



By Russ Pankonin

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Coach Carl Zuege said something's different about this year's Longhorn boys' basketball team. He doesn't know how to describe it other than it's something he hasn't seen in the boys program for a while.

Perhaps it's their outlook, their demeanor or their persona. Regardless of what it is, it helped this year's team do something the Longhorns haven't been able to do in seven long years—win a game on the opening weekend.

Granted, the Longhorns always open with a pair of tough teams—McCook and Goodland, Kan.—but the boys put one in the bag last weekend.

After closing to within eight of McCook to open the fourth quarter Thursday night, the Longhorns couldn't keep pace with McCook, falling by 16, 58-42.

But on Friday, despite not being able to get the ball to fall, the Longhorns held off a charging Goodland squad in the final seconds to take a 41-38 win.

That win broke an ugly streak that has haunted Longhorn coaches since 2003.

Schedule doesn't lighten

This week, the schedule doesn't get much easier as they take on another pair of Class B teams.

Friday they travel to Sidney, who finished third at the Class B state tournament last year.

While they lost some players from last year, Zuege said Sidney will be among the top teams the Longhorns will face this season.

On Saturday, the Longhorns play host to Ogallala. They won their opener against a strong Lexington team and will play tough defense.

Zuege pleased with boys' play

Overall, Zuege liked what he saw from his squad last week.

He felt they played well in the opener against McCook and competed well.

They did a much better job of handling the ball, too. This year against McCook they only committed 15 turnovers compared to more than 30 last year.

Against Goodland, he said the boys "played really well and shot poorly."

"We made enough shots to win," he said.

They went 13-33 from 2-point range and 2-15 from 3-point range for a 33 percent average.

One of the Longhorns' big men, Tanner Stromberger got in foul trouble early at Goodland.

Zuege said Daniel Regier and Charlie Haarberg, who came in off the bench, really stepped up to get things going.

The Longhorns built a nine-point lead at half and rebuilt it to nine going into the final quarter.

That's when the shots stopped falling.

Goodland scored nine unanswered points to tie the game, 35-35, on a 3-pointer.

Alex Strand finally hit the Longhorns' first basket of the fourth with less than three minutes to play to give Chase County a 37-35 lead.

The Longhorns went to the stall, forcing Goodland to foul.

Regier dropped a pair of free throws for a 39-35 lead but Goodland hit a trey with 9.1 seconds left to pull within one, 39-38.

They fouled Jeff Banks on the in-bounds, who followed by dropping both for a 41-38 margin.

Goodland couldn't get a decent shot off because of the Longhorn defense, sealing the win.

Regier lead the team with 13 points and 11 rebounds. Strand added eight points, three assists and three steals.



Late rally not enough

Thursday, the Longhorns managed to stay within 10 of the McCook Bison at half, 16-26.

McCook opened up a 14-point 47-33 lead after three.

The Longhorns looked liked a team possessed in the first 90 seconds of the fourth quarter.

They started pressuring the Bison, causing numerous turnovers.

Suddenly, the Longhorns had narrowed the margin to eight.

McCook regained their composure and slowed the pace down, hitting a deuce and trey to go back up by 13. From there, the Longhorns were never able to close the margin, falling 42-58.

Strand led the team with 15 points, six rebounds and six steals. Stromberger finished in double figures with 10, along with eight rebounds. Regier finished with nine rebounds.

Action at Sidney Friday starts with boys' and girls' jayvee games at 4 p.m. Action here against Ogallala Saturday starts with boys' and girls jayvee games at 4:30 p.m.