

Roller-coaster week

Lions score 99 to advance in ECACs after losing AMCC final



David Hairston (above) has had an impressive offensive showing in the ECAC tournament, scoring 29 points.

by Zoe Rose
contributing writer

They've gone farther than they did last year, and they're doing it in style. The Lions earned their sixth postseason appearance in seven years, accepting a bid into the Eastern College Athletic Conference Tournament. Behrend hosted Thiel in the first round. Aside from a slow start, Behrend dominated the game entirely.

The Lions had their best offensive performance. The team had a chance to score 100 points for the first time this season.

With 32.1 seconds left in the game, cheers of 100 swept the crowd as Tom Lulich approached the free-throw line. He missed both, so the crowd had to settle for a 99-point performance. When the buzzer sounded, the scoreboard read 99-77, a convincing win.

The Lions dominated Thiel all over the court. The Tomcats shot just 40 percent from three-point range while Behrend shot an amazing 81.3 percent. Also, the Lions also shot 15 percent higher in total field goal percentage. Behrend outrebounded Thiel 28-20 to solidify the statistical blowout.

In semifinal action this Saturday, Behrend will travel to Franklin & Marshall College to face No. 2 seed Desales. The No. 5 seeded Neumann Knights upset No. 4 Grove City 75-61 to advance to face

the No. 1 seeded Franklin & Marshall Diplomats on Saturday.

The ECAC title game will take place at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 9 in Franklin & Marshall's Maysers Center.

The Lions entered the ECAC tournament after they failed to receive a Division III tournament bid.

"There are a lot of great teams that came up just short of making the NCAA tournament, so we know we are going to face some tough competition," said Justin Jennings. "But we feel confident in our abilities as a team. We know if we play our game, then we are an extremely tough team to beat."

The Lions missed the bid due to their hard loss against Pitt-Bradford last Saturday, 62-59, at the Allegheny Mountain Collegiate Conference championship game. The Lions advanced to the title game after beating Lake Erie on Friday, 47-44. Leading the Lions in that lackluster offensive performance was James Curren, who had 17 points.

Starting the action against the Pitt-Bradford Panthers, Steve Merrill hit a three-pointer to help the Lions obtain a 5-0 lead. They didn't have the lead for long. By the 12:42 mark, Pitt-Bradford took over the lead 12-9 and kept increasing the gap throughout the first half. Plagued by calls in the first half that seemed to favor the Panthers, Behrend headed into halftime down 34-23.

"We played poorly in the first half," said Niland

"Eleven turnovers are hard to overcome. We did a much better job in the second half, which led to us making a comeback."

Another three-pointer by Merrill less than six minutes into the second half cut the deficit to 14, 43-29. The Lions didn't reach a single digit until Casey Ponsoll was fouled at 7:44 making it 52-43. This brought the crowd back into the game. On a drive, Tom Lulich was fouled, tightening the score to 59-52 with 3:36 left to go. Following a time-out at 1:10, the nail-biting began on the Behrend side of the court: Lulich made a crucial three-pointer to bring the game to 61-57, the closest it had been since the first few minutes of the first half.

"I knew as soon as he put it up it was going down," said Jennings of Lulich's clutch shot. "Tom has hit a lot of big shots for us this year. When the game is on the line, he's always willing to take the big one. The team has a lot of confidence in him."

Next, it was Curren's time to shine. After grabbing the ball from Pitt's stand-out player Matt Beacom, Curren brought the game to within two points with a strong inside presence. The game looked like it was in anyone's hands after a time-out at 18.3 seconds.

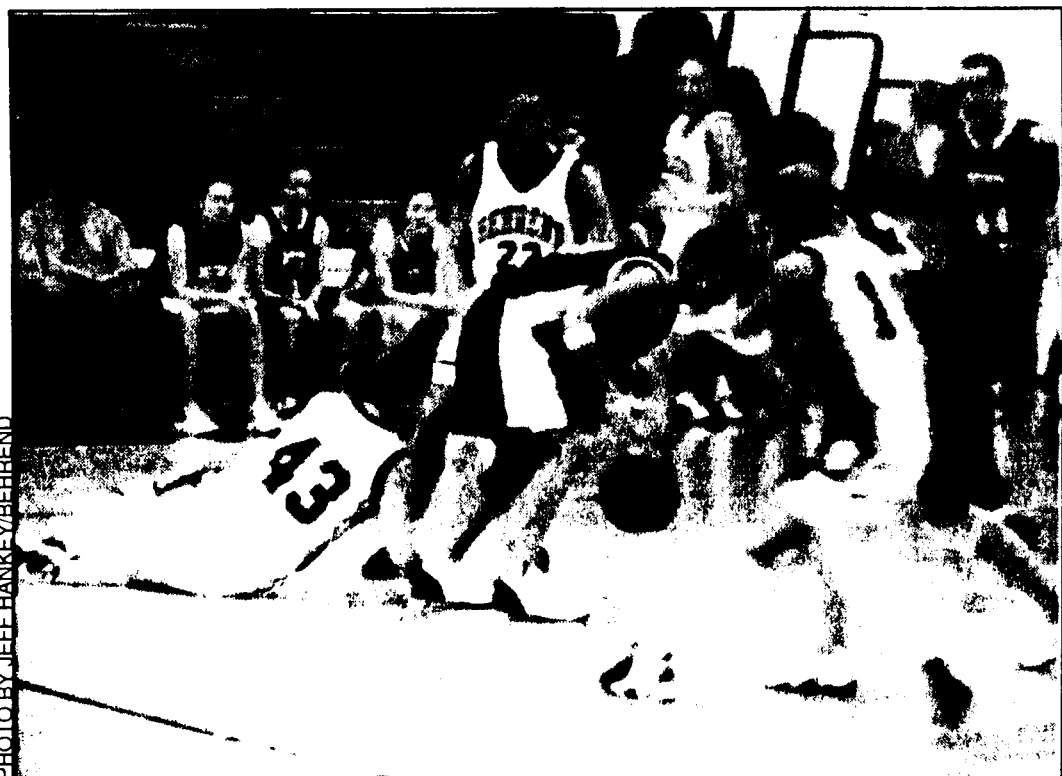
Pitt-Bradford's Antuan Mills was fouled, missing the first but making the second, making the score

62-59 with 12.8 seconds left to play. It wasn't quite over yet, though. Behrend had one more clear shot. Lulich took the shot that just missed sending the game into overtime.

The Lions had a few individual awards. The AMCC named Curren the 2002-2003 AMCC Player of the Year, and Niland was honored as Co-Coach of the Year. Making the first team all-conference with Curren was Hairston, who made second team all-conference.

Behrend falls

Women lose two playoff games in a row



The Lions fought hard in the AMCC championship game, going to the floor often for loose balls. Behrend's turnovers cost the team dearly in the AMCC championship.

by Kevin Fiorenzo
staff writer

On Friday, the women's basketball team played up to their No. 1 seed in the AMCC tournament by defeating No. 4 Frostburg State in the semifinals. However, the Lions lost in the finals to Pitt-Greensburg in an overtime nail-biter.

Coming into the game, the women were brimming with confidence after beating Pitt-Greensburg the previous week and claiming the top seed in the conference tournament. The win also ensured that the Behrend squad would host the

tournament. Their opponent in the semifinal was Frostburg State, a team Behrend beat in two hard-fought contests during the regular season. Frostburg started out very pumped up, playing some great defense. They couldn't sustain that intensity, though, as Behrend started chipping away at the big lead. Going into the half Behrend had come all the way back, tying the game 33-33.

Behrend didn't let up once the game resumed. The momentum they had built at the end of the first half kept up early in the second half and the women created a big lead.

Frostburg didn't have any answers and never

recovered. The nail in the coffin was a technical foul at the end of the game that gave Behrend a few easy points. When all was said and done, the Lions came out with the commanding victory, 72-58.

Leading the way for Behrend was forward Amber Krumpe, who had 21 points, six rebounds and three assists, and guard Danielle Bemis, with 15 points. Coach Roz Fornari believed that the turning point came during the intermission.

"We made a decision at halftime to have fun more and look to run out and kick out rebounds. We were playing really good defense and rebounding well."

Behrend's opponent the next day in the championship game was a familiar foe. For the third time, the Lions played Pitt-Greensburg. Behrend had won the first two contests, the latest coming just a week before. Not surprisingly, the contest was extremely hard fought. Neither team dominated, and the game ended up being a showcase for great defensive play. Going into the intermission, the Lions were up by only a single-point, 23-22.

The low scoring trend didn't cease after halftime and both teams did their best stay in the game. Behrend had the lead for most of the half and seemed to be well on their way to the victory. Pitt-Greensburg, though, never gave up and took the lead down the stretch. They seemed to have the game won, but a clutch three by Behrend guard Carly Cochran kept the Lions in the game. The game ended up going to overtime, with the score deadlocked at 49.

In contrast to the even play of both teams during regulation, the overtime period showcased a dominant performance from Pitt-Greensburg. They made all the important shots they needed and also continued to play smothering defense that kept Behrend from scoring. Greensburg went on a 16-2

run in the overtime and ended up winning the game and the championship by a wide margin, 65-51.

"In overtime we could not make a basket," said Fornari. "They shot poorly all game and we shot 45 percent, then in overtime, we were 0-8. When you don't make a basket and the other team gets hot from the floor, it is very difficult to win."

Along with Behrend's scoring drought, one of the most significant stats from the game was Behrend's number of turnovers, a key weakness for the Lions all year long. They turned the ball over 31 times.

Though the Lions were feeling down about the game, their season wasn't over yet. Behrend got one of the last bids for the ECAC tournament and played McDaniel on Wednesday. The women were still reeling from their loss on Saturday and were never able to get into the game. Behrend got 16 points from Krumpe, but it wasn't enough to beat McDaniel, which dominated 67-42. Turnovers were once again a significant problem as Behrend turned the ball over 30 times.

"I think we 'hit the wall' during the Greensburg game and didn't have the stamina to compete at McDaniel," Fornari said.

"We did a poor job of executing our game plan and had several players not playing well."

So the season for the Lions ended with a disappointing finish and a 15-13 record. Even though things didn't pan out the way the team would have hoped, they see it as a success.

"I am happy with the way our team battled all year. I am confident that the experiences we had throughout will help us be successful in the future. We have a good core of players to build around and have to use this year to see what we need to work on," Fornari said.