

Tank McNamara

By Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds



4-A Basketball Meet

Skyline, Brighton to Clash In 1st Round Prep Action

By Roger Graves
Tribune Sports Writer

The elimination process began with 22 teams nearly five months ago. But now, only 16 Class 4-A basketball teams remain.

They will arrive at the University of Utah Friday and Saturday, six from the north (Region One), five from the south and west (Region Two), and five representing central Salt Lake (Region Three) in search of a common dream.

Each will be seeking the 1979 Utah Class 4-A state championship, one of the most prestigious awards in the Beehive State. The formula is simple. Any team which wins four consecutive games in the Special Events Center will be crowned the 1979 4-A champion. Let's meet the teams and study this weekend's first-round matchups.

Friday's Opening Round

Skyline (16-5) vs. Brighton (15-5), 2:30 p.m.—Confrontations of this magnitude are normally reserved for the semifinals or final, but only one of these powers will advance beyond the first round. Skyline has already treated Brighton to a first-hand display of its explosiveness. The Eagles secured a 15-point triumph at Brighton during pre-season warfare. But how meaningful is a game in December?

"We have something to live up to," noted Brighton Coach Duke Reid. "They humbled us a little bit in that pre-season game. That was our only pre-season loss. We're not worrying about the past though. Our whole season starts Friday, and the kids are excited to be where they are."

"A pre-season win like that doesn't mean an awful lot," confided Skyline Coach Paul Jeppeson. "I just hope our kids don't feel like they just have to show up to win. You never know what will happen in the tournament. Our goal is to win the state championship, and that means beating Brighton Friday."

In the talent department, it will be Skyline's Brandon Bennett (15.3 average) and Scott Spurrier (17.1 norm) matching jumpers with Brighton guards Brad Steinke (13.8) and Mike Hudson (13.8).

Roy (16-5) vs. Bingham (5-13), 4:10 p.m.—Remember the 1978 4-A semifinals? To refresh your memory, Bingham outdueled Roy in a semi-close affair. Bingham went on to annex its second straight state title. Roy also continued winning, and finished third in the 4-A tournament. Of course, the Miners are hopeful history will repeat itself Friday, while the Royals hope to reverse the 1978 result.

Roy enters this first-round encounter riding an eight-game winning streak, while Bingham has failed to win eight games this year. However, there may be an equalizer. The Miners own an impeccable state tradition. Plus, Roy may be without the services of 6-8 Mark Sindle, who tore ankle ligaments during practice Monday.

"Sindle's status is doubtful for Friday," said Roy Coach Ted Smith. "If we can use him at all, it will be sparingly. But we've had injuries before, and the players have bound together. I think we have some good momentum going for us, and I'm planning on a good first round game."

"Entering the tournament as the defending champion can work both ways," analyzed Bingham Coach George Sluga. "I think it will give our kids the incentive to go for three in a row, but it will also provide Roy with a revenge motive since we beat them last year on our way to the championship."

Hillcrest (15-5) vs. West (8-12), 6:30 p.m.—Comparative records may spell a mismatch. But be not deceived. Hillcrest, which leads the league in hard-luck tournament losses (like a 72-foot shot which buried the Huskies in double overtime), brings a three-game winning streak into the tournament. Meanwhile, West is again healthy and is always a "tournament tough" team.

The Panthers edged the Huskies 47-45 in quarterfinals en route to the 1975 4-A title, and West Coach Clark Godfrey still insists "that was by far our most difficult game of the tournament that year." But 1975 is now a piece of radiant history for West. How does Godfrey size up the 1979 confrontation?

"That (Mike) Bernardo is as fast as Spiderman, isn't he?" said Godfrey, "and (Bob) Keyes has no range. He can shoot from as far out as Chava Lopez used to, and that's about 40 feet away."

East (18-3) vs. Weber (11-9), 8:10 p.m.—The Region Three champion Leopards lost an emotional affair at Highland Tuesday, and also lost its unbeaten league season. The complexion of this matchup may be determined by East's ability or inability to forget the "Highland Incident."

Weber, which dropped four of its last five games in Region One, matches up well with East. And vice versa. Chief characters to watch in this first rounder are East's Greg Grant, Rich Gremillion and Brad Boyle, and Weber's Mark Montgomery, Brad Hall and Bruce Thorpe.

Saturday's 4-A Matchups

Highland (20-3) vs. Viewmont (12-10), 2:30 p.m.—Now that Highland has taken home the Salt Lake Valley Tournament championship, the Rancho Holiday Classic title from Las Vegas, and second place honors in Region Three, its next matter of business is the 4-A state championship.

Highland's Mike Maxwell, a consummate showman in each of the last three 4-A tournaments, makes his final appearances in a Ram uniform, and enters the '79 affair as the highest scorer in Class 4-A basketball with a 30.5 average. Viewmont's Jim Miller, Brad Thacker and Jim Miller must stop Maxwell, John Baucom and Gordon Kener if the Vikings hope to survive the first round.

Clearfield (16-4) vs. Cottonwood (8-13), 4:10 p.m.—The Falcons coasted through the first half of the Region One season undefeated, before finishing in a second-place tie with Layton. Now, Coach Craig Hansen hopes Clearfield will begin its "second season" in the same manner it inaugurated the region season. Meanwhile, Cottonwood Coach Bryan Pavlish is confident a healthy Tim Whitworth and his first state appearance in three years will light a fire under his forces.

"I'm naturally disappointed that we did not win the region championship," admitted Clearfield's Hansen. "But we're not the type of team that will fold up. I think it should be stressed that any team in the tournament this year is capable of winning, especially in the first round. I think it's a good first round matchup."

Layton (12-6) vs. Granger (10-11), 6:30 p.m.—Layton literally chose its first round opponent. The Lancers won a coin flip with Clearfield and decided to enter the tournament as the third place team from Region One. But Layton's choice didn't necessarily mean it wanted Granger in round one.

It meant they weren't too keen about facing Highland in the quarterfinals.

Gordon Anderson, Brandon Flint and Matt Stireman are three Layton marksman which will gain much attention from the defense Brett Beagley, Matt Almond and Lee Giles will be important figures for Granger in this battle of Lancers.

Orem (12-9) vs. Sky View (10-12), 8:10 p.m.—Sky View, the last team to qualify for the tournament and one of the last two teams to play in the first round, simply hopes it is not the last to be eliminated in the first round. Region Two co-champion Orem, however, promises to provide a difficult hurdle for the Bobcats in this intriguing lidlifter.

Balance has become the credo of both teams during the regular season, with Chris McMullin, David Bennion and Scott Schlappi anchoring the Orem balance beam. Todd Stevens, Lance Lindley and Jon McKenna also have lived on a balanced scoring diet for the Bobcats.