

Atholton rallies for 1st title

Chapman scores 21; No. 9 Raiders erase 9-point deficit with 20-1 run

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With four seconds left in yesterday's Class 2A state title game, Atholton junior Brittany Coughlan finally allowed herself to smile as she worked her way to the foul line.

She got a hug from Elie Snyder while Taylor Chapman took a quick look at the scoreboard and clapped. Behind them, fellow starters Julie Taylor and Julianne Conroy got together for some happy words.

A short time later, the rest of the No. 9 Raiders had excitedly convened at midcourt of UMBC's RAC Arena, celebrating the program's first state championship.

The seven minutes of game time prior - played under trying circumstances against an equally scrappy Southern team from Anne Arundel - turned out to be some of the finest basketball the Raiders had played all season.

Hitting from the outside, attacking the basket for inside points, causing turnovers and showing good aim at the foul line, they overcame a nine-point deficit with a 20-1 run that proved the difference in a 69-62 win.

Chapman, a junior forward, scored eight of her 21 points in the pivotal stretch and added 15 rebounds. Coughlan had 19 points and Taylor, a guard who became the program's all-time leading scorer late in the season, finished with 11 points and 16 rebounds.

In winning championships in Howard County, the South region and the state, the Raiders finish their season with a 25-3 mark, accomplishing the lofty goals that were first thought about this time last year when they lost in the semifinal round.

"Our goal from the beginning was to win the county, region and states and we knew it was going to be really hard," Taylor said. "So I'm just so proud of how hard we worked and how far we've come. We got here last year and to come and not get it was tough. Getting it finally, this feels so good."

The Bulldogs (20-6), looking for their sixth state championship in their state-best 13th tournament appearance, looked to have taken control of a game filled with streaks when they got a three-point play from Kimberly Schneck (21 points) to take a 53-44 lead with 7:35 left to play.

But the 11-2 run the Bulldogs enjoyed forced Atholton to call a timeout, and the Raiders came back to the court a different team.

"We knew we're capable of going on runs," Coughlan said. "When we played Potomac [in the region final], we were down and got six points in the last 40 seconds [of the first half]. We even said that before the game ... if we ever got down that wasn't going to stop us at all because we're capable of getting six points in 40 seconds. So we knew that even when we were down, we couldn't lose hope because we knew we could come back strong."

A three-pointer and driving layup from Taylor helped the Raiders cut the lead to 53-51, and they took the lead for good with a play that typified their postseason run. Taylor pressured Southern senior guard Brittany Wiseman into a bad pass at midcourt, and Snyder grabbed the ball and ended up converting a three-point play.

"After that, we knew," Snyder said. "We had the momentum to keep going and we weren't going to stop after that. I knew she was going to throw it to my girls, so I just blocked it and finished."

Chapman then hit two free throws and scored two baskets inside to help close out the game.

"It got down to those last seven minutes and it was like: 'This is it. You worked all year for this, and you're not going to let it go without at least a fight,'" Atholton coach Maureen Shacreaw said. "And then they did take a step back and regrouped and things started falling the way they did [in Friday's semifinal win against Walkersville] and the last couple weeks."

The loss doesn't take away from a fine season by the Bulldogs, who made their way back to the state tournament with a different approach after reaching the semifinals last season. After graduating two of their starting post players, they relied on defensive pressure and more of a perimeter game to continue their winning ways.

"I'm very pleased," Southern coach Linda Kilpatrick said. "They [Southern players] really stepped up. We changed our style of play this year and they bought right into from the beginning of the season and just played outstanding."

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