

Rockford (Rockford) @ East Kentwood (Kentwood) - Boys Basketball

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Rockford (10-6-0) 44	2/15/2013 6 p.m.	East Kentwood (15-1-0) 40
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East Kentwood High School, Kentwood, MI

Rockford tops East Kentwood 44-40 in an O-K Red boys basketball defensive struggle

Don VanderVeen | Advance Newspapers, February 15, 2013 10:06 p.m.



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 East Kentwood's Jaylen Carter (20) drives for two of his game-high 14 points against Rockford Friday night. - (ADVANCE PHOTO | Brian Forde)

KENTWOOD – In an O-K Red Conference boys basketball game where scoring was very difficult, Rockford junior Casey Watters sparkled over the final three minutes Friday evening.

Watters came in off the bench to score the Rams' final eight points in a close defensive struggle to lead the Rams to a 44-40 victory over the league-leading Falcons at East Kentwood High School.

"Neither team was shooting the lights out," Rockford coach Nick Allen said. "They have a heckuva team and this was a big win for us."

"Both teams didn't shoot like as well as we would have liked to, but we pride ourselves on playing defense and I'm sure they do the same."

The Falcons' two conference losses – to Hudsonville and Rockford – were by a total of five points. Those three schools shared the O-K Red Conference title a year ago, and both the Falcons and the Rams play the Eagles next week in games that will decide this year's champion.

"It was a typical Rockford-Kentwood war," East Kentwood coach Jeff Anama said. "Nobody would give up an inch, and as a result, it was a struggle to make shots. They just made a few more than we did."

The two-time defending O-K Red Conference champion Falcons slipped to 15-2 overall and 6-2 in league play.

Rockford raised its record to 12-6 overall and 5-3 in the O-K Red.

"It was a good team win against a very good team," Allen said. "We think we're a good team and expect to be in every game."

"Winning this game gives us a chance."

The Falcons and Rams cranked up the defensive pressure in a physical first quarter that featured heavy substitutions by both teams early. The two teams combined to score only 11 points in the quarter that ended with East Kentwood leading 6-5.

Rockford senior Chad Carlson opened the second quarter with a 3-pointer, but once again defensive pressure and cold shooting by both teams took over. The Rams led by as many as six points before the Falcons battled back to tie the score 14-14 on a basket by Jeffrey Drake-Todd. Rockford's Zach Finkbeiner was fouled in the waning seconds of the half and sank one of two free throw to give the Rams a 15-14 halftime lead.

"We told our kids at halftime that they were playing so intense on the defensive end, that they didn't relax to make their shots on the offensive end," Anama said. "We were extremely happy with the effort."

The score remained close in the third quarter, and East Kentwood's Sherard Horne tied it and gave the Falcons a 23-22 lead with a pair of free throws. Rockford's Chase Fairchild followed with a quick basket and Nate Woznick's second 3-pointer provided the Rams with a 27-25 lead heading into the fourth quarter.

Jaylen Carter opened the fourth quarter with a jumper to tie the score and followed that up with a 3-pointer to give the Falcons a lead that was erased by a Carlson 3-pointer. Carter scored all 14 of his points in the second half.

The two teams began trading baskets at both ends of the floor, creating 12 ties or lead changes in the fourth quarter until Watters scored the go-ahead basket with just over two minutes remaining. Watters scored the final eight points for the Rams and finished with a team-high 10 points.

"He had a very good game and played very well," Allen said. "He scored some big baskets at the end."

"It's nice to see him experience some success and help our team do what we want to do."

The Falcons had the ball with three chances to tie or go ahead in the final two minutes, but were unable to convert.

"In games like this, it comes down to one or two plays, which is a credit to the kids on both sides," Anama said.

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MLive.com Game of the Week statewide poll: Which Friday night basketball game is the best matchup? (Poll Closed)

Holland Christian at Hamilton girls	56.71% (613 votes)
Portage Central at Stevensville Lakeshore boys	20.17% (218 votes)
Saginaw Nouvel at Essexville-Garber boys	9.34% (101 votes)
Lansing Catholic at Williamston boys	8.42% (91 votes)
Grosse Pointe South at Utica Ford girls	5% (58 votes)

Total Votes: 1,081

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By Steve Bell

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