

Newton's state dream dies 78-50

BY COSBY WOODRUFF
NC SPORTS EDITOR
cosby.woodruff
@newtoncitizen.com

DULUTH — Newton's ride through the state basketball tournament came to a crashing end Thursday in a 78-50 defeat against Wheeler.

The Rams (21-10) had no answer for Wheeler's athleticism. Wheeler (30-1), who shot 54.7 percent from the floor, will play either Stephenson or Norcross tonight at 8:15 for the state championship.

Wheeler will be playing for its third state championship in four seasons.

Newton spent most of the final three quarters Thursday simply playing for pride.

The Rams led 6-3 early and it was tied at 8-8 before Chris Hanna dunked for the Wildcats with 1:15 to go in the first. That basket started a 25-0 run and put Wheeler ahead for good.

Newton didn't score again until Rudy Nolley scored on a layup with 42 seconds remaining in the first half. Nolley's basket broke a 9:14 scoring drought for the Rams.

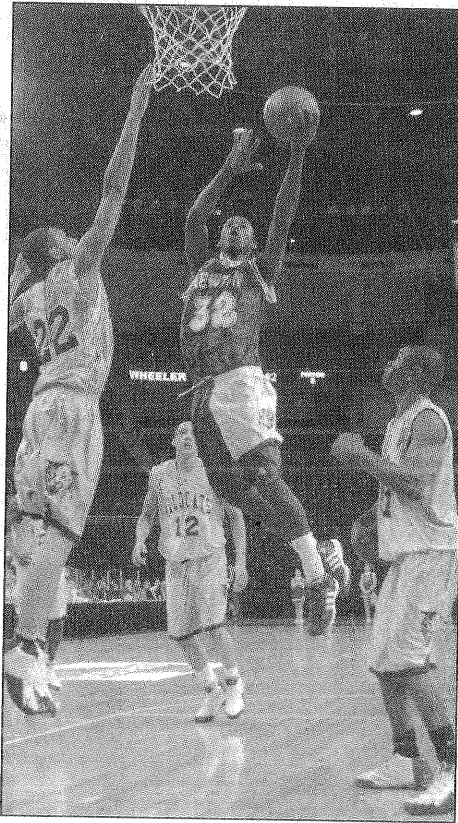
"We got away from what we wanted to do early," Newton coach Ron Bradley said after the game. "You have got to give (Wheeler) credit."

It only took a missed layup or two, another couple of ill-advised shots and then a few turnovers for the Wildcats to get into their up-tempo attack.

"We weren't good enough to keep it up," Bradley said. "We knew if we got behind we couldn't catch up."

Wheeler led 35-10 at the break and showed no inclination to let the Rams back in it.

Bradley said the early run, and the final margin, were more a testament to how well Wheeler played, not any sign of poor play by the Rams. At the same time, he said, his players were shellshocked at times.



Staff Photo: Sue Ann Kuhn-Smith

Newton's Rudy Nolley (32) splits Wheeler defenders B.J. Corley (22) and Chris Hanna (21) for a layup Thursday.

The Rams, who were 0-for-10 on 3-pointers in their two games in Macon last week, missed all seven 3-point attempts in the first half before Todd Hoskins and Jerrell Boswell connected to start the third quarter.

Boswell's basket, with 6:20 to go, gave him his first points of the night and first 3-pointer of the tournament. He went on to finish with 13 points. Hoskins led the Rams with 18, and Nolley scored 10.

Newton shot the ball poorly in the first

• See End Page 2B

Disappointing loss doesn't ruin season

BY MANNY FILS
SPORTS WRITER
manny.fils@newtoncitizen.com

DULUTH — The Newton Rams ended their amazing season with a less-than stellar finish, losing to the Wheeler Wildcats 78-50, one game away from playing for a Class AAAAA state championship Thursday at The Arena at Gwinnett Center.

Newton surprised a lot of people on its way to its furthest state tournament run in decades.

"When we won the first game of the state tournament, it was an ugly game. It was awesome," Newton coach Ron Bradley said with a slight grin. "We hadn't won a game in five or six trips. To win three, which we haven't done in 33 years or something like that, was awesome."

Despite getting badly beat by a great team, Bradley said that he would do it all over again.

"The thrill to come in here and be part of all this, these kids will remember it for a lifetime," Bradley said.

What made this team special was not its ability, but its heart. Even though the Rams were overmatched against the Wildcats, as they have been most of the season, this Newton team never gave up.

"I didn't think we'd have a winning season," said Bradley. "It's amazing how far these kids have gone. Before the season started, if you had told me we would've gone 14-13, I would've grabbed it. I think they have a lot of heart and effort."

The Rams did have a little luck on their

• See Season Page 2B

End

• From Page 1B

half and only slightly better in the final two quarters. Newton finished 17-for-61 from the floor and just 3-for-18 on 3-pointers.

Wheeler's 78 points were well below its tournament aver-

age of 94.7. Still, the total stands out when looking at Newton's season results. The Rams allowed only 40.7 points per game in their first three tournament games.

Overall, it was the third time in 31 games this season — and

only second time in regulation — that Newton allowed 70 points. Only Lithonia, which scored 86, scored more.

Sharaud Curry scored 23 to lead Wheeler. David Gonzalez added 11 and James Florence 10.