



Chiefs title hopes fall short in 75-60 loss to Ponchatoula

The Natchitoches Central Chiefs' dreams of a state championship came up just short in Saturday night's 75-60 loss to second-ranked Ponchatoula, 75-60, in the Division I non-select State Championship at Burton Coliseum in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

The Chiefs (29-8) fell behind 20-9 in the first quarter as leading scorers Jaden Braden and Logan Smith both picked up their second fouls before the end of the period as Ponchatoula (30-4) took control.

NCHS mounted a huge comeback in the second quarter as senior Cam Davis caught fire scoring 12 of his 15 points in the first half. The Chiefs outscored the Greenwave 21-11 in the second quarter as they trailed 31-30 at halftime.

Braden got hot in the second half for the Chiefs as he finished with a team-high 21 points on 8-for-18 shooting. NCHS hung tough as they trailed, 40-36 halfway through the quarter.

But 6-foot-9-inch Allen Graves of the Greenwave was too much. The senior finished with 18 points, 20 rebounds and blocked eight shots as Ponchatoula took a 54-44 lead at the end of the third quarter.

The Chiefs never got closer than 10 the rest of the way as the Greenwave repeated as Division I State Champions.

"I felt like we played a really hard fought game against a really good opponent," said NCHS head coach Kolton Sepulvado. "Going back to back is very difficult and I respect them for what they've done. They did an unbelievable job. It's easy for everyone to see Graves because he's so big but they have others that can hurt you. But I'm just as proud of my guys after

the game as I was before the game. For us to have the season we had and to go and compete for a state championship against an unbelievable team after we only won 11 games last year is impressive and I'm proud of the amount of work that this team put in to get us to this point and I will always remember this group."

The Chiefs finished 23-for-61 (37 percent) while Ponchatoula was 29-for-60 for 48 percent. NCHS committed just nine turnovers for the game but was outrebounded by the Greenwave 44-32.