

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 18, 2009

Contact: Cindy Smith
(432) 264-5034; 517-0073

From the Big Spring Herald
March 17, 2009

Sports Editor: Jonathan Hull
(432) 263-7331

Hawks Fall in NJCAA Opener

SALINA, Kan. – Howard College's women's basketball team is grateful to be at the NJCAA National Tournament, but the Hawks aren't exactly satisfied, either.

This is why Tuesday's 61-55 loss to the 11th-seeded Kaskaskia College (Ill.) Blue Angels in the first round in Salina, Kan., is disappointing.

Adding to the letdown is the way Howard opened the game, leading by as many as 18 points in the first half.

"Without question, this is a game that got away from us," said Howard coach Earl Diddle. "Early in the game, we were up 12-0 and I was sitting there thinking we should be ahead 24-0. We missed some wonderful opportunities early and the next thing you know Kaskaskia is coming back."

Howard, which is a sixth seed in the tournament field of 16, scored the first 12 points of the contest. Kaskaskia didn't make its first basket until almost eight minutes had elapsed from the game clock, when Keianna Harris connected with a jumper in the lane.

The Hawks' lead ballooned to 18 points by the 9:03 mark, 23-5, and stayed in double digits until there was 3:22 to play in the first half.

Kaskaskia's run started at the 3:57 mark. Down 28-13, the Blue Angels outscored the Hawks, 14-5, in the final four minutes of the first half, trimming what was once an 18-point advantage to 6, 33-27.

"They were a tough group," said Diddle. "They got some offensive rebounds and we were forced into a lot of turnovers, which is a testament to Kaskaskia's defense. We got out of our rhythm offensively and never got it back. We let them fight back into this game and at the end it was anybody's for the taking."

Kaskaskia came out of the break still holding the momentum. It took sophomore Whitney Williams just seven seconds to score the first basket of the second half after she took the inbounds pass and fought her way to the hoop for a layup.

Williams added a second layup to pull Kaskaskia within 2, 33-31, with 19:10 remaining to play.

The Hawks fought off the Blue Angels and held the lead until the 16:30 mark, when another jumper from Evans gave Kaskaskia its first lead of the contest, 36-35.

From that point, the Hawks and Blue Angels traded the lead six times with the final change coming with five minutes to play.

Howard had inched out to a 5-point advantage with 6:57 left, courtesy of back-to-back jumpers by sophomores DeAndra Thomas and Rachael Dryver.

Kaskaskia point guard Takara Harris drained a 3-pointer from the corner to cut the deficit back to 2, then rebounded her own miss and got the putback on the following possession, tying the game at 49.

Erica Lewis, who led all scorers with 19 points, went 1 for 2 at the line to give Kaskaskia the lead for good, 50-49, with five minutes left.

By the 1:44 mark, the Blue Angels had executed a 13-3 run for a 57-52 lead. They went 4 for 4 in the final minute, putting the game out of reach for Howard.

Thomas led the Hawks with 11 points with Miesha Blackshear being the only other player in double figures scoring for Howard with 10 points. Blackshear made it a double-double performance, securing 10 boards as well.

Lewis' 19 was complimented by 12 from Williams for Kaskaskia.

The biggest thorn in Howard's side was scoring as the Hawks shot just 33.8 percent for the game, including a dismal 23.5 percent in the second half alone.

Meanwhile, Kaskaskia shot better than 50 percent in the final 20 minutes and 43.9 percent overall.

Kaskaskia moves on to face third-seeded Connors State College (Okla.) at 6 p.m. Wednesday.

Howard moves to the consolation bracket and meets Vincennes University (Ind.) at 4 p.m. Wednesday. Connors defeated Vincennes, 78-64, in the first game of the tournament.

Vincennes was led by Ashley Buis in the loss, who rained in four 3-pointers in a 21-point performance. Hope Elam registered a double-double with 12 points and 12 boards.

Diddle says Howard still has plenty to play for despite being out of the running for a national title.

"We're happy to be at the national tournament and don't want this to be a short trip," said Diddle. "We're disappointed with the loss, but these girls play with a lot of pride. I think we match up with Vincennes very well. They have some height and shoot the ball well. Defensively, they play a zone. I think it will be a tremendous game."

**Kaskaskia College 61,
Howard College 55**

Kaskaskia (26-6)

Kelly Albers 2-6 1-1 5, Sad'a Ray 4-7 0-0 8, Takara Harris 2-4 2-2 7, Erica Lewis 8-12 2-3 19, Whitney Williams 5-11 2-3 12, Normeka Holder 0-7 0-0 0, Lindsey Davis 0-1 0-0 0, Keianna Evans 3-8 2-6 8, Sharika Harris 1-2 0-0 2. Totals 25-57 9-15 61.

Howard (26-8)

Rachael Dryver 3-8 1-2 7, DeAndra Thomas 5-7 1-9 11, Miesha Blackshear 3-10 4-7 10, Patricia Malouff 2-8 0-0 5, Chassidy Cole 3-10 0-0 7, Clarissa Krum 3-12 0-0 8, Danielle Cota 2-6 0-0 4, NaTalia Smith 1-4 0-0 2. Totals 22-65 6-18 55.

Halftime: HC 33, KC 27. 3-point goals: KC 2-6 (Harris 1-1, Lewis 1-1, Evans 0-2, Williams 0-1, Davis 0-1), HC 5-24 (Krum 3-11, Malouff 1-4, Cole 1-5, Blackshear 0-2, Dryver 0-1, Smith 0-1). Total fouls: KC 17, HC 15. Fouled out: Thomas. Rebounds: KC 48 (Williams 10), HC 40 (Dryver 10, Blackshear 10). Assists: KC 6 (Williams 3), HC 7 (Cole 3). Steals: KC 8 (Williams 3), HC 13 (Blackshear 5). Turnovers: KC 27, HC 19.