



Smith Scores 28 as Chiefs advance to Title Game

Logan Smith scored 28 points to lead the fifth-ranked Natchitoches Central Chiefs' basketball team past the eighth-ranked Ruston Bearkats, 60-56, Thursday night in the semifinals of the Division I non-select playoffs at Burton Coliseum in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

The Chiefs (29-7) took a three-point lead after the first quarter as Smith came out on fire scoring 11 points on three three-pointers in the opening quarter. NCHS led 19-16 at the end of the first.

The Bearkats (20-10) stormed back in the second quarter as NCHS led 22-18 early in the second period, but Ruston went on a 12-0 run to take a 30-22 lead with under three minutes left until halftime. The Chiefs limited the damage as they trailed 32-28 at the break.

The Chiefs retook the lead in the third and led 46-43 setting up a thrilling finish at Burton Coliseum.

NCHS took a two-possession lead early in the fourth quarter as Jaden Braden scored on a right-side lay-up. After a three-pointer by Ruston, Braden came back and scored again on a lay-up making it 50-46 NCHS with 5:38 to go. Smith added to the lead on an offensive rebound and lay-up with 5:02 left.

With the game hanging in the balance and the Chiefs clinging to a 54-53 lead, JaCorien Beard drilled a three-pointer at the top of the key to give NCHS a four-point lead with under two minutes to go.

The Chiefs' defense dominated the final two minutes, not allowing a field goal while Smith made three of four free throws to ice the game for NCHS.

NCHS shot 23-for-45 (51 percent) from the field and 8-for-13 from the three-point line. Braden finished with 14 points while Beard scored eight points. The Chiefs outrebounded the Bearkats, 3-27 and shot 6-for-11 from the free throw line. Ruston shot 20-for-54 (38 percent) from the field and was 10-for-11 from the charity stripe

NCHS advanced to the Division IV non-select title game Saturday at 8 p.m. against either Ponchatoula or New Iberia.