

## Argylls top Eagles for CIC-title share

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Jan 30, 2021 CONVERSE – Before the season even began, first-year Madison-Grant boys' basketball coach Kevin Cherry expected his senior-laden team to be conference champions.

Flip the calendar forward a few months and the Argylls had positioned themselves for such a moment. Just two days after knocking off Class 2A 7th-ranked Blackford and Luke Brown in a battle for first place, M-G visited county-rival Oak Hill, a place the Argylls hadn't won a regular-season game since Nov. 24, 2004.

From the opening tip, the 2A 11th-ranked Argylls controlled and frustrated the Golden Eagles on their way to a 60-41 victory Friday evening, clinching at minimum a share of the CIC crown.

"Really proud of our guys for coming in here and accomplishing that after a really good win for us on Wednesday," said an elated Cherry. "This could have been an opportunity to maybe come in and maybe have a little bit of a letdown. Instead, it was just the opposite. I thought we came out really focused, locked in defensively and made some shots early."

For the first time all season, Oak Hill was playing in front of a home crowd that consisted of more than just parents. The 500 fans had barely settled into their seats before M-G raced to a 7-0 advantage on a Jase Howell opening drive, followed by a Justin Moore bucket and a Grant Brown 3-pointer.

"I was really, really impressed with Madison-Grant and the way they came out," complimented Oak Hill coach Kevin Renbarger, whose team also lost at home in the Grant Four to the Argylls 51-35 a month ago. "You put in the idea they just played a high-level basketball game a couple nights ago for the lead in the conference and turn around and play a team that they handled very easily the last time. That says a lot about the senior leadership that they have and where the coach has this team going right now."

M-G was just getting started as they connected on their first six shots to start the opening quarter, then stretched the lead to double-figures (17-5) for good after a Jackson Manwell 3-pointer.

Oak Hill went without a field goal for over 10-minutes in the first half, a stretch that began after a Kian Hite bucket at the 3:06 mark of the first quarter. It was Hite, who scored nine points in the half, that ultimately ended the drought when he sank a pair of buckets in the final minute of the second period. Hite's 3-pointer at the buzzer trimmed the Argylls' lead to 30-14 at the break.

Golden Eagle leading scorer Landon Biegel was unable to get going as the Argylls forced him into contested shots. The sophomore was held to just 1-of-7 shooting in the decisive first half before finishing with 11 points.

"We knew we had to come out with a lot of energy and put them away early," commented Brown, who was assigned to guard Biegel. "Our focus was to contain (Landon Biegel) and to make it a struggle for them."

And a struggle it was as the Golden Eagles, who made just 4-of-15 field goal attempts in the first half and shot just over 33-percent on the night (13-of-39).

M-G was never seriously threatened in the second half as the lead never dipped below 14 points (37-23) following a Matthew Strange 3-pointer in the third quarter.

Brown poured in a game-high 23 points on 8-of-13 shooting, as well as hitting all four free throw attempts while grabbing nine rebounds. Kaden Howell was next in line with 12 points.

"It is phenomenal," said Jase Howell of playing with this core group. "They can all score it and do special things. I've grown up playing with them ever since I was young, so there is a lot of team chemistry there."

While the Argylls are led primarily by seniors, the sophomore point guard Jase Howell has a motor that never stops. He chipped in 11 points and played tenacious on-the-ball defense.

"(Jase) brings something to our team that it frankly needed," praised Cherry. "Just that sense of toughness. He competes every day like that in practice and in every drill, and that rubs off on those other guys."

Hite paced Oak Hill with 13 points.

Madison-Grant won going away in the JV contest 50-28. Teagan Yeagy led the way with 13 points for the Argylls. Evan Pearce registered nine points for Oak Hill.

Madison-Grant improved to 13-2 on the year and remained perfect in league play at 6-0. The Argylls travel to Bluffton on Saturday. Looming in the distance is a Feb. 12 trip to Alexandria for a chance to earn their first outright CIC title.

"We are a confident bunch, and we should be," Cherry said. "We have put a tremendous amount of work into our preparation. They are a senior-led group. So, they have been through these battles before."

Oak Hill (9-6, 3-2 CIC) has a very short turn around, traveling to Lapel on Saturday where the varsity tip has moved up to approximately 2 p.m.