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## 'It hurts' Benton Harbor upset in Class A regional final

By FRANK BENSON / H-P Sports Writer

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KALAMAZOO -- Heartbreaking and devastating.

Those were the two words used most often to describe Benton Harbor's first defeat of the season as the top-ranked Tigers fell to Holt, 58-54, in overtime Friday night in front of a sellout crowd in a Class A regional final at Loy Norrix High School.

"It's more than disappointing, more than that," said senior forward Joique Bell.

Benton Harbor, ranked No. 1 in Michigan since the preseason and currently ranked No. 11 nationally by USA Today, ends its season at 24-1.

Benton Harbor led by six points with 4:09 to play in regulation, but the Rams scored six straight points to send the game into the extra session.

With the score tied, 50-50, Holt was setting up for the final shot in regulation when Wilson Chandler and Justin Webb combined to steal the ball with 4.6 seconds to play. The ball was tipped out of bounds with 1.4 remaining.

The Tigers had time for an inbounds play and Bell lobbed the ball high in front of the basket to 6-foot-5 Rodney Alexander but Alexander's shot banked high off the backboard as time expired.

In overtime the score was tied, 54-54, thanks to two baskets by Benton Harbor's Wilson Chandler, but Holt scored the final four points of the game. In the overtime, Andy Clark, who led Rams with 20 points, had two baskets, and the other points came on free throws.

"It's a very tough loss, heartbreaking," said Benton Harbor coach Ramsey Nichols. "We wanted to go on."

"We didn't play our best game and Holt played their best game," said Bell, one of 11 seniors for Benton Harbor.

"I don't think anyone expected we could play with Benton Harbor except us," said Holt coach Bruce Lerner. "I had a hard time getting someone to scout the next game for us."

Benton Harbor struggled from long range, hitting just 2 of 15 3-point attempts. Holt outrebounded the Tigers 33-25.

"We made some poor decisions and too many turnovers," Nichols said.

"Defensively we doubled-down on their big men a lot," Lerner said. "I don't think Benton Harbor has been in as many close games as we have. We've played six overtime games this season."

"Overtime is our time," said Holt center Paul Crosby, who had 12 points and seven rebounds. "We knew how good Benton Harbor was but we know we can play with anyone."

Following the game, Chandler, a finalist for Michigan's Mr. Basketball award, was one of many Benton Harbor players sobbing in the locker room. Alexander slumped against a wall for many minutes.

The game began poorly for the Tigers as Chandler picked up his first foul 14 seconds into the game; he picked up his second foul three minutes later. Chandler scored 20 points and had a game-high eight rebounds.

Alexander scored 16 points. Those two were the only Benton Harbor players to score more than six points.

The game was close throughout as Holt led 15-11 after one quarter and Benton Harbor took a 29-27 halftime lead.

In a regional semifinal win over Ann Arbor Huron Wednesday night, Holt fans began to chant, "We want Harbor," and on Friday they swarmed the court at the final buzzer and embraced their team.

Benton Harbor fans left quietly, but mumbled about the final fouls total. Benton Harbor was whistled for 18 personal fouls to 13 for Holt. Benton Harbor made just 4 of 7 from the free throw line while Holt hit 19 of 24.

"Some of the calls down the stretch were a little questionable, but my hat is off to Holt," Nichols said. "They played very well, especially defensively. And I was very proud of my guys tonight, they played hard."

"You don't get any second chances," said Bell. "It hurts."