

The fourth-ranked St. Mary's Tigers dropped a heartbreaker in front of a standing-room-only crowd in the Division IV select basketball quarterfinals to the fifth-ranked Lincoln Prep Panthers, 40-38, Friday night at home.

The Tigers (25-7) trailed for much of the night but hung right in the hip pocket of the Panthers (20-8) as they never trailed by more than seven.

The two teams battled back and forth in the first as the Panthers held a 13-11 advantage after the opening quarter. The defenses continued to clamp down in the second quarter. The two teams combined for just four field goals and 10 points in the period as Lincoln Prep held an 18-16 lead at halftime.

The Tigers trailed 24-21 late in the third quarter when Payne Williams and Ben Bienvenu hit back-to-back three-pointers to give SMH their first lead of the game, 27-26. However, the Panthers regained the lead as they 33-30 at the end of the third quarter.

The Panthers took their biggest lead of the night, 40-33, with under four minutes to go. After back a pair of lay-ups by Bienvenu, SMH trailed 40-37 with time dwindling. The Tigers had one final possession with 12 seconds left as the ball worked around to Ayden Warren in the corner.

The senior got a good look at a tying three-pointer but was fouled on the play as he nearly hit the shot. The Tigers' guard had to make all three free throws to tie the game with just 2.5 seconds remaining. He made the first one but missed the second forcing an intentional miss on the third one. SMH was called for a lane violation on the third free throw giving it back to the Panthers as time expired on the Tigers' remarkable run.

Bienvenu finished with 10 points to lead the Tigers while Warren had nine and Williams had eight.

With the loss, the careers of four dynamic seniors came to an end. Warren, Williams, Bienvenu and Mixon Bankston played their final games in a Tigers' uniform but the legacy the group left won't soon be forgotten.

"This senior group made their mark and rewrote some records," said SMH head coach Jake Bankston.

"They led by example and played hard for the name on their jersey each and every night. I'm so proud of how hard they played each and every night out for the program. It says something about them when all four have an opportunity to compete at the next level. They had three 20-plus win seasons for this program and will be remembered for a long time."