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Troy Etsitty shines in win with 19 points

The Gallup Bengals tightened up on defense and took advantage of a cold-shooting Artesia team in the second half and beat the Bulldogs 60-45 in the Jan. 7 championship game of the annual Gallup Invitational Basketball Tournament at Gallup High School.

The Bengals improved to 5-8 and Artesia fell to 9-4 on the 2016-2017 basketball season. The Bengals blew through the tournament with prior wins over Tohatchi (78-31) and Miyamura (69-42). In winning the weekend championship game, the Bengals avenged a 63-40 loss to Artesia last month at Artesia.

“We came together in a much better fashion on offense and defense in the second half,” Bengals’ head coach James Voight said. “We were able to control their big guys and they missed some shots, and that helped as well.”

Sophomore guard Seth Manuelito and junior guard Noah Romero consistently found openings in the Bulldogs’ interior defense in the second half, something that was practically non-existent in the first half. In what turned out to be a big defensive boost, the Bengals held the Bulldogs to just 4 points in the third quarter, while Gallup scored 17. It seemed like Artesia sat on the number 35 forever in the third quarter.

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Throughout the third quarter, Gallup power forward Troy Etsitty maneuvered inside for back door points and put backs – and at times simply overpowered the Bulldogs inside and outside with sheer strength and determination.

“They are a good team, I’ll say that,” Artesia head coach Michael Mondragon said. “They were able to get some inside shots in the third quarter and that momentum carried forward to the fourth quarter. We had a stretch where we were getting shots, but just couldn’t hit anything.”

Etsitty dominated down low in the second half, hitting inside shots on passes from Manuelito and grabbing misses by Romero and sharp-shooting guard Nate John. Artesia’s interior trio of Alan Casio, Joe Willingham and Tanner Harris couldn’t get into a rhythm due to the fact that the beefy Etsitty was clogging the middle with regularity.

The going got so good for the Bengals that Voight inserted his second stringers with about a minute left in the game and Gallup leading 59-38.

Etsitty ended with 19 points and John put in 16 points and Manuelito hit 10. Etsitty was named Most Valuable Player of the championship game. Gallup takes on Thoreau (6-10) in an away game on Jan. 13.

“We won,” Miss Gallup High Ashtynn Samuels said after the game and after the award ceremony which she participated in. “It was a good game.”

By Bernie Dotson
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