

Estill Punches Ticket To Rupp!!!

MIKE WISEMAN
Tribune Sportswriter

The Estill County Engineers basketball team added another chapter to this already storybook season by adding the school's first-ever regional basketball championship with a 44-40 win over the Knott County Central Patriots last Tuesday night, March 5, in Hazard. With the signature win, the Engineers would punch their ticket to the Whitaker Bank/KHSAA Boys Sweet Sixteen Basketball Tournament to be held in Lexington, Kentucky, at Rupp Arena.

The 14th Region final would see the top two teams squaring off in what was sure to be a colossal battle for the coveted trophy and a trip to the big dance. A huge "Big Blue" turnout would surely help the boys play their best as Estill fans and students stuffed the arena.

The first quarter would be all Estill's as they surged out to a 7-4 lead behind their "Player of the Year," Caleb Bonny who would score all of the Engineers' points in the first stanza. Estill would be in no hurry on the offensive end and their methodical play seemed to get under KCC's skin.

The second quarter would see KCC throw their press at Estill to try and speed up the game. A Bonny leaner and four straight from Lane Doty would prompt a Knott time out and the Engineer faithful would roar their approval.

Twins Andrew and Lane Doty continue to make the going tough on the inside for Knott by blocking or altering numerous shots. But Lane would pick up his third foul with less than three minutes left until halftime. so it was "next Engineer up." J.T. O'Hair would fill the shoes admirably, and with Bonny tossing in another eight points, the Engineers would head to the locker room with a 23-12 lead.

The Engineers would know that Knott would not go down without a fight and the third quarter would surely prove that point. KCC would turn up their half court trapping defense and

get some good results as Estill would turn the ball over several times, leading to easy transition buckets for the Patriots. KCC would eventually draw even at 29 until an O'Hair "3" would give the Engineers a three-point lead, 32-29, at the end of the third quarter.

After being outscored 17-9 through the third quarter, the Engineers knew they needed to settle down and let their defense do the dirty work. A back and forth battle in the fourth quarter would take this game down to the final few minutes.

Kevin Richardson's only points of the game would be two of the biggest when he hit a floater in the lane to give Estill a 42-40 lead with 1:50 left on the clock. Estill would lock down on defense in the final two minutes, and with a Bonny field goal to extend Estill's lead to four points with just seconds left, the Estill contingency could tell something special was about to happen.

After a missed Knott field goal attempt, the rebound was knocked into the back court where Estill came up with the loose ball. An Estill timeout would only prolong the celebration for the Big Blue. As the seconds ticked away, a first regional title was firmly in the Estill County Engineers' hands.

Estill would be led in scoring by Tournament MVP Caleb Bonny with 23 points, Andrew Doty with 8 points, Lane Doty with 6 points, J.T. O'Hair with 5 points, Joe Benton with two points, and Kevin Richardson with two points.

Estill would place four on the All-Tourney Team: Caleb Bonny (MVP), Joe Benton, Lane Doty, and Andrew Doty.

The Engineers will open up play in the first session of the Sweet Sixteen on Wednesday, March 14, at 12:00 p.m. as they face off against Corbin. Close this town and head to Lexington to cheer on our hometown guys. See ya' at Rupp!! GO BIG BLUE!!



14th Region Tournament MVP Caleb Bonny takes the first cut at the nets for the Estill County Engineers after Estill won their first ever trip to the Sweet Sixteen last Tuesday night over Knott County Central, 44-40.

**Good Luck!
Engineers!**

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Beth Abshear and Brenda Adams
155 Richmond Road, Irvine, KY
(606) 723-8646

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Tamara L. Rice CPA
2214 Richmond Road, Irvine, KY
(606) 723-1935

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