

Area Teams Begin State Tourney Play



P&D FILE PHOTO
Viborg-Hurley players celebrate after winning the Region 5B title on March 5 in Yankton. The Cougars make their first appearance in the South Dakota State Class B Girls' Basketball Tournament beginning today (Thursday) in Huron.

Cougars Making State Girls' Debut



P&D FILE PHOTO
Abby Hora (14) is Viborg-Hurley's leading scorer, averaging 24 points per game.

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VIBORG — After having their post-season hopes derailed in districts a year ago, the Viborg-Hurley Cougars were determined not to let it happen this year. With that mission accomplished, the Cougars (20-4) now turn their attentions to trying to win the South Dakota State Class B Girls' Basketball Tournament, which begins today (Thursday) at the Huron Civic Arena. "Last year we were all upset about how it ended," said senior Hannah Jorgensen. "We've all worked harder, focused more. Our defense was really good this year." That defense has recorded 11 steals a game and allowed 45 points a game. In the Cougars' last four games — including avenging two of the team's four losses on the season — the team allowed just 39.5 points per game.

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Seniors Lead Cedar Back To State

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HARTINGTON, Neb. — A group of seven seniors have played a big role in Hartington Cedar Catholic athletic success, including helping the Trojans to a pair of third place finishes in the Nebraska State Boys' Basketball Tournament and a title game berth in football this past fall. Now the group looks to finish their high school careers by leading Cedar Catholic to a state basketball title. The Trojans (18-7) carry some momentum as they open tournament play tonight (Thursday) in Lincoln, said head coach Matt Steffen. "We've played really well the last five games," he said. "The conference championship against Norfolk Catholic got away from us, but we came back and beat them in the last game of the regular season." Cedar Catholic got off to a slow start in the season, dropping a pair of games as leading scorer James Kaiser was out with injury. The football injury sidelined Kaiser (18.8 ppg, 4.7 rpg, 33 assists, 36 steals) for five games, including two of the team's four losses to non-tournament teams. Kaiser will finish his career as the Trojans' all-time leading scorer, with 1,680 points going into state. "He didn't start as a freshman, but he could have," Steffen noted. "His group, they've played together since the start of fourth grade. There are



P&D FILE PHOTO
James Kaiser, left, of Hartington Cedar Catholic lays the ball off the glass in front of Laurel-Concord-Coleridge defender Jackson Methany, 40, during their game earlier this season. Kaiser, who leads the Trojans at 18.8 points per game, and the Trojans face top-seeded Hastings St. Cecelia in the Nebraska Class C2 Tournament today (Thursday) in Lincoln.

some good role players, and they have defined good team players for us." Sophomore post Stephen Hills (11.5 ppg, 8.8 rpg) and senior forward Ty Becker (6 ppg, 9 rpg, 29 steals, 30 blocked shots) have controlled the boards for the Trojans. Seniors Jared Wiebelhaus (7 ppg, 3.3 rpg, 30 assists, 20 steals), Shane Hamilton (5.8 ppg, 5.1 rpg, 33 assists, 31 steals) and Bennett Steffen (6 ppg) have also been solid contributors offensively. The Trojans draw top-seeded Hastings St. Cecelia

(24-1), a team that held opponents to a dismal 36 points a contest. Only twice all season did the Bluehawks allow as many as 50 points in a contest, including a loss to C1 qualifier Grand Island Central Catholic (52-51). "If you look at the scores, they're beating teams by 15 to 30 points," Coach Steffen said. "They don't mix it up or try to fool you." The Bluehawks' offense goes through their bigs: 6-5 forward Zachary Kitten (11.4 ppg, 7.7 rpg) and 6-4 forward

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New-Look Huskies Return To State

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ELK POINT — The Elk Point-Jefferson Huskies graduated a ton of talent from a squad that advanced to the semifinals of the South Dakota State Class A Girls' Basketball Tournament a year ago. Restocked and ready to go, the Huskies hope to get even further this year. EPJ takes a 19-3 record into the 2015 state tournament, which begins today (Thursday) at Watertown. The success of this year's squad, which lost six seniors from a year ago, did come as a little bit of a surprise to coach Gary Nebelsick. "If you'd have asked me three months ago it would have surprised me," he said. "But I can see them every day — they work hard and have bought into playing defense." The Huskies have been opportunistic defensively, averaging over 12 steals a game. Junior guard McKenzie Mennenga has a team-best 87 swipes. Junior Payton Donnelly (42), sophomore Karlee Shatswell (37), junior Josie Heeren (31) and junior Morgan Flynn (23) all average better than steal a game. "We need to play defense, take away the easy basket," Nebelsick said. "Our defense has been consistent." Offensively, Mennenga led the way with 19.2 points per game, including a team-best 54 three-pointers. Donnelly (8.5 ppg, 4.7 rpg, 72 assists) and Shatswell (7.0 ppg, 6.7 rpg) have also been key contributors.



P&D FILE PHOTO
Elk Point-Jefferson's McKenzie Mennenga gets past the Lennox defense for a layup during their semifinal matchup in the Region 4A girls' basketball tournament. Mennenga leads the Huskies at 19.2 points per game as they enter the South Dakota State Class A Tournament today (Thursday) in Watertown.

"McKenzie has carried a good part of the scoring role, even though there are one or two defenders on her all the time," Nebelsick said. "Donnelly has matured, and Shatswell has come along in the post. All the others are just playing their roles." The Huskies open against

a young (one senior) and quick Red Cloud team. The Lady Crusaders have scored over 50 points in all but two games this season, peaking with 85 in the Region 7A championship against Little Wound.

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P&D FILE PHOTO
Bloomfield senior Anthony Arroyos, front, hugs his teammates after coming out of the game late in the District D1-3 final on March 3. The Bees head to state for the first time since 2006, facing Heartland today (Thursday) at 2 p.m.

Defense Powers Bloomfield To State

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BLOOMFIELD, Neb. — Ten games into the 2014-15 season, the Bloomfield Bees did not look like a state tournament team. The Bees lost five of their first six and were 3-7 at that point. Then, as coach Gary Eisenhower said, the Bees "started to figure some things out." Now they are headed to state. The Bees (17-8) make their first trip to the Nebraska State Boys' Basket-

ball Tournament since 2006 when they take the court today (Thursday) in Lincoln. "That's what we've been preaching in practice," Eisenhower said of the defensive emphasis. "Team defense is a always an 'us vs. them' thing, not a 'me vs. my guy' thing." After that slow start, the Bees held opponents to just over 38 points per game over an eight-game win streak. After losing to Class C1 state qualifier Winnebago 83-60 in the Lewis & Clark Conference Tournament, the Bees have run off six straight wins, holding opponents to 37.5 points per game — even with 70 points allowed to Laurel-Concord-Coleridge. Seniors Cody Beckmann (14.2 ppg, 5.7 rpg, 50 assists, 51 steals) and Quinn O'Brien (12.6 ppg, 68 assists, 46 steals) have led the way offensively for Bloomfield, but several others have had big games this season, Eisenhower noted. "Quinn and Cody have led the team," he said. "But

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Newbill Powers Penn State Past Nebraska 68-65

CHICAGO (AP) — D.J. Newbill sees the Big Ten tournament as a shot at redemption for Penn State. It was nearly the stage for a big collapse, too. Newbill scored 26 points, Shep Garner added 19 and Penn State hung on to beat Nebraska 68-65 Wednesday in the Big Ten tournament opener. The 13th-seeded Nittany Lions (17-15) advanced in the tournament for the first time since a run to the final in 2011, despite letting a 16-point lead in the second half dwindle to one. They came away with their second-straight win after dropping six in a row when Shavon Shields missed a 3 for 12th-seeded Nebraska (13-18) at the buzzer. Penn State will play No. 5 seed Iowa on Thursday. "We're disappointed in how we

finished in Big Ten play," Newbill said. "We've got another opportunity to come out here and prove to ourselves and prove to everybody we're better than what we showed." Garner hit five 3-pointers. Newbill nailed four from long range and keyed a 14-1 run early in the second half that stretched the lead from three to 16. Penn State also blocked a tournament-record 16 shots. The loss was the ninth straight for Nebraska, which got 29 points from Terran Petteway. Shields scored 20 and grabbed 10 rebounds. But after making the NCAA tournament last season, the Cornhuskers are on the outside looking in. "As excited as I was last year is as disappointed as I am this year," coach Tim Miles said. "And I talked a lot of trash on the golf course last

year so I was pretty pumped up." He believes that the program is headed in the right direction, that the incoming recruits will provide a big lift. But enduring a run like this has not been easy. Things got so bad that Miles actually banned his players from their plush locker room and forbade them from speaking to reporters following a 28-point blowout by Iowa last month. "It wears on you," Miles said. "You go to the shopping center with your head down, the grocery store with your head down, and hope you don't run into everybody and have to regurgitate what you're going through." Nebraska was within 63-62 after Shields hit two free throws with 3:03 left. Newbill then scored on a layup for Penn State and Ross Travis hit a

free throw to make it a four-point game with 2:18 remaining. Petteway hit a free throw and added two more with 42.7 seconds left after being fouled on a drive, making it 66-65. Newbill missed a floater with about eight seconds left, setting off a scramble and a jump ball with the possession arrow pointing to Penn State. Geno Thorpe caught the in-bounds and hit two free throws to make it a three-point game with 4.2 seconds. The Nittany Lions hung on when Shields' pull-up 3 from the right wing hit the front of the rim. Penn State looked like it was ready to run away with this one after mounting a 14-1 run early in the second and breaking open a 37-34 game. Newbill scored eight during that

stretch and wrapped two 3-pointers around a free throw by Nebraska's Moses Abraham. Garner then nailed another 3 for Penn State, making it 51-35 with just fewer than 16 minutes left. But instead of bowing quietly, Nebraska responded by scoring 14 in a row. Tai Webster buried a 3 after Abraham missed a free throw, cutting it to 51-49 with 9:47 left. Garner pulled up for one of his own, triggering an 8-2 spurt, but the Cornhuskers stayed in it, a putback by Abraham making it 62-60 with about four minutes left. "When things got tight there, we responded," Penn State coach Patrick Chambers said. "We attacked the situation. We made some big plays and finally got some timely rebounds and Geno hit some really big-time free-throws for us."