

GWA Captures State Title

By Robin Wyatt
Sports Editor

George Walton Academy has boasted a winning tradition since its inception in 1969. But last April, a new dimension was added, the championship tradition of Ron Bradley. Coach Bradley came to GWA with a history of championships. He brought one to the Bulldogs in just one year.

The Bradley-coached Bulldogs captured the Class A state championship of the Southeastern Association of Independent Schools (SEAIS). The Bulldogs outclassed Windsor, 65-60 to claim the state crown on Feb. 27.

On Friday, a lot of hard work paid

off as the GWA Bulldogs brought home their first state championship. This week the girls go for the school's second state title as they travel to Milledgeville to play Westwood in the first round of the state tournament.

In the course of the championship run the Bulldogs have picked up several individual honors. Todd Whitsitt was named the most valuable player in the sub-region, region and state championships. He was also named to the all-tournament team in each of the tournneys. Randy Henderson was named all-region and Brad Bradley, who saved his finest play of the season for the trip to

Marshallville, was named to the all-state tournament team. He also received honorable mention to the all-region team with fellow guard Tony Groves.

In taking the championship, GWA won its last 19 games. They have not been defeated since they lost to Gordon-Ivey in the Christmas tournament. The Bulldogs had the opportunity to avenge that loss twice during the course of the regular season. The 'Dogs' only other loss came at the hands of Briarwood early in the season, in a game in which GWA's only two experienced players, Whitsitt and Henderson, fouled out.

Those losses are meaningless in view of the final results. However, the road to state was hazardous with elimination lurking only a point away in each of the games.

The sub-region title came easily with a defeat of Rutledge but the region tournament was a different matter. Utilizing clutch baskets by Tony Groves, Brad Bradley, and Todd Whitsitt GWA defeated Washington-Johnson in a double overtime 69-67 to gain the region finals and a trip to the state. But, it was important for them to win the region championship in order to travel to Marshallville as winners. They did but it took a Whitsitt basket with four seconds remaining to defeat Bartow, 50-49.

Heartbreak stood only a few seconds away in the first round of the state. Randy Henderson was injured in the game against Georgia Christian, a team Coach Bradley felt was second only to his own Bulldogs. Without Henderson, GWA had to scramble to gain a tie at the end of regulation time. The first overtime ended with neither

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team scoring. Whitsitt sank two free throws to send the game into a third overtime. With ten seconds left, he sank a basket and a foul shot to give GWA a 50-47 win. In the semi-finals, a tired Bulldog team fell behind by 16 points in the third quarter, it seemed insurmountable, but it wasn't. Clutch play by Bradley and Whitsitt gave them a 74-69 victory over Robert Toombs Christian Academy. After those four games, the final seemed like a waltz, as GWA stayed out of Windsor's reach winning 65-60.

Coach Bradley asserted that this team has character. It showed in those four games coming down the stretch. The coach said that those games were the toughest and most fantastic of his long career. But it is the clutch victories that make champions and GWA has the trophy to prove it.

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GEORGE WALTON stars, Todd Whitsitt (55) and Randy Henderson (40), accepting the Class A Championship trophy from the director of the S.E.A.I.S. Henderson and Whitsitt, the only seniors on the team, will be traveling to Kentucky to watch that state's high school tournament. Whitsitt was named tournament Most Valuable Player.

GWA wins state championship

"A Winner Never Quits" has been the motto of the dedicated George Walton Academy Bulldogs throughout tournament play, and once again, they were winners in every sense of the word because they absolutely refused to quit. Their supreme effort and dedication brought the SEAIS Class A State Championship trophy home to rest in the trophy case at George Walton Academy in Monroe.

In the opening game of the state tourney, the Bulldogs coached by Ronald Bradley, faced a powerful Georgia Christian Academy team from Valdosta. As is a usual thing for a Bradley-coached team, they were out-sized by the boys from GCA. They pushed the battling Bulldogs into three overtimes in a closely fought game.

GWA held a 24-17 lead at half-time, but on the first play of the 3rd quarter, tough Randy Henderson went down with a badly sprained ankle and was on the bench much of the 2nd half. Georgia Christian closed in and at the end of the 3rd quarter, the Bulldogs' lead was only 30-29. When the buzzer sounded, ending the 4th quarter, the game was deadlocked 45-45.

Neither team scored in the 1st overtime as GWA controlled the ball and missed the final shot — and it began to remind the fans of the opening game in the region tournament which went into two overtimes. Both teams scored 2 points in the second overtime, and again when the buzzer sounded, the score was still tied at 47-47. Finally, the Bulldogs pulled out in front for good on a field goal and a free throw by Todd Whitsitt, and the Bulldogs put the game away 50-47 as Whitsitt finished the night with 31 big points. Brad Bradley tossed in 10 and Randy Henderson added 8 and pulled down 14 big rebounds. Ben Harden, starting for 8th grader Don Holder who was sidelined part of the game with a sprained ankle, and Tony Groves, played good, steady basketball in the triple overtime win.

Carter each had 10 points. Cass' record fell to 19-7. Stephens County, 23-5, was an upset winner Friday night over heralded Therrell, the state's sixth-ranked team.

In other action, Greater Atlanta Christian swept region 7-B, the boys thrashing Palmetto, 70-52, and the girls thumping Duluth, 46-39. Craig Smith's 18 points led the GAC attack.

Down at Marshallville, George Walton Academy defeated Windsor Academy, 65-60, to take top honors among 57 schools in the Southeastern Association of Independent Schools' Class A meet. It was the 19th consecutive victory

Semi-finals

Excitement was in the air as the Bulldogs took the floor for what turned out to be the most exciting game of the tournament. Robert Toombs Christian Academy opened up the game red-hot and by the 1st quarter break led 28-20. They were still sizzling during the second quarter and GWA found themselves behind at the mid-way point 42-33. When they came back on the floor to begin the 3rd quarter, they still had not relized the GWA's purpose for being there was to win the State Championship, and with 1:15 left in the 3rd quarter, had a commanding 16 point lead of 61-45 over the Bulldogs.

Then dedication entered the game for the Bulldogs and took over, along with Todd Whitsitt. GWA began slowly and methodically to chop away at Toombs' lead. By the end of the 3rd quarter, the score was 61-49.

On the opening tap of the 4th quarter, Whitsitt tapped the ball to Randy Henderson who promptly hit a jump shot from the foul line to make the score 61-51. At this point the capacity crowd began to really come alive as they remembered the heroics of the week before in a tremendous comeback effort. The Toombs' 10-point lead steadily was cut to 5, and with about 3 minutes left in the game, Brad Bradley hit a 15-foot jumper to tie the score for the first time at 63-63.

Shortly thereafter the Bulldogs went ahead for the first time 65-64

as terrific Todd Whitsitt hit both shots of a 1-and-1 situation. With Todd in complete control of the situation, Tony Groves' 2 big lay-ups, and 2 clutch shots by Brad Bradley, the Bulldogs went on and outscored Toombs' 25-8 in the 4th quarter to win by a final score of 74-69. "In 19 years of coaching, I've never seen four games as fantastic as these past four. This team never knew when it was beaten. This is the finest group of competitors I have coached" stated a jubilant Coach Bradley after the big victory.

Whitsitt, determined to have his team in the state championship game against Windsor Academy of Macon had a tournament high 40 points, 18 big rebounds and 7 steals. Bradley finished the night with 17 points in probably the best game of his career as he hit 7

of 11 shots from the field and 3 of 3 from the foul line. Randy Henderson, reinjuring his badly sprained ankle, had 10 points and 9 rebounds. Sub Ben Harden scored 3 important points in the do-or-die game. And, so, the stage is set for the final act of the Bulldogs' State Championship Production.

State Championship

Going into the state finals against Windsor Academy of Macon, the Bulldogs' 26-2 record and 18 game winning streak were on the line. Dedication and determination, in the personages of super seniors Todd Whitsitt and Randy Henderson, were in control of the state championship game.

The Bulldogs led at the first 2 breaks, 15-14 and 28-24, and

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seemed to be in control of the situation. GWA held a 5 point lead at the end of the 3rd quarter, after Windsor had tied the game earlier in the period. At the end of the fiercely fought fourth quarter, Whitsitt, Henderson and company had put the State Championship trophy in the proud possession of George Walton Academy by a final score of 65-60. Whitsitt ended the night with 36 points, 11 rebounds and 4 steals. Henderson finished the game with 14 points and 15 rebounds.

Tony Groves played probably his best game of the season as he hit 4 of 4 from the field and 1 of 2 from the foul line for 9 big points. Brad Bradley scored 4 points and Don Holder added 2 in the state championship cause. The victory ran GWA's season record to 27-2 and 19 straight wins.

Whitsitt MVP

Whitsitt had a total of 107 points in the tourney for an average of 36 points per game. He also had 33 rebounds and 13 steals. For his stellar performance he was named Most Valuable player in the State Class A Tournament. Brad Bradley's 31 points and fine floor

play also earned him a trophy for being named to the State All-Tournament team. Whitsitt's MVP award was his third in three weeks.

On their victorious return home with "all the marbles" they were saluted with a parade through Covington, led by the Walton County Sheriff's Department and the Covington Police Department, and on to Social Circle where they were met by the Social Circle Police Dept. and Fire Dept. The players were put on a fire truck and taken through Social Circle and on to Monroe, where they were welcomed home with street signs and banners. By the time the entourage reached Monroe where they were met by the Monroe Police Department, there were about 50 cars in the parade for the journey of the Champions to the school. It was truly a fitting climax to a tremendous season by a most dedicated group of young men.

Other notes: The biggest point spread in the tournament was 5 points. Todd Whitsitt, upon looking at the championship trophy, "No one will ever know how many sprints or slides or boxing-out drills went into winning this one."

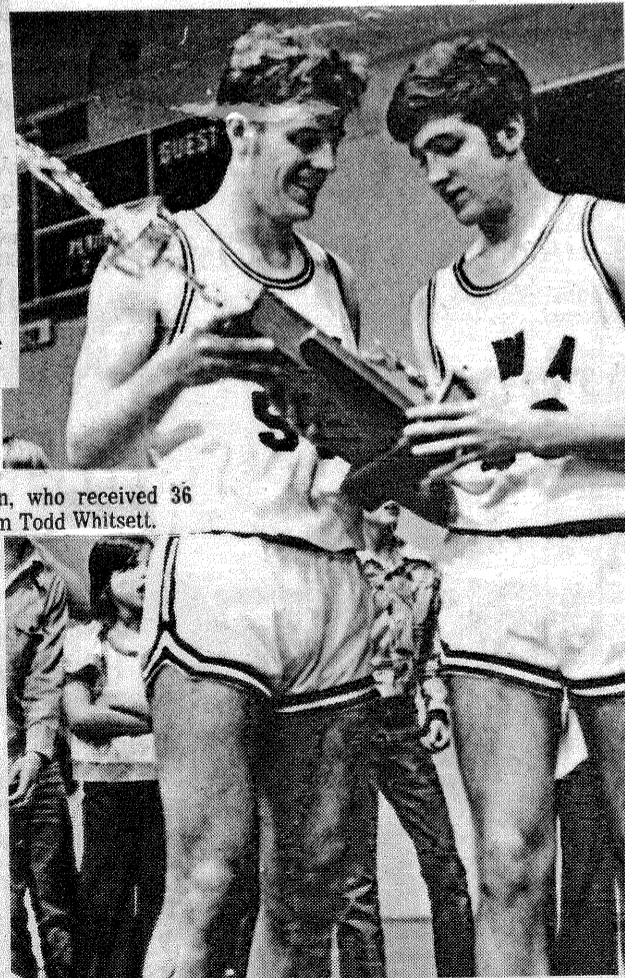
Randy Henderson, "We got the one we came for."

Brad Bradley, "I wish everyone could experience the great feeling of playing on a state championship team."

Tony Groves, "It is really great to win the championship. It's been a great year."

Don Holder, "This team really paid the price to win the state championship. It really has been great."

The GWA girls enter the State Tournament Wednesday at 4 p.m. at John Milledge Academy in Milledgeville.



Whitsitt and Henderson admire trophy

for Walton, who received 36 points from Todd Whitsitt.