

# SPORTS & CLASSIFIEDS

## Uncertainty to Celebration

Packers turn a question mark into a state berth

By Rocky Hulne  
sports@austindailyherald.com

On a night when points were at a premium, the No. 3 seeded Packer girls mustered just enough firepower to bring down No. 4 Albert Lea by a score of 45-30 in the Section 1AAA title game in Ove Berven Gym Wednesday.

The win didn't just give Austin bragging rights in the I-90 rivalry, it put the Packers back in the Minnesota Class AAA Girls Basketball Tournament after a one-year hiatus. That one year also happened to include a pandemic, a sports shutdown and a delayed season that saw the Packers wondering if they would even play a game this winter.

"Last summer we didn't know what we would have and the girls showed up," Austin head coach Eric Zoske said. "This winter we had virtual practice and workouts and the girls were there. They've done everything that's been asked of them. This is a great reward for working hard when things weren't even certain."

The Tigers (7-14 overall) tied the game at 23-23 when Jordan Juveland converted a three-point play with 13:06 left in the game, but Austin responded with a quick 7-0 spurt that was capped by a Hope Dudycha three. Emma Dudycha put together a 7-0 personal run that put the Packers (11-4 overall) in control with a 37-26 lead with 6:22 left in the game.

"I don't pay too close attention to the scoreboard," Zoske said. "I thought we were playing well, but weren't hitting our shots so we had to grind it out on D. Once those shots started to fall, it opened up our offense a little bit."

Emma finished with 17 points, three rebounds and two assists and twin sister Hope added 12 points and four rebounds. Both junior guards played big minutes on the team that went to state in 2019, but this year has a totally different feel to it.

"It's way more special this year, knowing that



Austin's Reana Schmitt with an early bucket against Albert Lea.

"They've done everything that's been asked of them. This is a great reward for working hard when things weren't even certain."

Eric Zoske, Packer girls head coach

Albert Lea 14 16 — 30  
Austin 19 26 — 45

**Austin scoring:** Emma Dudycha, 17; Hope Dudycha, 12; Cassidy Shute, 7; Olivia Walsh, 4; Reana Schmitt, 4; Elyse Hebrink, 2; **free throws:** 77 percent (10-for-13); **rebounds:** 27 (Schmitt, 13); **turnovers:** 9

**AL scoring:** Taya Jeffrey, 11; Jordan Juveland, 7; Kendall Kenis, 3; Nevaeh Wacholz, 2; Kristina Espinosa, 2; **free throws:** 88 percent (8-for-9); **turnovers:** 11

our season was cut short. Getting the opportunity to play more games at state is all we ever wanted," Emma said. "We're really good at hyping each other up as a team. The crowd helps, but honestly we didn't need it. The team is all you need."

Reana Schmitt shored up Austin's defense against AL as she pulled down 13 rebounds while also scoring four points. This was Schmitt's first year playing big varsity minutes for the Packers, playing a big role in the middle.

"It was a big honor to play with my teammates. It was pretty new to me and I really appreciate how the team has welcomed me and helped me improve my game," Schmitt said.

"We had to play our game tonight. When they took their long offensive possessions, we just had to get a stop and then go for a quick score."

Taya Jeffrey hit four straight free throws over a two-minute run to bring the Tigers within 15-14 late in the first half, but Olivia Walsh pulled down an offensive rebound and found Emma for a lay-up. Hope drove for a score with 11 seconds left in the frame to put Austin up 19-14 at the break.

The Tigers claimed a 7-1 lead to open the game over the first eight minutes. The Packers finally found their shot when Hope knocked down a three-pointer with 11:30 left in the first half to trigger a 12-0 run that saw Austin lead 13-7.

Austin has just one senior on its roster in Elyse Hebrink, who closed out her final game in Ove Berven in style as she collected three steals for the state-bound Packers.

"Elyse is going to go down as a legend in this town," Zoske said. "She's had a fantastic career here and what a way to have her last game here."



Austin's Elyse Hebrink with the driving lay-up against Albert Lea Wednesday night in the Section 1AAA title game in Ove Berven Gym.

Photos by Eric Johnson/photodesk@austindailyherald.com

### Online

Photo gallery: [www.austindailyherald.com/2021/03/uncertainty-to-celebration-packers-turn-a-question-mark-to-a-state-berth/](http://www.austindailyherald.com/2021/03/uncertainty-to-celebration-packers-turn-a-question-mark-to-a-state-berth/)

The No. 4 seeded Tigers went 20-87 overall over the four previous seasons. When AL won its playoff opener over Byron, it was just its second playoff win since 2014.

"I was proud to vote for coach (Jason) Thompson for Coach of the Year," Zoske said. "He's done a

fantastic job with his kids. Taya Jeffrey was not 100 percent, but I would take her on my team any day of the week. She showed a lot of heart with a bum ankle."

While The Packers are headed to state, Zoske took time to give respect to top-seeded Red Wing,

which was knocked out of the tournament due to a COVID-19 contact.

"My heart and sorrows go out to the players, coaches and families in Red Wing," Zoske said. "It's a tough thing they had to go through and hopefully we can represent our section well."

## Packers hit a scoring slump in season-ending loss to Byron

By Rocky Hulne  
sports@austindailyherald.com

After a season of shutting teams down, the No. 1 seeded Austin boys basketball team hit an offensive lull at the worst time, losing to No. 2 seeded Byron 52-50 in Packer Gym Thursday.

The Packers had erased a late seven point deficit to grab a 46-44 lead after Okey Okey hit a pair of free throws, but Okey missed a three that would've put Austin up by five. Byron's Jake Braaten followed that by knocking down a baseline three to put the Bears up 47-46 with 1:22 left in the game. Teyghan Hovland, who finished with 13 points, was denied on a drive on Austin's next trip down the floor and Trent Decook went one-for-two from the line to make it 48-46 Byron with 38.9 seconds left.

Austin head coach Kris Fadness would've liked to have seen his team close out better down the stretch, but he commended his team for giving it their all.

"The effort was great. I don't fault our effort. Our effort was outstanding. But in a close game like that, every mistake adds up. We didn't shoot the ball well and we took a couple of bad shots. We had our opportunities," Fadness said. "Okey takes a three



Austin's Gage Manahan pushes off the perimeter against Byron's Isaac Dearborn during the second half Thursday night in Packer Gym. Eric Johnson/photodesk@austindailyherald.com

and it doesn't go down and we lose their best player in the corner somehow. I thought we had a nice play call for Teyghan, he drove left and he just didn't make the shot. That's just basketball and I don't blame anybody."

Austin had a chance to tie or take the lead, but Braaten came up with a steal, which he converted for a lay-up that put the Bears up 50-46 with 23 seconds left.

Braaten later iced the game with two free throws with 10 seconds left. Aus-

tin junior Gage Manahan scored on a lay-up as time expired.

Austin's point total was the second lowest it has put up in a game this season as the team shot just 34 percent from the field. Byron (17-2 overall) shot 55 percent from the field and 58 on three-pointers. The Bears out-rebounded Austin 26-13, but Austin forced 17 turnovers.

A lot of Austin's shortcomings came because the Packers were playing shorthanded.

Already missing big

man Victor Idris to an injury, Austin went most of the night without its 20-point scorer as Emmanuel Manyon played just a handful of minutes in the first half after picking up two quick fouls. He was called for two charges in the first two minutes of the second half — putting him back on the bench until he entered the game with Austin trailing 37-33 with 8:45 left. Manyon hit a three to bring the Packers within 44-42 with 5:16 left, but he fouled out for a steal when the game was tied at

Byron 23 29 — 52  
Austin 25 25 — 50

**Austin scoring:** Teyghan Hovland, 13; Okey Okey, 10; Gage Manahan, 10; Dieth Duop, 7; Kaden Murley, 7; Kaden Murley, 4; Cham Okey, 3; Emmanuel Manyon, 3; **free throws:** 84 percent (11-for-13); **rebounds:** 13 (Hovland, 4); **turnovers:** 7

**Byron scoring:** Jake Braaten, 15; Easton Hulke, 10; Travis Underwood, 10; Trent Decook, 5; Ahjany Lee, 4; Jaxon Marine, 4; Isaac Dearborn, 3; **free throws:** 66 percent (6-for-9); **turnovers:** 17

44 with 2:32 remaining.

"We really needed Emmanuel to be a dude for us and he was all year," Fadness said. "He's a guy we needed on the floor. When he wasn't on the floor we struggled. In all three of our losses, a big part of it was we couldn't kept or have Emmanuel on the floor."

While the loss snapped a 12-game winning streak for the Packers (18-3 overall), Manahan still felt the team battled hard.

"We did it for the team. We wanted to win for the seniors. It wasn't our night, but we played hard every play and put it all out there," Manahan said. "In the end, it's not about us. It's about the team. Byron's a great team, but no excuses. We're supposed to play our A game."

The first half went back and forth, but the Packers

### Online

Photo gallery: [www.austindailyherald.com/2021/03/packers-hit-a-scoring-slump-in-season-ending-loss-to-byron/](http://www.austindailyherald.com/2021/03/packers-hit-a-scoring-slump-in-season-ending-loss-to-byron/)

grabbed a huge momentum boost at the halftime buzzer as Manahan banked in a running half-court shot to put the Packers up 25-23.

Austin started out on a high note as Dieth Duop hit an uncontested three and blocked two shots to boost the Packers to an 8-3 lead in the first six minutes of the game.

Fadness said this year has been one of his most enjoyable seasons as a coach as he has embraced his senior class, which he felt reached big heights by working hard.

"With Teyghan from his sophomore year to now, he's really evolved into a heck of a basketball player. Okey just lives it and he spends a lot of time in the gym. I'm hoping he can find a place to continue his career and keep playing," Fadness said. "Dieth is extremely personable and he gives you everything he has, Casey Berg comes from soccer to basketball and he competes and he's a winner. I didn't think Jordan would play for us after JV last year, but the kid never quit and it was a lot of fun with him this year."



# Good Luck AUSTIN PACKERS GIRLS BASKETBALL

## Minnesota Class 3A Girls State Basketball Tournament Bound



### How they got there

**Section 1AAA Tournament**  
Quarterfinals  
Austin 61, Winona 23

Semifinals  
Austin 61, Kasson-Mantorville 57

Championship  
Austin 45, Albert Lea 30

**Dates**  
March 30-31,  
April 6-8,  
April 9-10

**Sites**  
Quarterfinals  
To be announced

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Championship  
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Hayfield 57, Lyle-Pacelli 47

**Championship**  
Hayfield 78, Southland 72

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