

## Proving we were a team

Written by Administrator  
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### ***By Preston Wells***

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Playing sports always includes adversity, especially in high school. Wherever there is a group of teenagers put together to play for the same team, there too will be conflict; that's just part of how life works. However, it is how these student athletes approach and overcome this conflict that leads to their success in the season. A team could have all the athleticism in the world, but they are nothing if they are not a team.

I played for the Hugo basketball team this year. Playing through the season with nearly a different roster every week was our biggest conflict. With nearly five games left in the regular season, our roster stayed the same the rest of the year. So even though our first game was Dec. 1, we didn't become a team until the start of February, seems a bit late doesn't it? We were one win away from state, and we headed to Muskogee. On the way there, I was trying to envelop the whole experience. I examined the faces of every player on the bus; the excitement gleamed in their eyes. The roaring cheerleaders socialized amongst each other. Coach Shanklin rested his head on the seat as usual as he tried to get some rest. Then it happened, right there in the middle of the highway, with every person in McAlester watching. The bus broke down. Shouts of, "I knew this would happen," to, "the cheerleaders better get out and push!" rang out inside the bus. Fortunately, the bus started rolling again and we made it all the way to the game site. Just one turn left to make, the bus broke down once again. That's something I'll never forget.

Once in the state tournament, we were ecstatic. We got out of school, got to stay in a hotel, and most of all we enjoyed each other's company. That day, we were set to face St. Mary's. We didn't know what to expect, we just knew we were going to bring our best game. From that first day, I could tell that everyone on the team knew what we were there for — we wanted to prove that we deserved to be in the state tournament. The pre-game warm up was probably what I'll remember most. As we were doing lay-ups, I laid my eyes on the St. Mary's crowd. A blanket of blue covered the stands above the goal. The student section screamed various chants. One that stuck in all of our heads was the, "I believe that we can win" chant. I believe that was our motivator in that game, to silence the St. Mary's crowd, and that's what we did.

The next day, we played the defending champs, Cascia Hall. The fourth quarter of that game was most memorable. I remember looking behind our bench just to look at our crowd. The entire section, from left to right, was standing on their feet. I couldn't believe my eyes. That was when we took control and defeated them. After jumping up and down after the final buzzer, I remember looking at the faces of the opposing players. I could see the shock in their eyes. I don't think they really expected to get beat by a little southeast public school, but we proved them wrong.

That night, I remember telling fellow teammate Patrick Smith, "We're playing in the state championship tomorrow." He replied, "Just seems like another game doesn't it?"

Everything was so surreal. The next day, the team had breakfast together then headed to the Big House. In the locker room before the game, Coach Shanklin talked about our opponent but, just like he had said the entire season, he once again stated, "This isn't about Milwood, how they play or how tough they are. This is about us."

I remember running onto the court, the lights spotlighting every inch of the wood. As we warmed up, I watched the fans pour into the stands. They shared the same excitement as us and I could

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feel the support. The game started, and the challenge began. It seemed like during the whole game, the Hugo crowd was standing. That was so incredible to me. I never thought that would actually happen.

Although we ended up losing on the scoreboard, I felt like we still won. We proved we deserved to be there, and we let it be known to the rest of the state that Hugo could play ball too. It was an honor to pick up the silver ball, an award to show the amount of work put into this season. The last memory of the state tournament was walking out of the locker room after the game. It seemed like everyone from Hugo was there to greet and congratulate us. The community support was truly immeasurable. I'll remember every part of this amazing experience, and I'm pretty sure it'll be in our minds when we try to get back to the championship next year. Then we'll have more confidence than ever.