

# Titans are State Champs

Putnam County Sentinel – Charlie Warnimont – March 19, 2008

## *Defense leads O-G past Garaway*

COLUMBUS – The old adage is that defense wins championships. In the case of Ottawa-Glandorf that held true as no team along the tournament trail could seem to figure out just where there might be a crack in the Titans' smothering defensive pressure.

Sugarcreek Garaway had trouble handling the Titans' pressure in the Division III state championship game and that played right into O-G's hand. Led by their defensive pressure and opportunistic offense, the Titans capped off the season with a 62-44 win to give them their second state championship in five years.

Ottawa-Glandorf, ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the final poll this season, added another state championship to the trophy case; they finished the season 23-5. Garaway, the third ranked team, finished 24-4 on the season. The Titans first state championship trophy came in 2004 when the current seniors were in the eighth grade.

"I don't know what to say right now. I'm kind of numb with the whole thing, actually," third year Titan Coach Josh Leslie said. (Former coaches) Coach (Ron) Nienkamp and Coach (Dave) Sweet set the bar extremely high. With Coach Nienkamp getting here twice and Coach Sweet getting here a couple of times, and winning it four years ago, expectations are extremely high. The expectation level stays high up here. It's a great basketball community. You see what kind of crowds we have. You can't imagine what it's going to be like tonight when we get back there. It's a lot of fun and as a coach there's no place you'd rather be."

As in their semi-final win Friday, the Titans were able to get off to a solid start that made Garaway have to play catch up.

Pirate freshman Paul Honigford gave his team their only lead of the game (1-0) 21 seconds into the contest when he hit the second of two free throws. After both teams missed a series of shots, O-G finally got on the scoreboard when Justin Schomaeker nailed a three-pointer out of the left corner. The basket by Schomaeker ignited a 13-0 run by O-G as the Titans defense started to cause the Pirates fits.

During a minute stretch midway through the opening half Garaway had three straight turnovers that lead to six O-G points as Colton Everett scored a pair of easy baskets and Taylor Kuhlman finished off a steal with a lay up. After two free throws by Taylor Pothast, Kuhlman finished the

run with a lay up off another steal. In the opening quarter, O-G scored 10 points off seven Pirate turnovers.

Honigford ended the Titan run with a baseline jumper, and that was followed by two free throws from Devin Schie. A three-pointer by Jake Meyer pushed the O-G lead to 10 before two baskets by Garaway ended the first quarter scoring.

"We feel, if we can get off to a good start, and get them to play the way we want to play, to where we can turn them over and get into transition, that's big for us," Leslie said. "When we make teams play from behind the entire time like that, we're awful tough to beat. Our style worked today, and it's worked the last few weeks, and I'm happy for these guys (Schomaeker and Meyer), and the guys in the locker room."

Ottawa-Glandorf was able to keep the Pirates at bay in the second quarter as they pushed their lead to 16 twice in the quarter. Meyer paced the Titans in the second quarter as he drained a pair of three-pointes and scored twice on lay-ups. Meyer gave O-G its first 16 point lead when he converted a turnover into points with a slam dunk with 4:55 left in the half.

The second 16 point lead came two minutes later when Schomaeker dropped in a short jumper.

"I'm overwhelmed right now," Meyer said after leading O-G with 21 points and three three-pointers. "Whether it's 1 through 10, or 1 through 15, any of these guys can step up, not just necessarily me."

Leslie was proud of his senior forward and what he has done off the bench this season. After overcoming a football knee injury, Meyer stepped into the starting lineup for a short time. However, when O-G struggled some of the coaching staff adjusted the lineup to mix and match their strengths in order to get stronger off the bench.

"He's been very successful with this," Leslie said. "And our rotations have worked out much better. There was a point earlier in the season when we were starting all four seniors. At the same time we found our rotations were not as good. I had meeting with three of them and said for us to do what we needed to, all three of them shouldn't start. He became our sixth man and once he's in a game he very rarely leaves the lineup once he's in there."

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“When we catch them subbing, they bring in their second tier guys and try to get through the first few minutes. When we sub in, we’re looking to score and keep the pedal down and pace going and outscore their bench. They bought into this and they should be commended for this.”

Sugarcreek Garaway was able to trim the Titan lead to nine in the second quarter before a three-pointer by Meyer ended the first half scoring.

The third quarter saw the Titans stretch the lead as it grew to 20 (49-29) on a Taylor Kuhlman jumper with 2:27 left. Sugarcreek was never able to get the lead back into single digits.

Devin Schie trimmed the lead to 10 with a basket before Schomaeker and Pothast, off a steal pushed it to 14. The teams then traded points until two baskets by Meyer and two free throws by Brent Kuhlman pushed the O-G lead to 18.

“You could see, the first half, on their faces they were wearing down,” Meyer said. “That just tells us to go harder, keep getting into them with all the pressure.”

O-G forced 19 turnovers in the game as they had 14 steals lead by Taylor Kuhlman with four and Luke Bellman with three.

“The style we play is definitely an up tempo style,” Schomaeker said. “We do that to use our athleticism and length. Our defensive intensity throughout the tournament has led to our success. Our offense starts with defense and when we get defensive pressure that leads to some easy baskets. And that’s why we get out to early leads.”

The closest Garaway came in the final quarter was 13 points before the Titans kept the lead in double digits by hitting several free throws. Schomaeker closed the scoring with two free throws with 1:23 as both coaches were emptying their benches by then.

Schomaeker backed up Meyer with 15 points, while Taylor Kuhlman had nine points and five rebounds. Schomaeker also had four assists in the win.

The Titans hit 56.1 percent of their shots (23 of 41) as they were able to score on several lay-ups. They also hit 5 of 10 three-pointers.

Tyler Gerber led the Pirates with 15 points as he was 5 of 15 shooting, overall, and 1 of 5 from three-point range.

He was playing despite spraining his ankle in the team’s semi-final win.

Paul Honigford had a double-double for Garaway with 12 points and 12 rebounds, and David Gerber had 12 rebounds as well.

Garaway hit just 16 of 51 shot attempts in the game for 31.4 percent.

“If you let their guys catch and shoot, they will kill you,” Leslie said. “They just got too many catch and shoot looks Friday against St. Joe’s. We used our length and athleticism to push them out on the floor and made them catch it in a spot where they are not as comfortable.”

## Ottawa-Glandorf 18-31 5-10 11-16 62

Everett 3-0-0-6; Bellman 1-0-1-3; Schomaeker 5-1-2-15; Pothast 1-0-4-6; T. Kuhlman 3-1-0-9; Brickner 0-0-0-0; Johnson 0-0-0-0; Schmiedebusch 0-0-0-0; Moening 0-0-0-0; B. Kuhlman 0-0-2-2; Rosebrock 0-0-0-0; Meyer 5-3-2-21; Greve 0-0-0-0; Laubenthal 0-0-0-0; R. Kuhlman 0-0-0-0.

## Sugarcreek Garaway 15-38 1-13 11-13 44

D. Gerber 2-0-2-6; Honigford 5-0-2-12; Schie 3-0-1-7; T. Gerber 4-1-4-15; Stingel 1-0-2-4; Yoder 0-0-0-0; Troyer 0-0-0-0; Moomaw 0-0-0-0; Mullet 0-0-0-0; Myers 0-0-0-0; Hosteler 0-0-0-0;

Ottawa-Glandorf 18 17 14 13 - 62  
Garaway 12 11 8 13 - 44

Rebounds: Ottawa-Glandorf 25 (T. Kuhlman 5);  
Sugarcreek Garaway 32 (Gerber 12, Honigford 12).

Turnovers: Ottawa-Glandorf 14, Sugarcreek Garaway 19.

Steals: Ottawa-Glandorf 14 (T. Kuhlman 4, Bellman 3).  
Sugarcreek Garaway 6 (T. Gerber 3).