

Yellow Jackets surge for victory in second half

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MARIETTA — The chances of Sprayberry beating North Cobb Christian in Saturday’s SEBA Atlanta Hoop Festival weren’t looking good when it trailed by 16 points at halftime.

But not only did the Yellow Jackets storm back in the third quarter, they did so rather quickly, then dominated the fourth quarter to complete a 82-77 comeback victory at Pope’s Hound Pound.

“That was a good team, and this was a big win for us,” Sprayberry coach Marc Carver said. “We had nine players that scored, and they had six. We were able to use our bench (in the second half) to keep our energy up.”

Rodney Pearson led Sprayberry (9-4) with 16 points, while Chris Cottman scored 11 of his 15 in the second half. Mo Merritt posted a double-double of 14 points and 10 rebounds, and Djimon Wilson scored all 14 of his points in the second half.

Sprayberry scored seven points in a 1-minute span to start the second half, and Wilson had a hand in all of them. He assisted a Merritt layup, then made one on Sprayberry’s next possession before sinking a 3-pointer to cut North Cobb Christian’s lead to nine at the 7-minute mark.

“He’s like our Energizer Bunny,” Carver said of Wilson. “He’s played well all season.”

Defensively, Sprayberry came out playing zone in the second half, after going man-to-man in the first, and it helped Sprayberry create turnovers early in the third quarter.

North Cobb Christian's Kobe Wilson, who finished with 10 points, put back a missed shot to help the Eagles (8-1) keep their distance from Sprayberry, but the Yellow Jackets kept swarming. Cottman hit a 3 and Pearson made a pair of free throws to make it a two-possession game. Cottman then converted a layup off a turnover to bring it to four, forcing North Cobb Christian to call timeout at the 6:11 mark.

Sprayberry kept chipping away at North Cobb Christian in the third quarter and took its first lead on a pair of Pearson free throws with roughly 3 minutes to play.

Afterwards, the Eagles started making shots again, just like they did in the first half when they shot 48 percent from the field. They quickly snagged the lead back, and Hunter Norman and Wilson made back-to-back 3-pointers late in the quarter to extend their lead to seven. Will Crumly hit a 3 to preserve North Cobb Christian's seven-point lead going into the fourth.

North Cobb Christian's lead grew to nine points early in the fourth on a pair of Demiere Brown free throws.

Sprayberry then started chipping away at the lead by finishing its inside shots, and a 3-pointer from Bryce Brown got the Yellow Jackets back within four with 3:46 left to play.

Even with a four-point lead, North Cobb Christian couldn't put Sprayberry away.

"We held the ball for 2 minutes, and all we did was chuck a 3," North Cobb Christian coach Greg Matta said.

The Eagles also hurt themselves by committing a lane violation, which allowed Cottman a second chance to hit both free throws after missing one.

Cottman's free throws pulled Sprayberry within two and, two possessions later, Pearson hit a layup to give Sprayberry the lead. North Cobb Christian took the lead back on a Brown free throw before Sprayberry claimed it for good on a 3-pointer by Wilson.

Two more free throws by Cottman pushed it to four. Norman hit a deep 3 from the top of the key with 16 seconds left to put the Eagles behind by one before Bryce Brown and Wilson won it on the free-throw line.

Brown led the Eagles with 28 points and Crumly finished with 17.

"When we started getting hit, we didn't come back," Matta said. "They were aggressive and they kept coming at us in the second half. We just couldn't get a rebound."