

Jackets surge against Stockbridge

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MARIETTA - Heading into its game Saturday against Stockbridge, very few things pointed in Sprayberry's favor.

The Yellow Jackets were down two of their big men and were coming off two straight losses. The Tigers, on the other hand, were in the midst of a nine-game winning streak where they were averaging 76 points a game.

So much for expectations.

Jason Gordon scored 17 points with eight rebounds, and P.J. Stone added nine points and 11 rebounds, as Sprayberry defeated Stockbridge, 47-44, in the Atlanta High School Hoop Festival at the Cobb Civic Center.

The teams traded six- and seven-point runs throughout the contest, but it was Sprayberry which finally broke through with the lone big run of the game.

Trailing, 33-26, in the waning moments of the third quarter, the Yellow Jackets went on a 16-0 run, thanks to their defense and an ability to win the battle of the boards against the bigger and wider Tigers.

"Basketball is a game of runs," Sprayberry coach Marc Carver said. "What you can't allow is a long run. You have to call timeouts, (and) come back with a set play."

Stockbridge coach Duane Kelly tried that, only it didn't work.

After the Yellow Jackets (4-2) ran off eight straight to take a 34-33 lead at the 6:54 mark of the fourth quarter, Kelly called a timeout. But D.J. Funderburg, who scored 14 points in the game, stole the ball off the inbound pass and shuffled it to Duncan Lunsford for another one of Sprayberry's many layups of the afternoon.

Two baskets by Gordon and a pair of free throws by Stone pushed the lead to 42-33.

"That there was a huge run," Carver said. "There's the ball game."

Stockbridge, which was held to its season-low point total, finally broke the run with a 3-pointer by Chris Davis, who scored a game-high 24 points, at the 1:41 mark of the quarter.

The Tigers did have a small run of their own left, closing the game on an 11-5 spurt, but the Yellow Jackets' Gordon, Lunsford and Amonte Potter combined to go 5-of-7 from the line in the final 40 seconds to ice the game.

"It was our determination," Stone said.

Gordon put it a different way.

"We can bang with a bigger team and, when we get open opportunities, we take it," he said.

For the game, the Yellow Jackets won the battle of the boards, 29-26, including a 15-10 advantage in the second half, and 42 of Sprayberry's 47 points came from within 10 feet of the basket.

"We're not a very good 3-point shooting team," Carver said, whose team went 0-for-3 from behind the arc. "That's where we need to score the majority of our points."

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