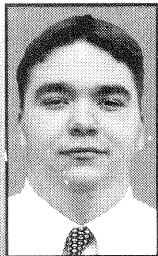


Sports

Home sweep home

Brian Knapp

Sports Editor



County packs gym, returns to its roots for historic battle

The people of this county, an embattled people I have pelted with my words more than once for their lack of support and interest in high school sports, showed they still know how to pack a gym Friday night.

They sure shut me up.

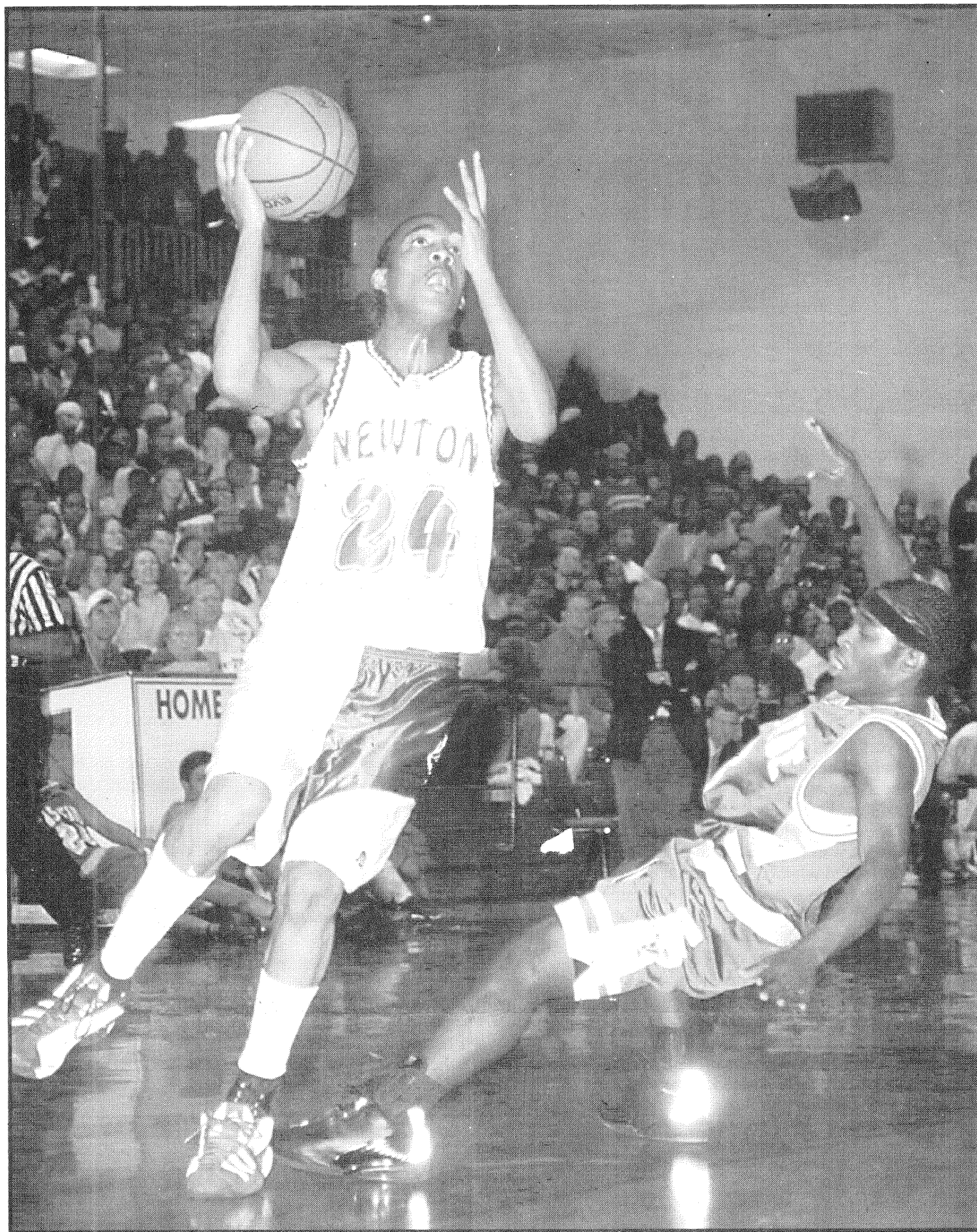
Some 2,000 teachers, students and men on the street pushed through the hallowed doors of Newton High School to watch the basketball teams at Newton and Eastside stand face to face for the first time on local soil. So many showed, in fact, that the powers that be had to turn some away at the door. They lined the catwalk and the lobby, three rows deep. The arena teemed with activity, and the sign out side said it all: **SOLD OUT.**

I had heard many times from many people about the heydays of yesteryear, when high school basketball tickets were worth their weight in gold around here, when inquiring eyes scaled the brick walls of the old Sharp Gym to sneak a peak from its second-story windows. They flocked to see the Bob Richardsons, the Tim Christians and the Stan Harris of their era, and they did their best to make those players feel like royalty.

I had often wished in the wee hours of the night that I could have been there to witness the times when basketball brought this community together to revel in local heroes who played not for money or fame but for love of the game and for one another. That was before glitz and glamour spread like the plague.

Friday, I got my chance to be there. The modern-day Covingtonians created the most magical of atmospheres, a spectacled setting of splendor on which good players could become great and great players could become that much more. The air was so thick with hype that it could have choked me had I let it. The crowd hung on every shot, on every time out, on every tick of that wonderful clock. Even the coaches looked wide-eyed, from where I sat. The noise was deafening.

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Ron Manson/The Covington News

In transition: Newton's Darius White (24) scoots in for a lay-up as Eastside's Marchellius Smith attempts to take a charge. The Rams beat the Eagles 41-37 Friday.

Rams tempo over E

By Brian Knapp
Sports Editor

The Newton team stands on i

Legale Floyd breaking steal, of the floor an eventual game-with 29.4 second the Rams upse Eastside 41-37 Newton High Sc

Eastside had with in the clos failed to score. then forced to strolled to the li victory, sinking one-and-one.

"I knew I wo Floyd said.

"I didn't have with Legale," sa coach Ron Bra there before. F from the line."

Darius White game-high 14 p the sold-out cro athleticism as N subregion) me possession of f south subregion pitched in with canning a three-game at 35-35 e period and a ba give the Rams a 5:55 to play.

Down by as 1 points, Eastside region) fought one-point lead third period, M sinking a half-c his team in fron

Eastside head McWhorter can not to place to on any one gam

"I don't wan team's cha McWhorter sa come out and pl aggressively in then, psycholog will have had n than it should."

Darius Kelley points off the l Eastside score shot 13-for-41 f

Both coaches the turnout.

"I heard the them away," "That's beautif ic game betwe ing teams, and a part of it."

"I wish I co like this every r er said. "I was

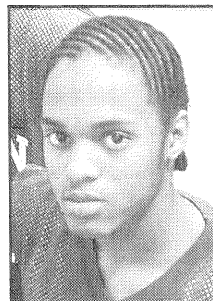
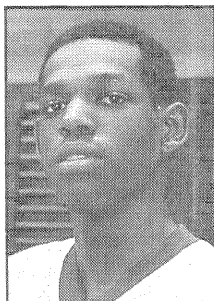
Eastside's Smith proves his defensive worth in loss

By Brian Knapp
Sports Editor

Bruce Smith was the heavy underdog in one of the fights inside the fight Friday, for it was he who was charged with defending the county's most explosive scorer as the Eastside boys' basketball team challenged Newton at Newton High School.

Smith more than held his own.

Smith minimized the damage of Legale Floyd, shadowing the heralded Newton superstar around every dribble, from baseline to baseline. He fought through screens, double screens and Floyd's clever and relentless move-



Marquee matchup: Bruce Smith, left, holds Legale Floyd to eight points.

ment without the ball, keeping him out of double-figure scoring for the first time in 34 games. Afterwards, Smith was spent.

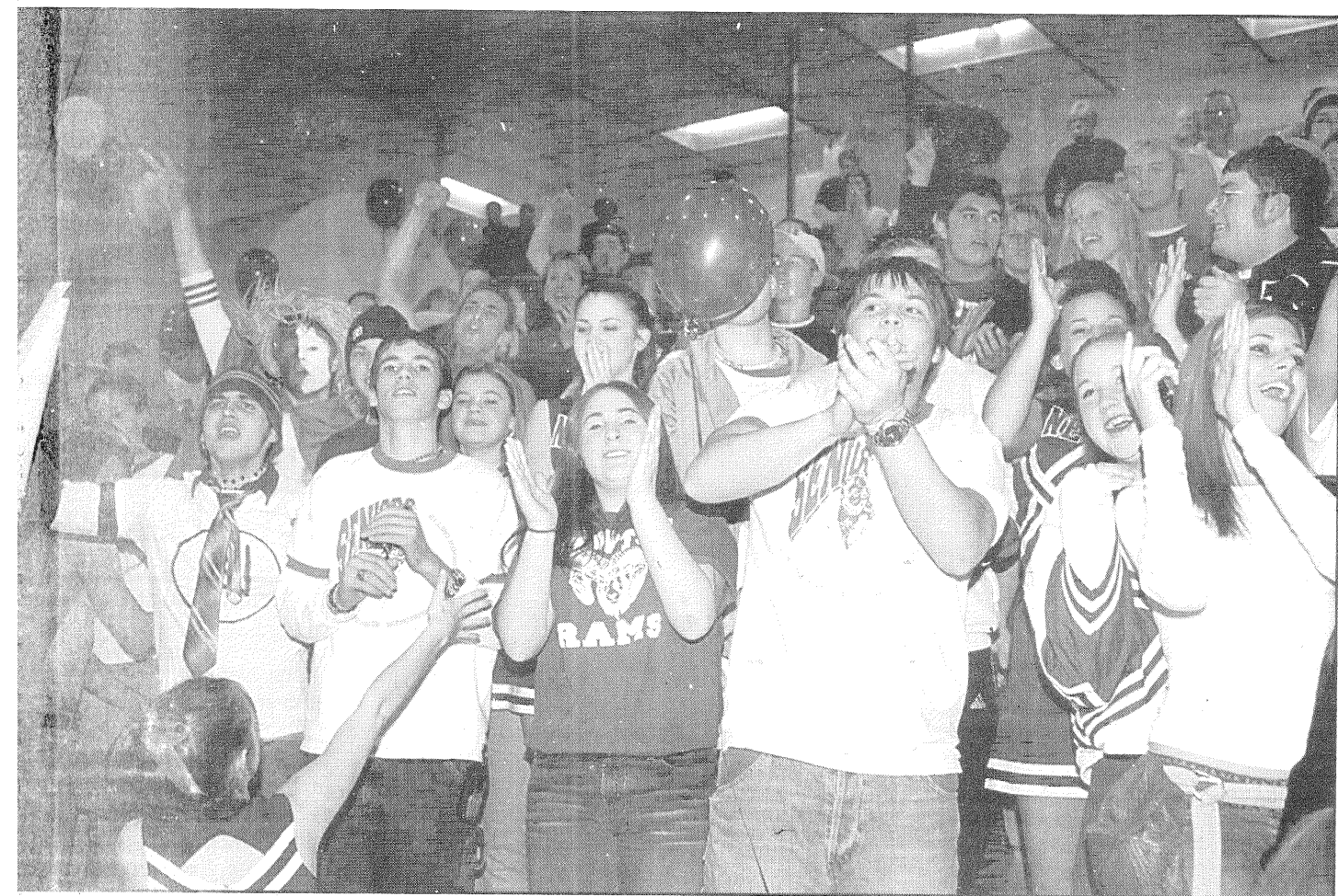
"I really had to keep moving," Smith said. "I got tired, but I felt like I did a pretty good job against him."

Floyd got off just five shots against Smith, who stayed in his hip pocket until the final bell sounded.

In the days leading into the long-awaited game, Smith studied Floyd on film, watched his rhythms and movements, adopted his tendencies to memory. He dedicated himself to stopping the player no one else could stop, to shutting down a master scorer who strikes from everywhere on the court.

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Sports



Ron Manson/The Covington News

presence in the stands: The Newton High School student section roots their team on to victory against Eastside Friday.

Fans, players sound off on showdown

By Bill Dolan
Staff Writer

Ofentimes in the world of athletic competition, the hoopla surrounding an event overshadows the event itself. Few could make that argument Friday evening at Newton High School as the basketball teams at Newton and Eastside met for the first time inside county lines. The young and the old alike turned out for the games, and a who's who of proud alumni from the two schools were mixed among them. Matt Easterday, a former two-sport standout at Newton, admittedly got caught up in the atmosphere. "This should have happened five years ago," said Easterday, currently a middle fielder in the Florida Marlins organization. "Look at this crowd. This is what the people really wanted." Larelle Cawthon, head coach of the diam Creek Middle School cheerleading team, found herself in a home divided.

While she and her husband, Lance, both graduated from Newton, her younger brothers are Eastside graduates.

"My parents and I had a little battle leading up to tonight's game," Cawthon said, chuckling as she spoke.

The magnitude of the event and the scale of the spectacle was not lost on the players involved, either. They were the centers of attention. Members of the victorious Newton girls' basketball team relished their time in the spotlight.

"Everyone was waiting for this," said junior forward Jamica Wyatt. "It's really good for the schools to play each other."

"The whole school was really pumped up," added senior guard Tenesha Tucker. "It was great for school spirit."

Members of the Eastside girls' basketball team, though disappointed, were also taken aback by the support showed by the community and student bodies.

"It would have been great to win, but it was still a great experience," said Eastside point guard Jennifer Maddox, who scored

a team-high nine points and made four steals in her team's 39-29 defeat. "It really pumps you up. It was really great with so many people cheering."

Darius White, who scored a game-high 14 points as the Newton boys' basketball team upended Eastside 41-37 in the night-cap, was also eager to talk about the unforgettable night.

"It felt good to play hard and to prove ourselves as a team in front of a big crowd," White said. "My adrenaline was running."

Outside the Eastside boys' basketball team's locker room, a slightly subdued Bruce Smith spoke about the game and quietly looked forward to a rematch with Newton at 8:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 31, at Eastside High School.

"It was a great game and the crowd was really into it," Smith said. "Now they have to come to our place."

"I enjoy the big game," added Marchellius Smith. "It helps you push a little bit harder. We'll be ready for the rematch."

Knapp: Commu rises to occasio

From page 9

I had little room to breathe, much less write or think or talk. And I loved every last second of it. It reminded me of why I love my job, and I hated that it had to end. The moment transcended age, race and all other human limitations.

I thought mostly about the players, their different backgrounds, what they must have thought of it all, the emotions they were dealing with. Teenagers are an odd sect of our society. They're moody yet passionate, reckless yet intelligent, stubborn yet impressionable. They need to be shown that they're impor-

tant to us, to our present and future city. They had to be important Friday.

The Bob Richards, Tim Christians and Harris of the past way to the Legale Bruce Smiths, the Tuckers and the Ners of the present.

Scores and statistics did not matter was over. What mattered that a small town its roots and, at least night out of the year embraced them.

Brian Knapp contacted via e-mail
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Matchup: Eastside ties up Rams' F

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"That kid will listen," said Eastside head coach Tommy McWhorter. "He knew what we were trying to do. He's one of those kids who wants to do whatever the coaches want him to do."

Smith's size (6-foot-4), his quick feet, his unusually long arms and his being left-handed made him the obvious choice for the job. What's more, he is Eastside's most seasoned of veterans.

"First of all, he's a senior," McWhorter said. "When I scouted Newton, I noticed that

Legale like to go left. Bruce being left-handed able to contest his shots. Plus, Legale's long arms. You need someone armed to guard him.

In actuality, Legale scored two of his early Smith's expense. In his first two points underneath the basket scored his last four-point lay-up and clinching free throw.

Even Newton's Ron Bradley was impressed with Smith's defensive play. "They did a great job of guarding Legale."

The Covington News