

Greenville County Eagles defeat Brunswick, rematch scheduled Thursday in postseason action



Greenville County Eagles quarterback Isaac Parker runs into the end zone for a 2-point conversion during Thursday night's game against the Brunswick County Bulldogs.

For the first time since 2018, the Greenville County Eagles have defeated their bitter rivals from Brunswick County High School. In the regular season finale, the Eagles held off the Bulldogs for a 22-16 win which makes it more than likely that they will play at least one playoff game in front of their home fans.

In so doing, they recaptured the Old Wooden Bucket, the trophy which goes to the winner between the two schools. Brunswick County won the prior two meetings, with no meeting held in 2020 for obvious reasons.

It was a typical Eagles win. Although their offense was shut out in the second half and missed several key opportunities to widen their lead, Greenville's defense tightened up in the second half and stopped the Bulldogs on a late possession, allowing the Eagles to walk out with the victory.

"Defensively, those guys...they really adjusted in the second half," said head coach Mario Walton after the game. "It was a great defensive effort."

After a Bulldogs punt to start the game, the Eagles wasted no time asserted their dominance on offense. Thanks to some timely penalties from Brunswick, the Eagles drove 60 yards down the field, leading to a one-yard touchdown run by sophomore Darris Drumgoole.

On their next drive, the Eagles doubled their lead to 16-0 thanks to a 55-yard TD run by dual-threat sophomore Odell Turner.

With less than two minutes left in the first quarter, Brunswick's offense finally fought back, driving down the field and scoring on a 15-yard touchdown pass to Jamari Anderson. After an Eagles punt, Brunswick took the ball down the field once more, tying the game at 16 thanks to a one-yard quarterback sneak by Aaron Moore.

The Eagles' offense regained its bearings on its next possession, thanks in large part to a long kickoff return which set them up well. Eventually, Drumgoole scored his second touchdown of the game on another short carry, although the ensuing two-point attempt failed, leaving the score at 22-16.

Little did anyone know that this would be the last time anyone would reach the end zone for the entire game. The third quarter went scoreless, as each team saw a promising drive end on a turnover on downs near their opponent's red zone.

Near the end of the quarter, Turner set the Eagles up nicely by breaking free and reaching the Bulldogs' 10 yard line. Unfortunately, Turner's carry went to waste, as the Bulldogs' defense stiffened, preventing the Eagles from scoring on four tries within the ten-yard line.

But Brunswick's offense failed to take advantage of their defense's heroic effort, as the Eagles eventually forced a turnover on downs of their own with just over two minutes remaining, allowing Greenville to run out the clock on a 22-16 win.

This marks the Eagles' third straight win and boosts their final regular season record to 8-2, one better than last year's mark of 7-3.

Editors Note: The Eagles will face Brunswick again in the first round of the 2A Region A playoffs. The game will be at 7 p.m. Thursday in Emporia.

Greenville County's win streak snapped by rival Brunswick



Freshman Mekhi Phillips of the Greenville County Eagles moves the ball up the floor during Friday night's game against the Brunswick County Bulldogs.

William Pitts/Independent-Messenger

A standing-room-only crowd filled nearly every seat of the Greenville County High School gymnasium for a full Friday night of hoops action as the hometown Eagles faced the rival Bulldogs of Brunswick County High School. Unfortunately, a large chunk of those supporters left for home disappointed, as the boys' varsity Eagles fell to the Bulldogs by a final of 69-58.

The team's inexperience compared to last year's squad reared its ugly head in this pivotal matchup, as missed free throws and untimely fouls cost the Eagles a game that looked winnable until early in the fourth quarter. In the second half, Greenville missed 8 out of 18 free throws.

"I think in the fourth quarter we kinda laid down and allowed them to get momentum," said head coach Antwan Walton. "We missed a lot of free throws, which I think put us in this situation."

Although the Eagles managed to keep the game close throughout the first three quarters, they never held the lead at any point after the first quarter. An offensive explosion by the Bulldogs to start the fourth quarter put Greenville away for good.

After a back-and-forth first half, the Bulldogs walked away with a slim 30-28 lead. During the third quarter, the pattern continued, as the Eagles tied the game on two separate occasions only for the Bulldogs to retake the lead.

However, the Bulldogs also missed several key opportunities to widen their lead, missing wide-open layups and free throws that would have put the Eagles in a perilous position had they been drained. Instead, Brunswick clung to a narrow 46-44 lead entering the fourth quarter.

It wasn't long before that narrow lead became a double-digit cushion, as the Bulldogs put 23 on the board to put the game out of reach. Nine of those points came from senior Ja'Markell Mays, who led all players in scoring with 29 points. As usual, senior Xzavion Walton was the Eagles' leading scorer, putting up 28.

The demoralizing defeat snapped the Eagles' four-game winning streak, a mark they reached on Wednesday night with a dominating road win over the Sussex Central Tigers.

Wednesday night's game was a tightly-contested affair in the first half, as the Eagles fought their way to a 29-26 lead by halftime. After the halftime break, something clicked for the Eagles, as they blew the doors off Sussex Central in the third quarter, outscoring the Tigers 21-9.

Senior Xzavion Walton led the way with 23 points, while freshman Mekhi Philips wasn't far behind, scoring 22 points of his own.

The Eagles will have the next two weeks to regroup and gear up for one of their toughest tests of their season.

When play resumes after the holiday break on Wednesday, Jan. 4, they will face KIPP Pride from Gaston, North Carolina — one of only two schools to defeat the Eagles' varsity boys squad last season.

Greenville all-district athletes honored at Washington Park Youth Open House



Former NASCAR driver Hermie Sadler speaks to Greenville County's All-District football players at Washington Park's Holiday Youth Celebration.

William Pitts/Independent-Messenger

All year long, Washington Park Center on Dry Bread Road does its best to support the youth of the Emporia-Greenville community, through after-school activities, athletic programs, and academic scholarships.

This past Saturday afternoon, Washington Park opened its doors to the public to showcase its community efforts at a "holiday youth celebration".

One of those youths who had plenty of reason to celebrate was Armani Anderson, who volunteers regularly at the center. Her life was changed for the better thanks to a trip to the Black College Expo in Bowie, Maryland, organized in part by Washington Park back in March. Anderson received multiple scholarship offers as a result of her visit. During her speech, Anderson

expressed her gratitude to Washington Park for the positive impact it made on her future.

Saturday's event was more than a celebration of the Washington Park Center, however — it was a celebration of youth athletics in Emporia-Greenville. Washington Park honored all 12 players from Greenville County High School's football team who made the all-district and all-region squads. This season was a highly successful one for the Eagles, as they finished 8-2 during the regular season and won a playoff game.

The athletes honored on Saturday afternoon were Nyjjar Waller, La'Quarion Whitaker, Hasaan Edwards, Odell Turner, Jahvonte Harding, Zy'ion Murrell, Isaac Parker, Tremaine Hill, Charles Fields, Jamir Brown, and Devi'Youne Johnson. Marlos Stith was the 12th player named all-District, but could not attend.

In addition to their all-District honors, Fields and Turner were also named to the all-region team.

Each of the athletes received special plaques as well as "All-District" sweatsuits in honor of their achievements.

A former Greenville County athletic superstar, Isaiah Stephens, returned to Emporia to congratulate the current Eagle athletes and wish them well. Last year, Stephens excelled as part of the Eagles' football, basketball, and track teams before graduating and heading to Norfolk State, where he is now focused on both football and track.

Stephens, who made all-state in track and all-region in football during his time as an Eagle, spoke about his first season of experience with the Norfolk State Spartans football program.

"It was rough at first," said Stephens. "Practice was six days a week. Five o'clock in the morning. It was rough. Basically, for those of you who want to go to

college and play at the next level, it's rough. You've just got to trust the process and be prepared."

Also coming to congratulate the Eagle athletes was Emporia sports legend Hermie Sadler, a former NASCAR driver who is currently embarking on a career in politics.

"I raced in NASCAR for more than 20 years and did 20 years of TV," said Sadler. "But I never did anything more fun that taught me more life lessons than playing youth football...baseball...high school sports right here in this county."