

Sports

2003-04 ALL-COUNTY PREP BOYS' BASKETBALL TEAM

Strengths of the stron

Eastside's Smith, Rams' Herring lead rundown of county's elite

Brian Knapp
bknapp@covnews.com

The Eastside High School boys' basketball team pieced together an historic season, winning 21 games (second-most in school history) and its first-ever sub-junior championship.

The Eagles stole much of the local underdog under from cross-county rival Newton, scoring their first two victories over the Rams and earning a seat in the Class AAA State Tournament.

Now, without further delay, The Covington News unveils its All-County Prep Boys' Basketball Team for 2003-04, and Eastside's Marchellius Smith and Newton's Justin Herring front the cast:

The Backcourt

Marchellius Smith (Eastside, Sr.): No player meant more to his team than Smith did to Eastside. The senior averaged 10.5 points, 3.0 assists and 2.0 steals per game, providing steady leadership throughout. Smith had four 20-point games, proving he could score when necessary.

Justin Herring (Newton, Sr.): Herring provided the skip in Newton's step, playing hard-nosed defense from horn to horn in all 29 of his team's games. He averaged 3.0 points and 5.0 assists per game but made a much more noticeable impact with his presence on the court.

Marquis Gilstrap (Eastside, Sr.): After starting for much of the year, Gilstrap became a valuable sixth man for Eastside. He averaged 7.0 points per game and knocked down a number of clutch shots during the season. "It's funny that he's a good shooter," said Eastside head coach Tommy McWhorter. "He doesn't use his lower body a whole lot, but he shoots the ball the same way every time. I think he was born to shoot."

Jerrell Boswell (Newton, So.): The sharpshooting Boswell averaged 16.9 points and 2.0 assists per game in his first season with Newton. The sophomore guard scored in bunches, as evidenced by the six second-half three-pointers he sank against Eastside.

The Frontcourt

Darius White (Newton, Sr.): Perhaps the best all-around player in the county, White averaged a county-best 10.0 points, 7.8 rebounds and 1.0 steals per game as a senior. Lethal off the dribble, the 6-foot-3 forward was an exceptional passer with extraordinary court vision and awareness. "He had an awful lot of talent," said Newton head coach Ron Bradley. "At times, he was as good a player as we had in the state."



Brian Knapp/The Covington News

Memorable moments: The images shown in the composite above highlight the 2003-04 season for the Newton and Eastside high school boys' basketball teams.

Tough-minded guard fuels defensive fire for Newton

Brian Knapp
bknapp@covnews.com

Justin Herring defined what the Newton High School boys' basketball team was all about.

Herring, The Covington News Defensive Player of the Year for 2003-04, worked to the point of exhaustion at shutting down opposing guards and served as the foundation for Newton's 2-3 zone defense.

"He did a great job," said Newton head coach Ron Bradley. "His defense just carried us. He was the spirit of our defense. He was one of those guys that played every day, which led to him being named as our



DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Justin Herring, Newton

Herring put up 3.0 points, 5.0 assists and 2.0 steals per game, leading the Rams to their second consecutive 20-win season and Class AAAA State Tournament appearance.

"You can lose his offensive stats in a hurry," Bradley said, "but he was closer to perfection than any other player we had."

any number of games but none more than the miraculous 59-57 victory over eventual Region 8-AAAA South subregion champion Eastside in January.

The senior made steals on three consecutive possessions in the game's final minutes as Newton roared back from 20 points behind at halftime to defeat the Eagles.

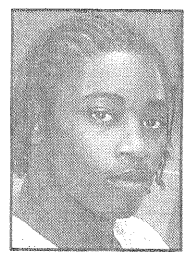
"He's what got us started," Bradley said. "Everybody else fed off of him. He was always doing something to help the team. He didn't score a lot of points, but what people don't realize is how many points he affected. He was just invaluable, and he was the most

Point guard leadership drives Eagles in playoff

Brian Knapp
bknapp@covnews.com

Marchellius Smith is a player that value cannot always be measured in points, rebounds and assists.

Smith, The Covington News Most Valuable Player for 2003-04, led the Eastside High School boys' basketball team to 21 victories (second-n



MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Marchellius Smith, Eastside

head coach Tommy McWhorter. "He's the epitome of a player. He tried to do everything I asked him to do. He was somebody who was on the floor, and we're not going to miss that aspect of the game."

Built like a tank, Smith averaged 10.5 points, 3.0 assists and 2.0 steals per game as a senior, guiding the Eagles to the Region 8-AAAA South subregion title. He shot 40 percent from three-point range and, more importantly, 80 percent of his free throws.

His consistency at the free-throw line meant he had the hands in crunch time more often than not.

"The fact that he could shoot free throws like he did was special for us," McWhorter said. "Then again, we watch him do it in practice every day."

Smith tipped Eastside on defense, pressuring opposing guards from the opening to the final horn. He has a knack for being in the place at the right time, evidenced by his team-high charges taken.

"He has a low center of gravity, and he anticipates," McWhorter said. "Even when he went on the court, he implemented our game plan defensively. He could do anything for word, what I would say to him. He did the little things that don't show up in the stats, but they were the things that made the difference."