

Gallup Lady Bengals leaving everything on the court

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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Team prepares for state basketball

Dalayah Morris takes a deep breath before lining up for a free shot. She knows she has to remain calm and not let the crowd's cheers distract her. She shoots, she scores, helping the Lady Bengals increase their lead in the Division Championship game against the Kirtland Central Lady Broncos. The Lady Bengals won the Feb. 25 game 54-46, punching their ticket to the first round of the State Championship, which took place March 3.

Staying calm was one of the key portions of the girls' strategy. Morris, a senior, bases her strategy off a saying she learned from her grandfather: "moving like water."

"You need to be like water for a lot of things to go your way," Morris explained. "You have to be under control, you have to be patient, and take things slow."

Kiera Livingston, another senior on the team, shared a different strategy.

"Our strategy will just be pushing the ball and keeping the energy high and not giving them the chance to think they can beat us," Livingston said.

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Livingston said that one key element to the team's playbook is their defense. The defense puts pressure on their opponents, and Livingston said that's a big component that helps the Lady Bengals win.

Talking about the first-round game March 3, Livingston said she knew the team would have to "bring it" if they were going to move on to state.

"The whole entire game I knew we had to come out with a lot of energy and get off to a fast start," Livingston said. "We were ready to punch our ticket to go to the Pit so we were getting mentally ready. It was just a fun game altogether."

The girls won against the Albuquerque Academy Lady Chargers 60-34.

Although Morris and Livingston were a part of the champion team in 2021, Livingston said this win as a senior would mean a lot more.

"Now, as I'm a senior and I'm actually doing my part for the team, it means so much to me and I'm so excited to be going to the Pit again and having that experience," Livingston said.

Morris said she plans on doing everything she can to help her team win in her final year as a Lady Bengal.

"I want to leave everything I have left on the court and just be able to say I did everything I could to help my teammates and try to achieve my goal of winning the title," Morris said.

The girls continued their winning streak by beating the Valencia Jaguars in the quarterfinals March 7 with a score of 60-37.

CONTINUING THE LEGACY

This could mark the Lady Bengals' seventh state basketball title in the school's history.

In an interview with the *Sun*, Coach Todd McBroom said the legacy is all thanks to former coach John Lomasney.

Lomasney started his career as the high school girls' basketball coach in the late '80s, and went on to lead the girls to four championships before he retired after the 2008-09 season.

"Lomasney was the one who turned the program into the tradition of what it is today," McBroom said. "I've heard stories [about how] people didn't really come to the girls' games and then when Coach Lomasney took over it was just a day and night change with how it worked."

McBroom is in his sixth season as head coach. He came into the program at the beginning of the 2016-17 season.

When asked during the interview before the March 3 game how he felt going into the first round of state, he said he was feeling good.

"We're starting to – in my opinion – play our best basketball of the year. This is the time you want to do that," McBroom said. "We just beat Kirtland basically two times in the past two weeks, and they've got the one seed so I feel good about where we are right now."

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McBroom said something that makes the Gallup team different than any other team is the girls' willingness to put time in at the gym.

"I think it comes down to you have kids who show up and they work hard in the gym, and you don't get that everywhere, I promise," McBroom said. "I've been places, I've talked to the other coaches, and there are other programs where they struggle to get kids in the gym and we consistently get a whole bunch of kids in the gym. When you get a whole bunch of kids working, it makes it competitive from within."

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