

The Natchitoches Central Chiefs and Lady Chiefs swept a district doubleheader Monday night at home over Benton with the Chiefs winning a thriller 68-66 and the Lady Chiefs cruising to a 56-32 win.

The Lady Chiefs (16-9, 5-3 in 1-5A) got off to a methodical start as they had a 22-13 lead at halftime. In the second half, NCHS took control as they built a 19-point lead at the end of the third quarter, 45-26, on their way to the win. The Lady Chiefs were led by Alyssa Chandler with 15 points while MaKayla "Tootie" Gallien and Akeelah Wade both had 14 points and eight rebounds to aid NCHS over Benton (15-12, 4-4 1-5A).

The Chiefs (19-3, 5-1 in 1-5A) were tested wire-to-wire by Benton (10-13, 2-4 in 1-5A) as it was an inauspicious start. NCHS opened the game with just one field goal and three points through the first four minutes of the game. The Chiefs, however, would tie the game at 11-11 at the end of the first quarter as Logan Smith drilled a three-pointer.

The Tigers continued to pressure the Chiefs as they held a 31-28 lead at halftime. As the third quarter continued to tick away, NCHS was facing unfamiliar territory; the possibility of a home loss. With Benton leading 47-40 with 1:03 to go in the third, the Chiefs launched a 12-0 run that trickled into the fourth quarter as they took a 52-47 lead with 6:02 to play.

Benton refused to go away as they regained the lead, 61-60, with 1:30 to go. However, it was a familiar face for NCHS that clutched up as Smith buried a three-pointer from the wing with 1:17 to go to give the Chiefs a 63-61 lead. Moments later, the Chiefs forced a turnover and Cam Davis was fouled before he knocked down two free throws with 45 seconds left to give NCHS a two-possession lead, 65-61.

The Chiefs maintained a three-point lead with three seconds left as Smith went to the line and drilled two free-throws to put the game away at 68-63. Consequently, the two seemingly insignificant free throws loomed large for NCHS as Benton made a half-court shot at the buzzer as the Chiefs hung on for the win to remain undefeated at the Teepee.

Smith finished the game with 17 points to lead the Chiefs while Ja'Corien Beard 16 points and snatched 12 rebounds. But junior Jayden Phanor was the unsung hero coming in off the bench and scoring 12 points while senior point guard Jaden Braden spent much of the game in foul trouble.

The Chiefs found a way to win despite shooting 5-for-20 from the three-point line and turning the ball over 22 times.

Next up, the Chiefs and Lady Chiefs will hit the road Wednesday night to face Southwood in Shreveport beginning at 6 p.m. with the girls' game.