Ram comeback nips Leopards

By Mike Sorensen
Deseret News sports writer

It was a classic Highland-East basketball game. The kind you might see late in the season when the region title is at stake or during the state tournament. It had the same type of intensity.

But this was just a mid-December clash for the championship of the Salt Lake Valley Basketball Tournament at Highland High School Friday night.

And the Rams were the victors, overcoming an 11-point deficit in the final quarter to win 75-66.

The contest between the two undefeated clubs lived up to its advance expectations. The big question going into the game was which would be more effective — East's strong inside game or Highland's quick pressing defense.

The answer was both. East dominated the game for three quarters, controlling the boards and getting second, third, and fourth shots over the smaller Rams to lead 54-43.

But the fourth quarter was all Highland, as the Ram press went to work, forcing numerous East turnovers, giving Highland a 31-12 last-quarter advantage.

"It was a matter of pride on their part," Ram coach Larry Maxwell said of his players' last quarter comeback. "I told the kids that as long as there was time on the clock to keep hustling. They did and I'm proud of them."

Down 11 starting the fouth quarter, the Rams took just two minutes and 17 seconds to catch up.

Spencer Hewlett started the rally with a couple of free throws and then the Ram press accounted for three lightning-quick baskets. Gordon Kener hit two layups off assists from Mike Maxwell and John Baucom hit one. When Hewlett dropped in two more foul shots it was a tie ball game.

Then East's two big men, Rich Gremillion and Dave Johnson, fouled out and things looked bleak for the Leopards even though it was tied. But give the Leopards credit, they didn't give up.
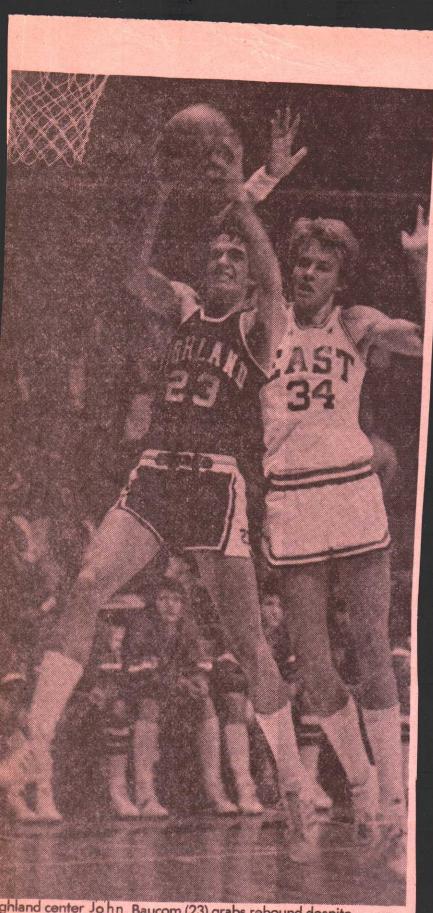
The game was still tied at 62 with 2:20 to play when George Furgis hit a 20-footer. But Kener, Maxwell, and Baucom all hit baskets down the stretch to expand the Ram lead.

Maxwell, despite playing on a bad left leg, led Highland with 24 points and was named the Most Valuable Player of the tournament. Baucom, named to the all-tournament team, finished with 17, while Kener had 15.

East was led by Brad Boyle, who had an outstanding game, with 20 points, followed by Gremillion and Johnson, who both made the all-tournament team, with 14 and 13, respectively. East missed the services of Tim Lunt, who sat out the game because of a back injury suffered in Thursday's win over Orem.

Earlier in the evening, Skyline captured third place in the tourney by downing Orem 73-64.

In the consolation final, West took fourth by edging Alta 47-44.

ghland center John Baucom (23) grabs rebound despite
forts of East's Rich Gremillion during Valley championship tilt.