (Liebrecht 4); St. Henry 14 (Bohman 5).