

## Flu-stricken Eagles beat Lakewood

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By Cam Ellis

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CALYPSO -- Imagine a dynamic basketball player from North Carolina, playing in a championship game and carrying the scoring load all while fighting a vicious case of the flu.

Sound familiar?

Lexi Mercer took a page out of Michael Jordan's playbook on Friday night, finding the time to score a game-high 17 points in between bouts of throwing up to lead Rosewood to a Carolina 1-A conference championship, beating Lakewood 51-45.

Mercer wasn't the only one struggling with health issues for all 32 minutes. Starting forward Callie Thorton also played through flu-like symptoms and guard Krystal Yelverton dealt with calf cramps at multiple points during the game.

"I think that was the toughest [game they've played all year] because physically, we're in such bad shape," said Rosewood coach Rick Grantham. "Lexi was throwing up, Callie was throwing up ... but it was really kind of cool the way that they battled."

Mercer was slow to get into a rhythm, picking up 3 fouls in the first 10 minutes of the game. She sat most of the 2nd quarter and finished the first half with only five points.

In her absence, the Eagles put together a true team effort. Bench players like Jala Holloman, Hannah Daniels and Jordan Dubose all contributed to the scoring effort. Led by Yelverton, the Eagles pushed the ball quickly in transition, taking advantage of some lackluster Lakewood defense to get multiple easy buckets in the paint.

"It was definitely a full team effort," Mercer said. "We had players that came out and made crucial shots that don't usually make crucial shots. That was really big for us."

It was an unexpected effort that had Grantham smiling from ear to ear after the game.

"It was big," he said. "Anytime we can get anything from them, it's big. Lexi and Krystal can't carry the team every night - although it seems like they do - but it's those other little things that everybody else does. On nights when we need those second chance points, that's where they come from."

The second half, however, belonged to Mercer. The junior came out firing, scoring 12 of her 17 points in the second half.

For a moment, it was looking like it wouldn't be enough. The Eagles went into the 4th quarter down three, and with their starters both sick and in foul trouble, Lakewood looked to deliver the finishing blow.

It was Rosewood however, that rose to the occasion. Outscoring Lakewood 16-7 in the final frame, the Eagles pulled away to win their 2nd consecutive 1A championship.

"It feels really good," a green-faced, trashcan-clutching Callie Thorton said. "Especially to do it two times in a row. So, we're excited. We're going to go really far in the playoffs."

With playoff seeding taking place this weekend, it shouldn't be long before Grantham and company know who they're slated to play against in the opening round. The win assured that they would play at least one home game, potentially more.

First though, the Eagles are going to take some time to enjoy the championship and, more importantly, rest.

"It's funny to me, because I went into the lockerroom after the game and they all looked like they've been in a fist fight," Grantham said. "We've got kids hugging trashcans in there. That's literally the effort

they give. Who wouldn't want to coach that? I've got the greatest job going."

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