

HISTORY MAKERS

Celebrating the Titans' run to the final four



The Morning Journal | March 28, 2018

OPINION

Lorain's ride is one legends are made of

It's generally difficult to transition from covering one sport to the next when the



Marissa McNees

Columnist

seasons inevitably end, but it's particularly tough to accept Lorain's journey is over.

The Titans took us on an unforgettable ride

that is as much about high school basketball as it is rallying a community together, filling it with pride as an unlikely group of young men won their way into the hearts of those in Lorain through hard work and a pure love of the game.

The ride didn't start out smoothly or really even have a consistent stretch without some form of adversity, but that's what makes this a truly "Lorain" type story.

Throughout the years, Lorain basketball has been the city's "it" factor.

Fans would line up Friday nights for tickets to sold out games, gyms would fill to capacity and even Coach John Rositano said players were treated like rockstars around the community. But not one of those teams man-



ERIC BONZAR — THE MORNING JOURNAL

Lorain coach John Rositano and the Titans' bench celebrate a basket against Cincinnati Moeller in a state semifinal showdown. Lorain's run to the state final four is the stuff of legend.

aged what this season's team did in its run to a state tournament appearance.

It took a team with virtually no meaningful varsity experience, zero returning starters, constant person-

nel changes and one big chip on its shoulder to make Lorain history.

But it's the chip that stayed on every Titans' shoulder all season that made the difference.

In a mid-week practice before the state semifinal against Cincinnati Moeller, Rositano could be heard urging his players not to lose that edge, to keep playing with something to prove because,

in the end, they always had something to prove.

They had to prove to their city they were just as capable as their talented and charismatic predecessors.

They had to prove to op-

ponents they were not to be taken lightly.

And they had to prove to all of Ohio that Lorain is not a city to be underestimated — not in basketball, not in anything.

One of the best to ever wear a Titans uniform, Naz Bohannon, had a saying: "Start unknown, finish unforgettable."

He instilled that in himself and his teammates over his four years at Lorain until last season came to a heartbreaking end in a district final and all anyone wanted to do was forget.

But a pair of then-sophomores, Devon Grant and Taevon Pierre-Louis, lifted their teammate off the floor and told him with certainty they'd take the team to the state tournament next season.

Promise kept.

Start unknown, finish unforgettable.

So is the story of the 2017-18 Lorain Titans.

What happens next?

As Rositano said after the state semifinal: "Anything's possible."

Reach McNees at MMcNees@MorningJournal.com; [@MarissaNM](https://twitter.com/MarissaNM) on Twitter

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OPINION

2018 Lorain Titans put their city on the map

COLUMBUS » At each state basketball tournament, stars are placed on the outline of Ohio at midcourt of the Jerome Schottenstein Center.



Jon Behm

The stars represent the 16 teams playing in the state semifinals — four in each of the four divisions.

And, sure enough, a star was right at the top of the state near the middle. A star that represents Lorain.

A star that has done what other recent Lorain basketball teams have fallen just short of doing.

What's that you ask?

The 2018 Titans put Lorain on the map.

It had been 30 years since Columbus had seen a Lorain basketball team in a state semifinal.

So, to those outside Northeast Ohio, Lorain was a virtual unknown. A place they had maybe heard of, but couldn't quite recall if it really existed or if they had made it up.

Now, Lorain's presence in the state is as real as the star at midcourt of The Schott that represents the school.

And, even if the rest of the state chooses to forget about Lorain — and, trust me, it would be a mistake if they did — you best believe Cincinnati will not be forgetting Lorain any time soon.

Why?

Because the Titans did what they have done all season: Refused to back down when the going got tough.

Could the Titans have given up after being outscored by five in the second quarter to enter halftime at a 25-16 deficit?

You bet.

Did they?

Hell no.

The concept of giving up is not one Lorain understands — a mindset not only ingrained in the 2018 Titans, but also the city these young men represent.

Rather, the Titans went out and won the second half, 28-26, against the No. 2-ranked team in Division I.

Lorain made Moeller fight for a win, just as these young men have fought for every win and ounce of respect they have gained all season.



ERIC BONZAR — THE MORNING JOURNAL

The Titans take a moment to talk during their state semifinal showdown with Cincinnati Moeller.

You best believe the Crusaders felt the pressure as Lorain twice closed the gap to two points in the second half.

And, while the Titans

may not have gained the lead, they left a lasting impression.

The Titans won't back down.

They will never be put

in a corner.

Lorain does not quit. Period.

So, I ask. Where is Lorain?

It's right where it belongs.

Columbus.

Behm can be reached at JBehm@MorningJournal.com; [@MJ_JBehm](https://twitter.com/MJ_JBehm) on Twitter



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Regular season scoreboard

GAME 1: LORAIN 49, VERMILION 48

The Titans held Vermilion scoreless for the last 3:47 of the game, coming back from down 41-33 early in the fourth quarter. Jordan Jackson sealed the win by splitting a pair of free throws with three seconds to play. Devon Grant led all scorers with 20 points while Taevon Pierre-Louis scored 11 of his 17 points in the fourth quarter, adding eight rebounds.

GAME 2: LORAIN 63, STRONGSVILLE 59

A fourth-quarter comeback spurred by Devon Grant and Taevon Pierre-Louis gave the Titans the lead, but a defensive switch that saw 5-foot-6 Kameron Davis limit 6-foot-6 Strongsville guard Omari Peek to six points in the second half proved to be the true difference as Lorain improved to 2-0 on the season with Lake Erie League play set to begin.

GAME 3: LORAIN 81, BEDFORD 43

Lorain finally got the start to a game it had been looking for, jumping to a 14-0 lead in the first quarter behind Devon Grant, who scored the first 10 points of the game and had 15 of his game-high 26 points in the first quarter. Taevon Pierre-Louis added 15 and Jaiden Sledge had 11 points in the Titans' victory.

GAME 4: CLEVELAND CC 73, LORAIN 62

Shooting woes plagued the Titans in the first half, as Lorain was 10 of 37 from the field and did not hold a lead in the game after an 8-7 advantage with 4:53 left to play in the first quarter. Lorain trailed, 40-27, at halftime. Devon Grant tried to will the Titans back into the game, scoring 19 of his 25 points in the second half.

GAME 5: LORAIN 66, SHAW 49

Lorain put the disappointing loss to Cleveland Central Catholic behind it to manhandle Lake Erie League opponent Shaw. Devon Grant showed his scoring prowess, tallying 23 points while knocking down three 3-pointers. Jordan Jackson notched 14 points and Taevon Pierre-Louis added 13 in a game where the Cardinals were rarely within 10 points of the Titans.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Pierre-Louis

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Davis

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Grant

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Grant

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Grant

GAME 6: LORAIN 50, ELYRIA 39

The Titans got a measure of revenge from a district final upset against Elyria last year, claiming the first round matchup of the Lorain County Holiday Classic. Scrappy defense led by Kameron Davis proved to be the difference as Lorain forced six Pioneer turnovers and kept Elyria off the scoreboard in the first quarter.

GAME 7: LORAIN 67, SANDUSKY 57

Lorain claimed the Lorain County Holiday Classic for the fourth straight time. The Titans overcame a rough shooting night in the first half to erase a three-point deficit at halftime, holding the Blue Streaks to eight points in the third quarter. Taevon Pierre-Louis notched a game-high 21 points and made it a double-double with 10 rebounds.

GAME 8: LORAIN 67, MAPLE HEIGHTS 64

Lorain put together two critical runs to start the third and fourth quarters, scoring six straight to pull within one before taking its first lead of the night at the 1:41 mark in the third, and eight straight in the opening minutes of the fourth to take a 55-49 lead. Jordan Jackson had a breakout performance for the Titans with 21 points and five rebounds.

GAME 9: LORAIN 66, LUTHERAN EAST 64

The reigning Division IV state champions gave Lorain a scare, but Taevon Pierre-Louis was not afraid. The junior drove the length of the court with eight seconds to play and hit a layup as time expired to give the Titans the win. Pierre-Louis finished with 13 points while Devon Grant had a game-high 25 and Jordan Jackson chipped in 16.

GAME 10: CLEVELAND HTS. 65, LORAIN 55

The Titans dropped their first Lake Erie League game of the season, and it was a first quarter run that did Lorain in. Cleveland Heights capped the first quarter on a 16-0 run and the Titans never regained the lead. David Weatherington and Jordan Jackson each finished with 11 points to lead the Titans in the loss.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Davis

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Pierre-Louis

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Jackson

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Pierre-Louis

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Weatherington

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Regular season scoreboard

GAME 11: LORAIN 74, CLEARVIEW 63

Continuing a trend of strong finishes, Lorain outscored Clearview, 22-10, in the fourth quarter to claim the Battle of Lorain. The Titans used a 12-0 run in the fourth quarter to earn the win. David Weatherington took over the team in the third quarter as Taevon Pierre-Louis ran into foul trouble. Weatherington finished with 14 points.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Weatherington

GAME 12: LORAIN 61, MEDINA 37

Defense was the name of the game for Lorain as the Titans forced 19 Medina turnovers and a bad shooting night overall for the Bees. Taevon Pierre-Louis was the difference, scoring a game-high 22 points while registering two steals. The 6-foot-6 junior rarely allowed Medina to score inside the paint all game.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Pierre-Louis

GAME 13: LORAIN 80, WARRENSVILLE HTS. 59

With only a one-point lead after the first quarter, Lorain kicked it into a new gear and dominated Warrensville Heights for the remainder of the game. Taevon Pierre-Louis had one of his best games on the season, scoring 19 points to go with 11 rebounds, three assists and a block. Devon Grant added 18 points and nine of the 11 Titans scored at least a point.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Pierre-Louis

GAME 14: LORAIN 77, BEDFORD 47

The Titans continued their decimation of Lake Erie League opponents, notching a 40-point win while leading wire-to-wire. Lorain was led by Devon Grant's 23-point performance. The junior added seven rebounds, two assists, two steals and a block. Jordan Jackson notched 10 points and Taevon Pierre-Louis had nine.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Grant

GAME 15: LORAIN 78, SHAW 65

The Titans built a 21 point halftime lead and never looked back as Devon Grant scored 14 of his 22 points in the first quarter to run Lorain's winning streak to five. Jordan Jackson added 11 points and David Weatherington and Jaiden Sledge each scored 10 points coming off the bench. The Titans led the game wire-to-wire.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Grant

GAME 16: GARFIELD HTS. 71, LORAIN 64

The host Bulldogs erased a five-point Lorain lead in the fourth quarter to snap the Titans' winning streak. Lorain struggled to hit its shots in the second half after a strong start to the game. For the third-straight game, Devon Grant led the Titans on offense, this time scoring 21 points, while Taevon Pierre-Louis added a double-double of 17 points and 10 rebounds.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Grant

GAME 17: MAPLE HTS. 57, LORAIN 43

Lorain's 23 turnovers haunted the host Titans as Lorain dropped back-to-back games for the first time on the season. With things tied at 21 heading into the second half, a 9-2 run by the Mustangs took Lorain out of the game. Devon Grant led with 15 points, while Jordan Jackson contributed 11 and Taevon Pierre-Louis notched six points.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Grant

GAME 18: CLEVELAND HTS. 65, LORAIN 55

Cleveland Heights won the Lake Erie League title, ending Lorain's three-year reign as the Titans lost their third straight game — something they hadn't done since the 2013-14 season. Lorain led at halftime, but a Tigers' run in the second half put the game out of reach. Taevon Pierre-Louis paced the Titans with 12 points, 10 rebounds, two assists and two blocks.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Pierre-Louis

GAME 19: LORAIN 69, ELYRIA CATHOLIC 62

Lorain got back to its winning ways, taking an 11-point lead into the fourth quarter and surviving a late Panthers' rally. Elyria Catholic made it a five-point game with two minutes to play, but a 7-0 Lorain run over the next minute secured the win. Taevon Pierre-Louis posted his second double-double in as many games with 19 points and 11 rebounds.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Pierre-Louis

GAME 20: LORAIN 71, LUTHERAN EAST 54

After a last-second win over Lutheran East earlier in the season, Lorain left nothing to chance in the rematch. Lorain took a 20-9 lead after the first quarter and never looked back, leading by double-digits for the remainder of the game. Devon Grant had a game-high 23 points, but made an even bigger impact on defense, holding Falcons' star Jordan Burge to 17 points.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Grant

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Regular season scoreboard

GAME 21: LORAIN 71, AVON 45

Holding a 29-23 lead at halftime, Lorain packed on defensive pressure in the second half and began finding its shooting stroke to put the game away quickly. The Titans had four players reach double-digits with Taevon Pierre-Louis scoring 17, Devon Grant and Jaiden Sledge at 16 and David Weatherington at 10. Sledge hit four 3-pointers to set the tone for the Titans' offense.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Sledge

GAME 22: LORAIN 73, WARRENSVILLE HTS. 64

The Titans had to fight for it, but capped the regular season with a win. Warrensville Heights grabbed a 42-36 lead midway through the third quarter, holding Lorain scoreless through the first three and a half minutes. But Lorain closed the quarter on a 14-4 run to take the lead for good. Pierre-Louis posted a double-double with 25 points and 18 rebounds in the win.

PLAYER OF THE GAME



Pierre-Louis

Meet the core of the 2017-18 Titans

Devon Grant

Year and position: Junior, point guard

Height: 6-foot-1

Statline: 21.3 ppg, 2.6 apg, 2.3 spg

What was the most memorable regular season game?: Garfield Heights. They are a good team and so are we.

What's your favorite memory of the season?: Going to Murray Ridge (Center for the Developmentally Disabled).

Best lesson a coach or teammate taught you?: Continue to have confidence.

The best part about playing for Lorain?: We all love having each other as teammates.

What's one thing you want people to know about Lorain basketball that most don't know?: We aren't just ordinary kids from a small town.



Taevon Pierre-Louis

Year and position: Junior, forward

Height: 6-foot-6

Statline: 15.7 ppg, 8.9 rpg, 2.6 apg, 2.0 spg

What was the most memorable regular season game?: Away at Lutheran East. I had a game-winner.

What's your favorite memory of the playoffs so far?: The clock going off against St. Edward and the fans running on the court celebrating.

The best part about playing for Lorain?: Our efforts and everybody caring and playing with friends and family.

What's one thing you want people to know about Lorain basketball that most people don't know?: If you got Lorain on your schedule be war ready...



Jordan Jackson

Year and position: Sophomore, guard

Height: 6-foot-4

Statline: 9.4 ppg, 3.5 apg, 4.9 rpg

Most memorable regular season game?: Warrensville, because I had my game-high 21 (points).

What's your favorite memory of the season?: Going to Murray Ridge and playing with the kids.

What's your favorite memory of the playoffs this far?: Beating St. Ed's.

The best lesson a coach or teammate taught you?: Even though I wasn't playing well on the offensive end, I did other things to help us win.

One thing you want people to know about Lorain basketball?: How hard we practice and that's what leads to our success in games.



David Weatherington

Year and position: Senior, guard

Height: 6-foot

Statline: 6.0 ppg, 2.4 rpg

What was the most memorable regular season game?: Garfield. We had so much energy and played so good.

What's the best lesson a coach or teammate taught you this season?: Always play hard like it's your last game.

What's the best part about playing for Lorain?: We are surrounded by a good community that supports us.

What's one thing you want people to know about Lorain basketball that most people don't know?: That we can make it this far. Everybody in Ohio didn't think we would be here.



Kameron Davis

Year and position: Junior, guard

Height: 5-foot-7

Statline: 1.2 ppg, 1.1 apg, 1.7 spg

What was the most memorable regular season game?: Strongsville because people finally knew what we could do.

What's your favorite memory of the season?: Playing with my team every game.

What's the best lesson a coach or teammate taught you this season?: When you have fun, you play good.

What's the best part about playing for Lorain?: Knowing that we are surrounded by good people.

What's one thing you want people to know about Lorain basketball that most people don't know?: We are one big family.



Jaiden Sledge

Year and position: Senior, shooting guard

Height: 5-foot-10

Statline: 5.5 ppg, 37-percent 3-point shooting

Most memorable regular season game?: Garfield because we played very hard the whole game.

What's your favorite memory of the season?: Being with my brothers.

Best lesson a coach or teammate taught you this season?: Always have fun no matter what.

What's the best part about playing for Lorain?: Knowing we have good people around us.

What's one thing you want people to know about Lorain basketball that most don't know?: That we work hard each and every day.



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Playoff run

SECTIONAL FINAL: LORAIN 68, NORTH RIDGEVILLE 31

By Marissa McNees

MMcNees@MorningJournal.com
@MarissaNM on Twitter

Taevon Pierre-Louis scored a season-high 31 points and top-seeded Lorain dominated North Ridgeville, 68-31, in a Division I Elyria District sectional final.

Pierre-Louis single-handedly matched No. 8 North Ridgeville's total points and chipped in 13 rebounds, including eight offensive boards, as the 6-foot-6 forward dominated down low while the Rangers came up with no answers.

"It's a team thing. We try to get everyone involved, but me personally, I knew no one could match up with me," Pierre-Louis said. "My height, my weight, I had an advantage so I took it."

Lorain (18-5) still had eight players involved in the scoring, including three freshman — Kamron Thomas, Jaevon Manning and De'Vante Jackson. Thomas entered the game near the end of the third quarter and scored six of the Titans' eight points over the last minute and a half heading into the fourth.

"He came in right away and you'd never know he was a freshman," Lorain coach John Rositano said. "He's used to playing with us and

against us in practice ... and did a great job coming off the bench and helping us tonight."

But as high-powered as the Titans' offense became, it was once again their defensive pressure that stunned North Ridgeville (12-12).

The Rangers were not used to anything Lorain threw at them, and though they handled the pressure initially, were simply worn down as the game progressed.

Lorain's main offensive weapon was held below his season average, as Devon Grant, who averaged 20.4 points per game during the regular season, had 13 points in the sectional final, but where North Ridgeville lacked the support on offense, Lorain had more than enough help to go around.

"There was a little rust there, we missed a couple shots around the basket, but when you're playing defense like that it allows you to have a couple dry spells offensively," Rositano said. "We're moving forward with our defense and that's what we emphasize and that's what we do."

"When people think of Lorain they think of the dunks, the runs, but our half-court defense is what separates us from a lot teams and I thought we played really good half-court defense."

DISTRICT SEMIFINAL: LORAIN 73, MIDVIEW 64

By Marissa McNees

MMcNees@MorningJournal.com
@MarissaNM on Twitter

Lorain advanced to its fourth-straight district final appearance by beating Midview, 73-64.

The top-seeded Titans were tested all game by No. 4 Midview in the most physical game for either team this postseason, but after the Middies tied it, 36-36, early in the third quarter, Lorain's standout juniors, Devon Grant and Taevon Pierre-Louis, powered their team

to an eight-point lead heading into the fourth quarter.

Midview (12-11) got as close as four points with less than three minutes to play in regulation, but foul trouble had Lorain in the bonus the rest of the way as the Titans hit 13 of 14 free throws to close out the game.

"(Midview) is physical, they came after us and caused a little bit of problems around the basket, but our guys made plays, did the right things and you've got two premier players in Ohio that are both juniors that I thought played

very well," Lorain coach John Rositano said. "They were getting bumped around a little bit but they kept their composure."

"When you get to this level upsets happen. You've got to be solid at this level of basketball. Teams are gunning to get us. I thought Midview played extremely hard tonight, I thought they played extremely well."

Grant and Pierre-Louis combined for 54 of the Titans' 73 total points.

Grant led all scorers with 29 points on 9 of 17 shooting

while Pierre-Louis had 25 points and 11 rebounds. The 6-foot-6 forward is averaging 28 points in two games this postseason.

Lorain (19-5) has the chance for a bit of redemption in the March 10 district final against the winner of Strongsville-Berea-Midpark as the Titans have kept last season's loss to Elyria in the back of their minds all year.

"We're hungry," Grant said. "We're not expecting to lose. We never expect to lose so we're just going to continue to stay hungry."

DISTRICT FINAL: LORAIN 58, STRONGSVILLE 55

By Marissa McNees

MMcNees@MorningJournal.com
@MarissaNM on Twitter

At times, it seemed Lorain was reliving last season's disappointing district finals loss all over again, but the Titans held off No. 11 Strongsville, 58-55, at Elyria Catholic to reclaim the championship and advance to a Division I regional semifinal.

Lorain (19-5) will face St. Edward on March 14 in a regional semifinal at the University of Akron.

Strongsville played like a team with nothing to lose and started the game on an unbelievable 11-0 run over two minutes. The Mustangs closed the first half on a 12-2 run to take a 35-28 lead to

the locker room while top-seeded Lorain tried not to panic as shots continued to fall short.

The Titans finally came alive in the opening minutes of the third quarter to cut the Strongsville lead to 1 before the worst-case scenario unfolded before their eyes.

Taevon Pierre-Louis picked up his fourth foul at the 4:40 mark of the third and headed to the Lorain bench to watch helplessly from the sideline, and just as the Titans took a 47-46 lead toward the end of the third, Devon Grant was whistled for his fourth foul and suddenly Lorain's two best players were out of the game.

"It was our worst nightmare," Lorain coach John

Rositano said. "You get two of your premier players in Ohio with four fouls, but they played very smart. They're intelligent basketball players so they can play through it as long as they don't charge and we did a great job of playing through it."

The Titans went down, 44-36, after Pierre-Louis was taken out and needed a big shot to gain some momentum when senior Jaiden Sledge came through. The 5-foot-10 guard knocked down three straight 3-pointers to liven up his team and suddenly Lorain was right back in it.

"When we came out after the half, I was just thinking I needed to score because I hadn't scored yet and my shot just started falling. My

teammates got me more involved and the shots fell," Sledge said. "I hit that one and I thought, 'Just shoot it again if you get it.' I was in rhythm and all my shots they were just falling for me tonight."

Strongsville tied the game, 51-51, with just under three minutes left in regulation and got within 1 with nine seconds on the clock, but it was a pair of Grant free throws at the end that sealed the district title for Lorain as the Mustangs' Joe Lake threw up a shot at the buzzer that bounced off the rim.

Grant led all scorers with 22 points and Pierre-Louis had 13 — the only two players to score double digits for Lorain.



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Regional semifinal: Lorain 72, St. Edward 69 (OT)

Grant, Titans shock St. Edward

By Jon Behm

JBehm@MorningJournal.com
@MJ_JBehm on Twitter

AKRON » It's safe to say St. Edward will be seeing Devon Grant in their nightmares tonight.

The Lorain junior scored 12 of his game-high 34 points in overtime to lead the Titans to a 72-69 victory over AP Poll No. 8 St. Edward in an Akron/Toledo Region semifinal at the University of Akron's James A. Rhodes Arena.

To say Grant took over in the extra period would be an understatement.

After leading for just 1:11 in regulation, the Titans led wire-to-wire in overtime thanks to Grant.

The junior scored all of Lorain's points in overtime, including a perfect 8 of 8 from the foul line as the Eagles started to foul down the stretch.

Add in that he hit the game-tying 3-pointer with 28 seconds remaining in regulation to tie the game at 60-60, and it is safe to say that the Grant will be haunting the Eagles' dreams for quite a while.



JEN FORBUS — THE MORNING JOURNAL

Lorain celebrates an amazing win in overtime against St. Edward in a regional semifinal.

"Big-time players make big-time plays in big games," Lorain coach John Rositano said. "That's what he did. He hit some big shots there down the stretch.

"Here's coaching for you: The last two minutes was 'Get the ball to Grant's hands, get fouled, make foul shots, win the game.' That's what we did. That's what he did and we won the game."

For Grant, he wasn't worried about connecting on his free throws in overtime, even though the Titans had only shot 11 heading into overtime.

"I just looked back at

practice," Grant said of his clutch free-throw shooting. "Usually we practice them every day. I take them very seriously and so does my team. So they just went in."

And, while Grant was Mr. Clutch for the Titans in the overtime period, it was a team effort that lifted the Titans to victory.

Trailing, 15-4, with 3:36 to play in the first quarter, the Titans ended the quarter on an 11-5 run behind seven from Grant and four from junior Kameron Davis to make it a 20-15 game after the first.

The Titans didn't stop

there, starting the second quarter on a 6-0 run to take a 21-20 lead just over a minute into the quarter.

It was the first Lorain lead since 2-0 just 10 seconds in to the game.

But the Lorain shooting went cold after the run, allowing St. Edward right back into the game for a 31-25 Eagles lead at halftime.

The Titans refused to back down.

Trailing, 47-40, with 1:28 to play in the third quarter, senior Jaiden Sledge stepped up for the Titans.

After Grant connected on a 3-pointer — the Titans' second of the game after going 0 of 8 in the first half — Sledge hammered a pair of his own from the corner to give Lorain a 49-47 lead with 40 seconds to go in the third.

"They look for me after I hit my first one," Sledge said. "They look for me to shoot my second. I just shot them and I knocked them down."

Lorain could not quite maintain the lead, though, as St. Edward's Montorie Foster hit a lay-up as time expired to make it a 49-49 game.

St. Edward senior P.J. Flannery connected on a lay-up to make it a 60-57 game, but then it became the Grant show as he sank the tying 3-pointer with 28 seconds to play.

The rest was history.

Titans still believed when no one else did

By Marissa McNees

MMcNees@MorningJournal.com
@MarissaNM on Twitter

AKRON » No one in Northeast Ohio gave Lorain a shot to win against St. Edward, and in the days leading up to the game, coach John Rositano said the only ones who believed the Titans could win were in the locker room.

Sure enough, St. Edward took an early 15-4 lead in the first quarter and all of a sudden it wasn't if the Eagles would win, but by how much.

But true to themselves as they've been all season, Lorain never backed down.

"Not many people gave us a chance," Rositano said. "These guys ain't backing down from anybody. They're not afraid of anybody, intimidated by anybody, they just know how to win basketball games."

It wasn't easy, but nothing has come easy for the Titans this season.

They lost five players over the course of the season for various reasons. They lost a Lake Erie League title that has been in Lorain the past three years. They lost five senior starters from a season ago, but they never wavered.

Rositano has always claimed the players who

stayed have been the core of the team, showing heart and soul day in and day out, and that was evident in the Titans' biggest win of the season.

Players like Jaiden Sledge, a role player who knocked down a pair of 3-pointers to give Lorain a late lead, or like Kameron Davis, a 5-foot-7 guard known for his scrappy defense, who sank a couple of key jumpers on the back end of a 6-0 Lorain run to put the Titans back in the game.

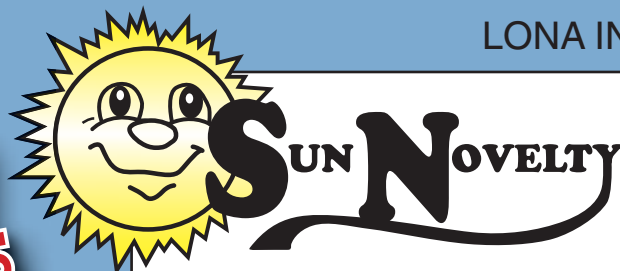
And of course, juniors Devon Grant and Taevon Pierre-Louis put together two incredible performances to lead Lorain.

"Nobody expected us to be here. Nobody expected us to get to districts," Pierre-Louis said. "We lost five starters, we lost five seniors from last year, nobody expected us to do what we do. We're just gonna keep proving them wrong. It does not stop right here. It does not.

"We're gonna wake everybody up and let them know. We're gonna get our respect."

Respect, recognition — the Titans earned it all and more, and the team no one expected to make out the district has a chance to do what no Lorain team has done in a long time.

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Regional final: Lorain 47, Toledo St. John's Jesuit 44

Lorain wins clash of Titans, advance to final four

By **Stephanie Metzger**
Sports@MorningJournal.com
@MJJournalSports on Twitter

TOLEDO » The clash of the Titans ended in Lorain sealing its first trip to the state boys' basketball tournament with a 47-44 regional final win over Toledo St. John's Jesuit.

Cutting down the net was a moment years' in the making as Lorain has battled Ohio's juggernaut high school teams, only to face defeat in the district and regional rounds.

This time was different.

The game's biggest play came by the hands of a junior, but the execution was nothing new for Kameron Davis.

With 51 seconds on the clock, St. John's held a one-point lead and possession of the ball. Cue Davis, who nabbed the game-changing steal to force a timeout.

"I was just thinking we have a whole bunch of seniors and we don't want this to be their last game, so we've got to do whatever it takes to get this win," Davis said.

Lorain coach John Rositano noted that Davis has made similar plays throughout the season.

"That's why he's in the game, to make plays like that," Rositano said.

After St. John's Houston King fouled out, junior Devon Grant sank two sets of free

throws to give Lorain a 47-44 lead.

St. John's had possession with four seconds remaining, but an errant pass went out of bounds, ending St. John's season.

"Once we got the ball, we feel good with 30 seconds with Grant with the ball in his hands," Rositano said. "He's a great foul shooter, big-time player and he made a big play again. Now, we're going to Columbus."

Senior David Weatherington echoed Rositano's words.

"I knew when he [Grant] had the ball in his hands, he was going to hit the free throws and we were going to win the game," he said.

"Big-time guys play big in big games," Rositano added. "Big-time players know when it's showtime. They know it's time when the bright lights come on."

The victory marks Lorain's first trip to the state tournament since the historic 1987-88 Admiral King team that fell to Columbus Linden-McKinley in the state semifinal. That year also happened to be Rositano's first year on the Lorain coaching staff as an assistant.

St. John's struggled through a slow start as Lorain leaped to a 10-3 lead. But a pair of 3-pointers from King made the difference, giving St. John's a 16-13 lead to end

the first quarter.

King's hot hand carried into the second quarter as he added three more 3-pointers. Senior Vincent Williams Jr. followed with a three-point play to advance St. John's to a 24-17 lead.

Lorain's scoring was confined to just three players, but sophomore Jordan Jackson finished the day 6-for-7 with 14 points and Grant paced the offense with 29 points, shooting 60 percent.

St. John's remained pesky through the third quarter after Grant pitched a mid-range shot for a 30-27 lead, but St. John's junior Payton Moyer sank a 3-pointer to level the score. Lorain rolled to a two-point lead with 2:50 remaining as Grant added a 3-pointer, but Williams dumped a shot in for a 37-37 tie to end the third quarter.

"I'm just so happy for our kids," Rositano said. "When you go as hard as we do every day, at some point you get rewarded and our guys got rewarded today and last Wednesday for everything we do in practice every day."

Lorain has edged closer to the state tournament the past few years, but the team and its fans still feel the respect from outsiders is lacking.

Weatherington agreed. "Quit sleeping on Lorain," he said. "We're coming."



ERIC BONZAR — THE MORNING JOURNAL

The Lorain Titans knocked off Toledo St. John's Jesuit, 47-44, to advance to the D-I state championship final four, March 17, 2018.

Eyes of the city of Lorain on the Titans

By **Stephanie Metzger**
Sports@MorningJournal.com
@MJJournalSports on Twitter

TOLEDO » While most fans have their eyes on powerhouse programs like St. Edward or Massillon Jackson, the city of Lorain has had its eyes on its own back yard.

Four years ago, Lorain was a 12 seed in the Division I district tournament. The Titans fell to Westlake in the second round.

But something exciting started the following year.

Lorain dominated for a 25-0 record through its regular season. It sneaked by

Brunswick in a triple-overtime district semifinal before defeating St. Ignatius in the final. The team fell in the regional semifinal to St. Edward.

But no tears were shed.

The city of Lorain again became a basketball town. It has been that way since.

The Titans met the same fate in 2016, falling to Lima Senior in the regional semifinal. In 2017, they couldn't overcome Elyria in the district final. Still, the city showed up, maintaining its Titan pride.

This year finally paid off, for both the team and the fans as the Titans took down

Toledo St. John's in the regional final, 47-44.

As St. John's threw the ball away in the game's final second, half of John F. Savage Arena at the University of Toledo erupted in cheers and tears.

"Just walking through the stands, just the tears from the fans, just how much it means to these people. We'll represent the city of Lorain Friday in Columbus," Rositano said.

"This will do wonders for the pride of the city of Lorain," Rositano added. "It's just a great feeling for I think everybody involved."

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State semifinal: Cincinnati Moeller 51, Lorain 44

Titans' run ends in state semi

By **Fuad Shalhout**

FShalhout@MorningJournal.com
@Shalhoutf on Twitter

COLUMBUS » The Titans' dream season is over.

Lorain fell in a Division I state semifinal, 51-44, to Cincinnati Moeller on March 23 at the Jerome Schottenstein Center.

"These guys fought, kicked and scratched like they have all season," Lorain coach John Rositano said. "We did what we wanted to do and kept the game close going into the fourth quarter and if we make a couple plays, couple shots down the stretch, it's a different game. You can't believe how happy I am for these guys and how proud of how they fought through some adversity this year and never backed down. They made the city of Lorain unbelievably proud."

The Titans had trouble with the Crusaders' size. They were outrebounded, 39-27, with 6-foot-10 Jaxson Hayes posting a 16-13 double-double and 6-foot-5 Jeremiah Davenport adding 10 points and nine rebounds.



ERIC BONZAR—THE MORNING JOURNAL

Lorain's Kameron Davis goes airborne as he snags a loose ball from Cincinnati Moeller guard Isaiah Payton.

Junior Devon Grant led Lorain with 17 points on 6 of 14 shooting, and junior Taevon Pierre-Louis added 10 points and 13 rebounds.

The Crusaders outscored Lorain, 14-9, in the second quarter and led, 25-16, at halftime and held a 23-10 rebounding advantage in the first half.

David Weatherington opened the second half with a basket and foul to boost the Titans, but as was the case throughout the night, Moeller always had an answer, scoring five straight for an 11-point lead.

Midway through the quarter, the Titans went on a 11-2 run, sparked by Grant's back-to-back hoops to cut it to 32-30. Moeller scored the next six straight, capped by an alley-oop jam from Hayes to end the quarter with a 38-30 lead.

Lorain again pulled within 41-38 with just over five minutes remaining after Grant made a layup and 3-pointer to rile up the Titans' contingent.

After a Crusaders timeout, they answered with a Miles McBride baseline jumper, and two straight Hayes dunks for a 47-39 lead with three minutes left.

From there, Lorain had to play the foul game and got as close as 49-44, with one minute to play, but couldn't make that extra push.

"There have been games this year where we've been hurt on the boards in the first half and we bring it to their attention," Rositano said. "And we brought it to their attention at halftime and we brought it in the second half. That's why we got back in the game. Made a couple runs and gave us an opportunity."

Lorain finishes 22-6 overall.

Titans' toughness reflected by defense

By **Marissa McNees**

MMcNees@MorningJournal.com
@MarissaNM on Twitter

COLUMBUS » The only teams to hold Cincinnati Moeller to 53 points or less this season had all been out-of-state opponents.

Then the Crusaders met Lorain.

The Titans held a team that averages 63 points per game to 51 — its lowest offensive output since Jan. 6 — and in a Division I state semifinal, no less.

In the end, Lorain's improbable postseason run came to a disappointing end as Moeller prevailed, 51-44, on March 23, but the game featured that signature grit the Titans have displayed all season as they nearly grinded their way to a win over the second-ranked team in Ohio.

"It's just in our blood," junior Taevon Pierre-Louis said. "We've been playing with each other our whole lives and we've always been that way. It don't matter if a team is ranked higher than us or not, we're just gonna bring out what we got."

While Moeller shot 40 percent over the first two quarters (42 percent for the game),

coach Carl Kremer said it was one of his team's worst shooting performances of the season — a direct result of the Titans constantly getting after the ball.

Even forward Jaxson Hayes, a Texas commit, said he and his teammate Jeremiah Davenport, a Wright State commit, had one of their toughest challenges of the season against a Lorain team that just wouldn't quit.

"It was really tough going against them," Hayes said. "Every time I cut to the basket, there was just four guys around me. Every time I cut to the ball it was all five of them and they did a really good job of guarding me and Jeremiah. They were just really good (on defense) overall."

The Titans certainly weren't going to let up in the program's most important game to date.

"Lorain kids don't back down. It's in their DNA, I guess," Lorain coach John Rositano said. "I don't care if you're a basketball fan or just a casual fan out there tonight, you can see the toughness and the grit and the character these kids threw out there tonight."

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