

James Haire

Elizabethtown High School Boys Basketball Coach

Coaching Career: 1995 – Present

Career Coaching Record: 534 Wins – 296 Loses

State Championships

2000 KHSAA Sweet 16 Boys State Championship

2021 KHSAA Sweet 16 Boys State Runner Up

1994 KHSAA Boys Class AA Track Championship

2005 King of the Bluegrass Championship

Region Championships

5th Region Basketball Championships:

2000

2005

2020

2021

2023

Honors and Accomplishments

Area Coach of the Year: 1997, 2000, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2021

KABC Region Coach of the Year: 2002, 2003, 2014

5th Region Coaches Association Coach of the Year:

2014, 2020, 2021

1998 & 2000 Coached the Executive Inn East/West All Star Game

2009 KABC Board Member

2016 Court of Honor Inductee

2015 Coached the KY/Ind All Star Game

2018 National Coach of the Year Finalist

State champs !

E'town defeats Lexington Catholic for state title, 79-69

By MARTIN HEPNER
Sports Writer

LEXINGTON—How sweet it is.

The Elizabethtown boys basketball team, once again facing a seemingly hopeless situation, rallied in dramatic fashion Saturday night to beat Lexington Catholic in the championship game of the state tournament.

The 79-69 decision capped a run of four victories in a little more than 48 hours, including two tremendous come-from-behind efforts Saturday.

"I think we got our respect now," said Elizabethtown senior guard Chris Williams, who helped spark a furious third-quarter rally that turned the game in the Panthers' favor.

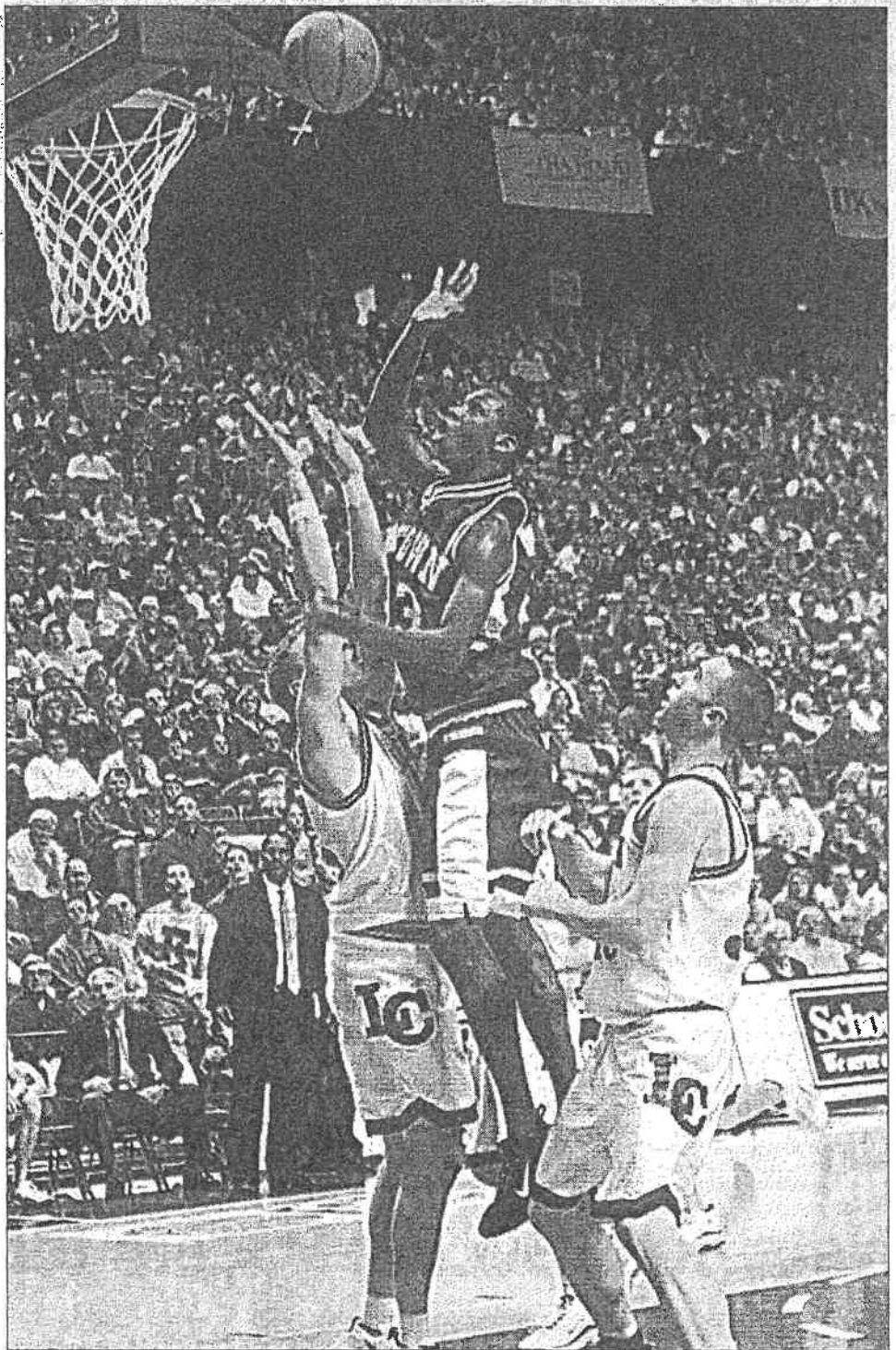
"We came into this tournament and everybody was saying

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N-E/Neal Cardin

Right, Antwain Barbour goes over two Lexington Catholic players for a basket in Saturday's state championship game. Above, Barbour gets pumped up after he was fouled on a shot attempt in the third quarter. Left, Elizabethtown coach James Haire climbs a ladder to cut down the net after winning the State championship.



BOYS' SWEET 16

E'town downs LexCath 79-69 for boys' title

Barbour's 31 lead Panthers to first crown

By BOB WHITE
The Courier-Journal

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Chris Williams got the winning rally started and Antwain Barbour finished it as Elizabethtown won the high school boys' basketball state championship last night.

Williams scored 19 of his 25 points in the second half and Barbour rang up 23 of his 31 in the last two quarters as the Panthers wiped out a 13-point halftime deficit to shoot down Lexington Catholic 79-69 in the 83rd State Tournament final before 17,442 fans in Rupp Arena.

Williams, a left-handed senior, scored 14 of E'town's first 16 points in the third quarter to ignite the rally that gave the Fifth Region champion its first basketball state title.

Barbour, a thin, agile and talented 6-5 senior, scored 12 of the Panthers' last 15 points in their 31-point third quarter.

"I just wanted to come out and play hard and get our team in position to win," Williams said. "Barbour then fin-

ished it. We were down 15 points earlier today and won and were only down 13 tonight."

Barbour, who was named the Sweet 16's MVP, poured in 42 points in E'town's 88-87 comeback victory over Russellville in the afternoon semifinals.

"Chris is a great player," Barbour said. "When he gets going I come on, too. We feed off each other. We just refused to lose."

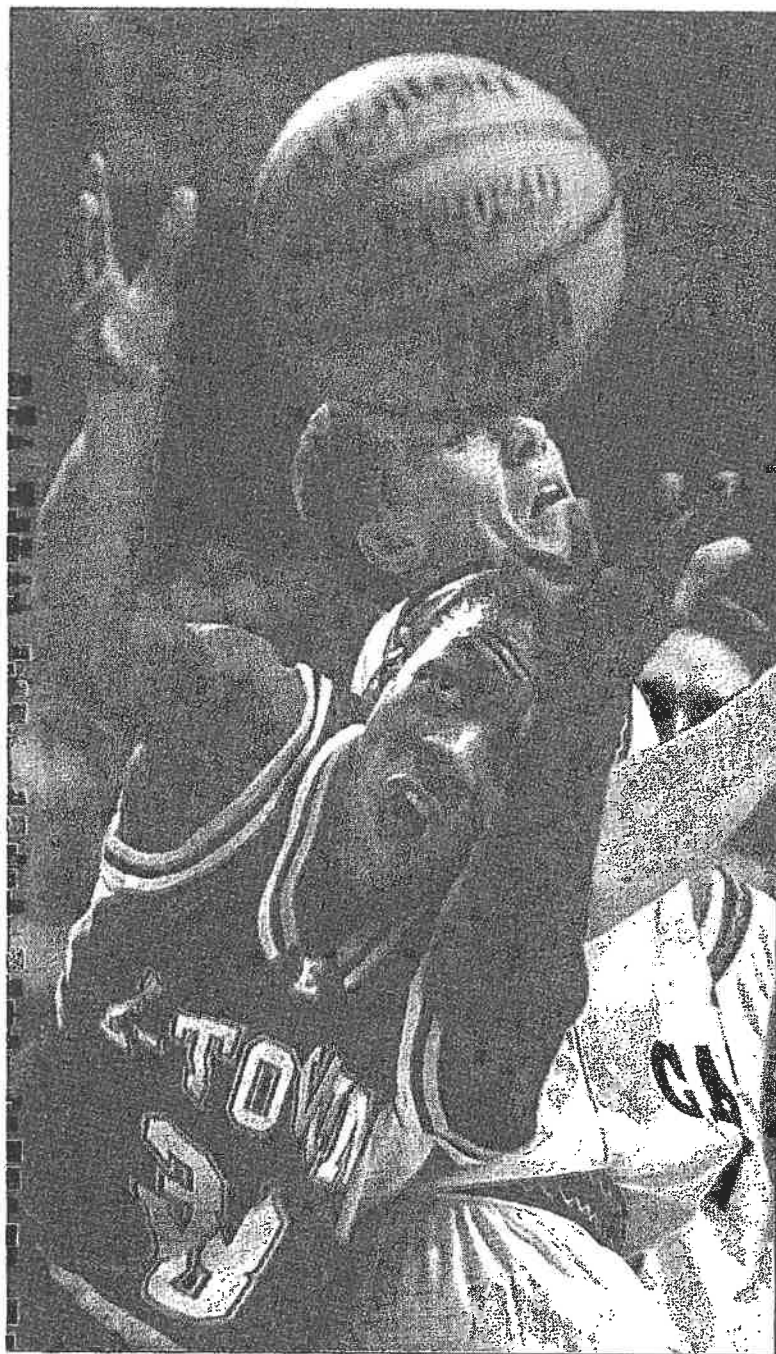
It was E'town's fifth trip to the Sweet 16 and second time in the championship game. The Panthers lost to Owensboro 71-63 in the 1972 final in Louisville.

Ray Vencill, coach of that E'town team, was one of the first on the floor to congratulate present coach James Haire.

"My older brother, Nute, was on the '72 team," Haire said. "When I played in the '75 tournament, we lost. This is why I coach. I coach for these kids. This is something they'll remember the rest of their lives."

The victory capped a 30-5 season for E'town, which was No. 9 in The Courier-Journal's preseason poll of coaches. The

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BY MARY ANN LYONS, THE COURIER-JOURNAL

Antwain Barbour, the State Tournament MVP who scored 31 for E'town, battled LexCath's Brendon Woody for a rebound. Barbour had 42 in the Panthers' semifinal win over Russellville.

E'town downs LexCath 79-69 for boys' title

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Panthers were No. 17 in the Lit-ratings after regular-season play.

E'town, which last played in the State Tournament in 1986, got off to a rocky start against Lexington Catholic, the 11th Region champion.

The Panthers fell behind 10-3, 28-16 and finally 38-23 after Will Harris hit a three-pointer for LexCath near the end of the first half.

"We played three games in 24 hours, but that's all mind-set," Haire said. "We just turned up the intensity after halftime. In the first half, we had open looks but didn't make the shots."

"I just convinced the kids they weren't tired."

Haire wasn't surprised at Barbour's play over the last two games.

"I see it every day in practice," he said. "He's an outstanding talent. Williams is, too."

By outscoring Lexington Catholic 31-9 in the third quarter, E'town roared into a 56-47 lead. The Panthers stretched that margin to 67-57 after Barbour scored seven straight points.

LexCath, which lost to University Heights 59-57 in the 1992 final in Louisville, wasn't through. The Knights, led by Matt Heissenbuttel, rallied within 69-62 with 3:02 left.

Barbour then rebounded a missed free throw by Williams and scored for a 71-62 lead at 1:30. Williams hit two free throws at 1:20 to make it 73-64.

Heissenbuttel led Lexington Catholic (32-5) with 25 points. Harris, who moved to Lexington from E'town

ELIZABETHTOWN 79										
Player	min	fg	ft	reb	to	a	pt	tp		
Johnston	30	3	6	3	8	1	8	4	2	11
Williams	29	7	14	6	10	7	5	0	3	25
Pedigo	25	1	2	1	4	2	1	1	3	3
Barbour	31	13	22	4	8	8	2	0	3	31
Richardson	5	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	2	0
Bramblett	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	2	0
Sexton	32	4	9	1	2	20	1	2	2	9
Team							3	0		
Totals	160	28	53	15	30	44	19	8	17	79

LEXINGTON CATHOLIC 69										
Player	min	fg	ft	reb	to	a	pt	tp		
Smith	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	
Wofford	12	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	2
Wellman	20	1	2	2	2	0	2	3	5	5
M. Heissenbuttel	29	8	14	8	14	8	0	2	2	25
Hewitt	19	2	5	1	4	1	2	3	5	5
Woody	14	0	4	0	0	1	1	0	2	0
Harris	31	8	19	2	2	10	3	3	3	20
Wilson	24	4	11	0	0	4	2	1	2	8
Morton	6	1	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	2
Ross	8	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
J. Heissenbuttel	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Team							2	0		
Totals	160	29	60	13	22	29	10	13	24	69

Halftime — Lexington Catholic 36, Elizabethtown 25.

3-point goals — Elizabethtown 8-16 (Johnston 2-3, Williams 5-9, Barbour 1-3, Richardson 0-1), Lexington Catholic 4-24 (Wellman 1-2, M. Heissenbuttel 1-2, Hewitt 0-1, Woody 0-4, Harris 2-9, Wilson 0-5).

Shooting percentages — Elizabethtown 52.8, Lexington Catholic 43.3.

Steals — Elizabethtown 5 (Pedigo 1, Barbour 3, Sexton 1), Lexington Catholic 12 (Wofford 2, Wellman 1, M. Heissenbuttel 2, Hewitt 3, Woody 1, Harris 2, Wilson 1).

Blocked shots — Elizabethtown 1 (Barbour), Lexington Catholic 1 (Morton).

Attendance — 17,442.

three years ago, scored 16 of his 20 points in the first half.

"E'town is a second-half team, and we told our kids that," Lexington Catholic coach Danny Haney said.

"We did everything we could. We extended our defense out, but they pushed their offense out. They hit six (actually five) three-pointers in the third quarter. I didn't know what else to do.

"Their athleticism took over. With their size they were able to shoot over us."

Disappointed about not winning his first title, after reaching the semifinals in 1998 with the favored team, Haney said, "It'll happen sometime."



PHOTOS BY DAVID R. LUTMAN, SPECIAL TO THE COURIER-JOURNAL

Elizabethtown High School celebrated the boys' basketball state championship at a pep rally yesterday. Elizabethtown Mayor David Willmoth told the crowd that the school, which has just 747 students, proved that bigger is not better.

E'town rides Panther power to state victory

By MEGAN WOOLHOUSE
The Courier-Journal

ELIZABETHTOWN, Ky. — Hundreds of fans packed the gym at Elizabethtown High School yesterday afternoon to welcome home the little team that could — and did — win its first boys' state basketball championship.

"I knew we were going to win it," senior Adam Bostic said as he sat in the bleachers waiting for the team's grand entrance. "We have so much going for us, so much heart."

Although the bleachers were full of confident fans yesterday, at the start of the season there were those who wrote the team off. The Elizabethtown Panthers have been to the Sweet 16 only twice in the tournament's 83-year history. Coach James Haire said people consistently referred to them as going nowhere.

Even after the team pushed its way to the final game in Rupp Arena in Lexington on Saturday with a season record of 29-5, the trophy and championship banner had already been placed on their opponent's side of the court, Haire said.

Instead, the Panthers came



Patti Antone hugged James Haire, who has been coaching the Panthers for five years.

from behind to beat Lexington Catholic 79-69 and raise their record to 30-5.

"I think these kids kept hearing (that they weren't strong), and they took offense to it," Haire said. "It couldn't have ended any better."

A city police escort joined the team as it returned from Lexington yesterday, leading



Fire and police vehicles led the victorious team to the pep rally yesterday. Elizabethtown came from behind to beat Lexington Catholic 79-69 in Rupp Arena on Saturday.

a procession through downtown on a victory lap and then back to its home gym, where school officials had rolled out a red mat. Fans in blue and yellow, the Panther colors, screamed, waved pom-poms and stomped on the bleachers to the beat of "We Will Rock You."

A handmade banner

summed up the feeling: "How Sweet It Is."

Ray Vencill, a former coach at E'town who took the team to the Sweet 16 in 1972, told the crowd, "You can't win Derby Day on a billy goat" and pointed out the contribu-

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From left, players Chris Williams, Cal Foster, Mark Richardson and Jason Johnston celebrated their basketball championship yesterday. Elizabethtown High principal Ruth Sorace said the team thrived on comebacks. "They would just pick up steam," she said.

E'town rides Panther power to state victory

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tions of two star players, Chris Williams and Antwain Barbour. The two, both seniors, dominated the scoring in the last games.

"I've been around a long time," Vencill said. "I've never seen a better performance at any ballgame than I saw (in the) two games yesterday."

Barbour — a 6-5 forward who was named the Sweet 16's most valuable player — scored 42 points in the semifinal game Saturday, leading his team to an 88-87 victory over Russellville. He gave the entire team credit.

Williams had 25 points and seven rebounds and teammate Nathan Sexton 9 points and 20 rebounds in the title game. Sexton's 20 rebounds were the fifth-highest total in the history of the championship game.

"We all just hate losing," Barbour said.

Looking tired after playing four games in three days, Barbour posed

for photographs and signed shirts for young and old fans. His mother, who attended every basketball game this season before heading to the 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift at a local factory, stood smiling nearby.

She said that calls from college recruiters have been steady for the last two years but that her son has not made a choice yet. He said he is just trying to let the victory sink in.

After Saturday's big win, he said, he went back to his hotel room and sat down.

"I just kept thinking, 'We actually won. It's just like a dream.'"

The Panthers routinely surprised fans and other teams with their comebacks. On Saturday night, they recovered from a 13-point deficit after halftime to win the championship.

The school's principal, Ruth Sorace, recalled that they were behind during the very first game of the season and came back in the fourth

quarter to beat Shelby County 119-108.

"They would just pick up steam," she said.

Haire, who teaches social studies, said after the rally that many questioned whether he was up to coaching the team when he took the position five years ago. That year the team lost 22 games and won two, he said, and one parent withdrew his son from the school and sent him to Lexington Catholic to play ball.

The victory, however, is not personal but a triumph for the whole team, he said, comparing the players' spirit to that of the comic-book hero the Incredible Hulk.

"When somebody pushes their back against the wall," he said, "they change. They get angry."

Josh Wendt, Steven Warren and Greg Crews bought a black marker and drew the school's initials on their bare chests for the rally. Although all three are still in junior high, they fol-

low the high school team and said they have never been disappointed.

"We don't have a team; what we have is talent," said Josh, 13. "They can handle the workload."

Mayor David Willmoth declared before the crowd that tomorrow will officially be Panther Basketball State Champions Day in Elizabethtown. He said that the school, which has only 747 students, proved that bigger is not better.

"This is the best team," he said to loud cheers, "and this is the most exciting thing that is going to happen this year in Kentucky basketball."

Tomorrow the team will eat lunch with the Rotary Club, and there will be another celebration at the school. The award will be placed in a trophy case that is being built. The trophy will go beside the Lady Panthers' state championship trophy from 1998.

BY DAVID R. LUTMAN, SPECIAL TO THE COURIER-JOURNAL

State Champs! E'town rolls to title

Not only did the E'town boys' basketball team win the state championship, but they also won the title in the 1994 Class 2A State Champs.

The E'town boys' basketball team won the state championship in the 1994 Class 2A State Champs.

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STATE TRACK AND FIELD

Event	Winner	Time
100m
200m
400m
800m
1600m
3200m
6400m
12800m
25600m
51200m
102400m
204800m
409600m
819200m
1638400m
3276800m
6553600m
13107200m
26214400m
52428800m
104857600m
209715200m
419430400m
838860800m
1677721600m
3355443200m
6710886400m
13421772800m
26843545600m
53687091200m
107374182400m
214748364800m
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13743895347200m
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■ BOYS' PREP BASKETBALL

Elizabethtown's Haire a finalist for National Coach of the Year

By GRANT WIEMAN
The News-Enterprise

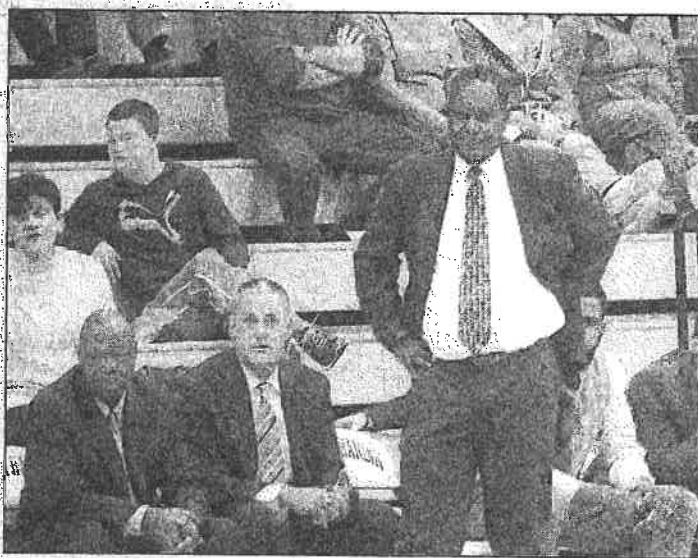
Elizabethtown Panthers coach James Haire is one of eight finalists for National Coach of the Year for Boys Basketball.

The award ceremony, presented by the National High School Athletic Coaches Association, is June 27 in Sioux Falls, S.D.

"It's not something that I had campaigned for," Haire said, adding he was honored to be included. "I don't really get into that type of thing, Coach of the Year things. ... I don't seek attention. Everything to me is about team. Is my team doing well? I always try to deflect everything away from me.

"When someone comes to one of my basketball games, I don't expect to be the highlight. I expect my team to be."

According to a release from NHSACA, the nomination "was based on longevity, service to high school athletics, honors, championship years and winning percentage."



Elizabethtown coach James Haire watches his team during a game last season. Haire is a finalist for the National Coach of the Year for Boys' Basketball, presented by the National High School Athletic Coaches Association.

Haire was nominated by the Kentucky High School Coaches Association board during a meeting last

August.

Jimmie Reed, executive director for the KHSCA, said he can't recall another

Kentucky boys' basketball coach being a national finalist.

Turn to HAIRE, B4

HAIRE: is one of eight finalists for National Coach of the Year honor

Continued from B1

"Coach Haire has been around for a long time and has been very, very successful," Reed. "We're just trying to get him and the state some proper recognition.

"... James Haire is well thought of not only because of his coaching success, but he's well thought of and respected throughout the state because of him being in education."

Haire has been coach at Elizabethtown for more than 20 years, including the 2000 Sweet 16 championship team.

He credited much of his success to Ray Vencill, the former Panthers' coach, as well as former North Hardin coach Ron Bevars and former LaRue County coach Paul Handley.

"I've been very fortunate to have a lot of very good people that I can talk to," Haire said. "One of them is Coach Vencill. He's been a solid foundation for me as far as bouncing ideas off of. ... I take a lot of inspiration and give people (chances for) different opinions.

"I don't take them all the time, but I like to listen to other peoples viewpoints, people who have been through the fire. As well as my assistant coaches, too."

This past season, the Panthers finished 17-10 and picked up wins against 5th

Region Tournament teams John Hardin, Central Hardin and Adair County.

It was an 11-game improvement from two seasons ago.

"Regardless of the record, I'm always extremely proud of anybody who's ever played for me, anybody who's given 100 percent effort," Haire said. "What really is amazing is like two years ago, these boys were sophomores, had no seniors on the team, and to watch them grow to become physically better, mentally tougher and at times able to compete with anybody."

Haire said he first learned he was nominated for the award when he received an email in November as practice was getting underway.

"Me with emails, I kind of glance at them and dispense them," he said. "I kind of glanced at this one and I was getting ready to dispense it, but then I saw Jimmie Reed's name, and I knew him."

Haire filled out the requested form and two weeks later learned he was a national finalist.

He tried to hide it during the season, not wanting to draw attention from the team, but word spread on social media.

Haire said he's never been to South Dakota, but he hopes to make a summer vacation out of the event and bring his wife Pam and children, Andrea and Jamie, along.

Reed said he also plans to attend.

The NHSACA ceremony will recognize the National



JILL PICKETT/The News-Enterprise

Elizabethtown coach James Haire watches his team during a game last season.

Coach of the Year in 19 different sports.

While he has already accomplished more than most, Haire, 60, said the nomination has not made him nostalgic or turn an eye to retirement.

"I take every season as it comes," he said. "We won a championship back in 2000 ... never wore the ring. I don't want to look backwards. I only want to look at what I have

now.

"I don't have a timetable right now. Everybody tells me I'll know when it's time. The worst thing that can happen is you quit too soon and then regret it and yearn to get back in it. I want to be ready and just walk away."

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BOYS' AREA COACH OF THE YEAR JAMES HAIRE, ELIZABETHTOWN

Under Haire, Panthers have rebounded strong

By JEFF D'ALESSIO
SPORTS EDITOR

When a coach looks at his roster after a season and sees that the five starters he put on the floor most of the year will graduate, it can often lead to a mix of emotions.

Panic would top the list for most coaches.

Not for Elizabethtown High School boys' head basketball coach James Haire.

New year, new challenge.

Time to go to work.

His Panthers won an area-best 17 straight games, went 23-3 overall and 8-2 in 17th District play.

For that, Haire earned this year's Area Coach of the Year award in voting by area coaches and members of *The News-Enterprise* sports staff.

"That type of award comes as a benefactor of the hard work of these guys," said

Haire, who has a 125-67 record in seven seasons as Elizabethtown's head coach. "I hope it reflects the type of job our coaches do. I have some excellent coaches with me."

Voting for individual awards was based on a 5-3-1 scale with five points for first, three for second and one for third.

Haire, who received five first-place votes, finished with 30 points. North Hardin coach Ron Bevars finished with 24 points and LaRue County coach Dee Hutchins was third with 20 points.

After starting the season 0-2 with losses to Shelby County and North Hardin, the Panthers have won 23 of their last 24 games.

"In both of those games, I saw a lot of good," Haire said. "... If we had won both games I wouldn't have been jumping up and down about it. I felt like this team had some very good qualities about it."

With five starters gone,

there is often a growth period.

Haire saw that in his team over the summer and it hasn't stopped.

"If you take Dwight (Rudd) off this team, this is the JV team from last year," he said. "These kids like playing together and we play a lot of kids. Sometimes there are sacrifices that you have to make to be successful and this team has done that."

The Panthers will be the No. 2 seed in the 17th District Tournament this week at North Hardin High School. Two of Elizabethtown's three losses have come against the Trojans.

"I kind of thought we'd have a good year, but I never thought the record would be as good as it is," Haire said. "This team, they have a type of hunger and desire that is different than most teams."

"I think a lot of it is they've had to wait a long time for their chance and now they have it," he added. "They



Elizabethtown head coach James Haire.

N-E/Neal Cardin

know if we play together as a team, we're a pretty good team. And they know that if they play as individuals, they

can be beat by anybody."

This is the third Area Coach of the Year award Haire has won.

Jeff D'Alessio can be reached at 769-1200, Ext. 292, or at jeffd@mail.the-ne.com

BOYS' ALL-AREA BASKETBALL

COACH OF THE YEAR

Haire claims top honor for sixth time

By JOHN GROTH

groth@thenewsenterprise.com

Coach James Haire still remains mesmerized at what the Elizabethtown Panthers accomplished this season.

With only one returning starter back from a year ago, they managed to scratch and claw their way all the way to the Boys' 5th Region Basketball Tournament championship game.

They survived a brutal schedule and dealt with plenty of regular-season bumps and slumps before refocusing their efforts to get back to their inside game and go on a deep postseason run.

Elizabethtown finished 16-13, knocked off regular-season 17th District regular-season champion John Hardin in two of three meetings – ending the Bulldogs' 13-0 start the first time and hanging on in a four-overtime thriller in the district final – and won two 5th Region Tournament games before suffering a 62-55 loss to Bardstown in the region



JAMES HAIRE

final.

"What these players have done, I think is amazing," Haire said. "We lost 10 seniors last year and returned one player with any kind of valid varsity experience with Mitchell (Henry). We had one transfer, Chris (McDonald), and large holes to fill. We had guys with JV experience trying to play up. The guys did a tremendous job."

Area coaches and *The News-Enterprise* sports department thought Haire did, too, as he was voted the Area Coach of the

Year. He finished with 42 points and six first-place votes – beating out John Hardin coach Mark Wells (five first-place votes) by five points. LaRue County's Paul Childress was third with nine points. Voting was based on a 5-3-1 scale and coaches couldn't vote for themselves.

It's Haire's sixth honor during his 16-year tenure. But this one might have been one of his toughest yet.

After reaching the 5th Region Tournament semifinals in 2010, Elizabethtown graduated nearly all of its starting lineup and most of its roster. The Panthers still had a dominant post presence with Henry and had McDonald transferring from Fort Knox.

They also had a guard corps of seniors Terry Jones and Cory Farrow, junior Jansen Flood and sophomores Bryce Byrd and Nic McDonald, who had barely played at the varsity level.

Early on, they had no chemistry with each other, on the court or off it. In Haire's view, they were so quiet.

"I knew they were competitive. As far as reading body language, faces and emotions ... they were calm," Haire said. "It was hard for me to get used to."

It took the players a little bit of time, too.

Elizabethtown won its first game, then lost three straight. The Panthers responded, winning six of their next seven – including a five-game winning streak – but ended the regular season winning just five of their final 13 games, though they lost to three powerhouses (Warren Central, Bullitt East and Louisville Eastern) to close it out.

But the week prior to the district tournament, Haire noticed a change.

Players seemed more focused in practice. He had their attention, especially when he brought in more than a handful of former coaches and players – including Ray Bencill (basketball) and Vince Hancock (football) – to speak.

"I think they finally realized E'town basketball is bigger than

just them, that they represented a generation of people, that they represented the 1930s or 1940s," Haire said. "Once they realized that, they started to elevate their level of play. They knew what they were carrying."

Then, Elizabethtown looked like those teams of old. The Panthers blitzed North Hardin in the first half, rolling to a 21-point halftime advantage before winning, 58-44 in the district tournament semifinals. They knocked off the Bulldogs in the district final, then took care of Caverna and Bardstown Bethlehem in the 5th Region Tournament.

Henry acknowledged Haire helped them, with their schedule, their confidence and their strength.

"A lot of people come around here and have said Coach Haire helped them become tougher and help them through life," Henry said. "If you can make it through this, there are a lot of things you can make it through."

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THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE

Sports

Panthers win third 5th Region title in 4 years

BY JOSH CLAYWELL
PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

MUNFORDVILLE — Before his players can leave practice each day, veteran Elizabethtown coach James Haire has them make 20 free throws.

No one really likes free throw drills, but it paid off in a big way for the Panthers Tuesday night in the Boys' 5th Region Basketball Tournament championship game.

Trailing 42-39 with around 6 minutes to go, Elizabethtown closed with a 16-2 run as the Panthers rallied past longtime rival LaRue County 55-44 at Hart County High School.

The game-changing run included Elizabethtown going 6 for 6 from the foul line over the final 2 minutes.

"Coach has been preaching free throws all year," said Elizabethtown big man Ayden Evans, who was named Most Outstanding Player of the tournament. "We do a free throw drill after every practice, so we have to lock in on our free throws. That's what won us the game."

It was a furious comeback that propelled the Panthers to their ninth region title since 1972.

The Hawks took a 42-39 lead after Luke Trumbo drew a charge

and then Carson Childress drained a 3-pointer on the other end with around 6 minutes to go.

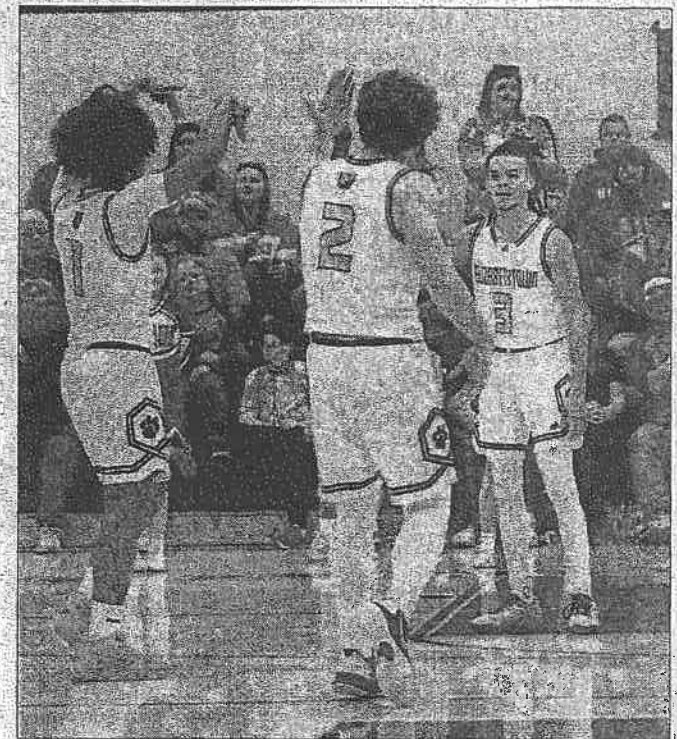
That, however, was the last time LaRue County led.

Elizabethtown's JuJuan Williams hit a 3-pointer with 5:45 left, giving the Panthers a 43-42 lead.

Williams forced a turnover in front of the Hawks' bench with 4:59 to go, then hit a tough fade-away shot in the lane to make it 45-42.

Evans stretched the lead to 47-42 with a layup, and Obi Howard followed with a short jumper to make it 49-42 with 2 minutes

SEE REGION/PAGE B2



JOSH CLAYWELL/Paxton Media Group

Elizabethtown players JuJuan Williams (1), Trey Durbin and Obi Howard begin celebrating Tuesday night as the Panthers close in on their third 5th Region title in the past four seasons.

ALL-AREA: Haire named 2021 Coach of the Year

Continued from A10

his E'town basketball career with fondness. The Panthers won back-to-back 5th Region Tournament titles.

"I'm most pleased with all the teammates I've had and the great coaching staff I've been able to have for all four years of high school and for the fan base of E'town supporting me through all the ups and downs," Franklin said.

Elizabethtown featured a starting lineup with five double-figure scorers last season and even when Franklin drew special defensive attention, the Panthers were able to find scoring options.

"It helped a lot but it wasn't just about me scoring; we all can play and if the attention is all focused on me that's what I have teammates for, to score and win the game if I'm not able to get the looks that I want," he said.

He said he improved his game over the last year with his ballhandling ability and shooting and said shooting is something he continually needs to work on.

He's not certain where he will attend college and play basketball. He will major in business.

"There's multiple schools that are recruiting me and I'm trying to find a home where I am most wanted and so I can major in business," he said.

"Whatever puts me in the best situation to help me be successful at life is what I'm looking for."



MATT TYSON/The News-Enterprise

After leading Elizabethtown to the state tournament, coach James Haire has been selected by area coaches as the Coach of the Year.

Haire gets Panthers to 'step up' this season

By **CHUCK JONES**
The News-Enterprise

The Elizabethtown Panthers were dealt a major setback before the season even began when Zane Najdawi moved to Virginia during the offseason.

Instead of hitting the panic button, Elizabethtown pushed forward with the same high expectations, probably because those don't change from one year to the next under Coach James Haire.

Players shifted into different roles, namely senior Dominique Harding stepped in to fill the void left by Najdawi in the paint, and senior guards Nic McDonald and Ja'Von Cotton elevated their play. Senior Ryan Harris and juniors Zach Patterson, Tristan Johnson and Austin Freyberger saw their roles expand as well.

Elizabethtown's mentality of everyone had to do more to make up for the loss paid off as the Panthers enjoyed a 23-9 season against a challenging schedule.

"We go in from last year and before we even play a game Zane left," Haire said. "That was a big disappointment, but everybody stepped up. I think we had a very good year. They really stepped up and accepted the challenge."

For his efforts, Haire was selected the Area Coach of the Year for the third time in the last four years and the eighth time overall. He trails only former North Hardin coach Ron Bevars, who won the award 12 times, on the boys' side.

Haire garnered seven of the possible 10 first-place votes (coaches weren't allowed to vote for themselves) and tallied 41 points. John Hardin's Mark Wells, who received two first-place votes, finished second with 22 points. North Hardin's Mike Cofer (11 points) and Central Hardin's J.C. Wright (10 points) each earned a first-place vote.

The four-member *News-Enterprise* sports staff and seven area coaches voted and voting was done on a 5-3-1 scale.

"I see how hard all the coaches in this area work and they get the best out of their teams," Haire said. "We have great coaches in this area. What I see them do, it amazes me. It's almost like I'm not deserving. It's an honor. It's Coach of the Year, but it should be the Team of the Year. The credit goes to them."

The Panthers came through the month of December with a 7-3 mark, but they opened the New Year with a disappointing 73-61 loss at Taylor County.

"Taylor County was very well prepared for us," Haire said. "Every time we would call something, they would call it out. Just because you have E'town across your chest doesn't mean you're automatically going to win. I think they took it more seriously and it woke them up. They were more focused after that."

It showed in the results. The Panthers reeled off 10 consecutive wins, including an 88-50 thumping of Montgomery County in the Nathan McCurry Classic at John Hardin.

"I think the weather threw us for a loop," Haire said. "After the win over Montgomery, we didn't play for like a week. There was a lot of uncertainty. We continued to play well, but that threw us off."

After losing four of its final six regular-season games, Elizabethtown bounced back to win the 17th District Tournament and then reached the 5th Region championship before falling to Bardstown, 61-44.

Despite coming up a win shy of reaching the Sweet 16, Haire said he was proud of what this team accomplished in his 19th season.

"We were a perimeter team, but Dominique gave us that inside presence" Haire said. "Nic, Ryan and



JILL PICKETT/The News-Enterprise

Elizabethtown coach James Haire shouts instructions during a game this season.

Ja'Von were seniors and very familiar with each other. They were hard to press and we had a lot of guys who could shoot. I thought the biggest thing was our maturity level. The next game

was always the biggest to them. They were competitors and they wanted to win."

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Panthers' Haire sweeps the category

By MIKE MATHISON

The News-Enterprise

When James Haire took over the boys' basketball program 25 years ago at Elizabethtown High School, he sure didn't think he'd still be coaching, suit and tie and all.

"I remember people asking me that. I told them I would coach for a few years and step out," Haire said. "There wasn't ever a thought about doing it this long. I love coaching basketball. I coached football, basketball and track at the same time and I loved doing that. It always amazed me how long Coach (Ron) Bevers did it.

"It's a competition. At a school like E'town, you have up and down years. I don't want anyone to misunderstand, but the years we don't win as much, I have a tremendous appreciation for the guys who gave the effort. They wanted to win just like everybody else and I want to win just like everybody else. You look at the effort they gave and you can't help but respect all of them. I respect every team I've ever coached.

"In those lean years, I thought I coached a much better job then. I was trying everything to get something to work. When you have better players, you're still trying and working hard, but they do make your job a little easier."

The Panthers won the 5th Region Tournament March 10 for the first time since 2005 and were ranked in the top 10 all season. For his efforts, Haire has been selected as the Area Coach of the Year after a 27-3 campaign.

He swept the category with all eight first-place votes and 40 points. Voting was done on a 5-3-1 scale by the seven area coaches and *The News-Enterprise* sports staff. Coaches could not vote for themselves.

John Hardin's Jared McCurry, who won the award the past two seasons, finished second with 18 points and the

other first-place vote. LaRue County's Paul Childress finished third with 11 points.

"I think that (North Hardin's) Mike Cofer and (Central Hardin's) Matt Nickell did tremendous jobs with what they had and developed their team," Haire said. "And Jared always does a great job. We have some of the best coaches there are in the area, and I really believe that.

"I'm very honored by this. There are many other coaches who easily deserved this award."

Elizabethtown now awaits the final word of the Sweet 16, which has been on hold since the girls' tournament was postponed March 12.

"I wish there was a way they could play," Haire said. "I would love to see the way this team would have played against Ashland. It would have been something to watch. It would have been a very entertaining game. If they're gonna call it off – and they haven't made that decision yet, I'm not sure how they can do it. I hope, for the seniors, they find a way to do it.

"We were only full strength for (the first) four games. Kam (Sherrard) got hurt and missed the next 17 games and (Clay) Games went down for the season. For them to be able to keep up the winning, losing two key people, I really thought that was amazing."

The Panthers lost one senior from a year ago and will lose four this year in Myles Fields, Matthew Pinkham, Luke Fiepeke and Dennis Bowen.

"The 2000 team (that won the state championship) was sort of like that," Haire said



of the youth on the team.

"We had Chris Williams and Nathan Sexton. We've had a few years like that, but we didn't have a team with four sophomores like I had last year. We had four or five juniors, but nothing like I have now."

Nine of the 14 players on the roster are juniors with six of the top seven scorers – Jaquias Franklin, Camden Williams, Khia Sherrard, Kam Sherrard, Alandre Murphy and Jacob Moberly – returning next season.

Haire, a 1976 Elizabethtown graduate, played for legendary coach Ray Vencill, who passed away last June.

"Back then it was all white coaches. I didn't have one black coach growing up,"

Haire said. "We didn't see color when you saw those coaches. You saw guys who cared about us, who cared what we were doing about school and all of those coaches taught me a will to win. His influence on me was more on the role I'm in now. We had many talks. Something he would tell me went through me to help fuel me and help keep me going.

"When I grew up, you did not see a lot of pro sports on TV. Elizabethtown High School was who I looked at as a pro team. My brother played on that '72 team that was (state) runner-up. E'town players and coaches were like celebrities to me, especially Coach Vencill. I talked about him often to our players. They

didn't know him because he did not have a chance to watch the team in person. He wasn't able to come. He would watch on TV and told me things about this group, the uniqueness about them before I could even realize it.

"He saw their defensive intensity, especially last year. He saw their on-the-ball defense and how they were able to read off each other. They were doing certain switches without being told. They would help backside and did some things in games where I went, 'Wait, we haven't worked on that yet.' I don't coach much in the summer, I let the assistants coach and I watch, and they were doing things last summer that said a lot about them as players and

teammates."

Haire said Vencill scheduled games in Louisville before Kentucky Colonels games.

"I saw Dr. J (Julius Erving) play in person one year and we got kicked out of our dressing room by Wilt Chamberlain the next year; he was the coach of the San Diego Conquistadors," Haire said with a laugh. "So, I saw Dr. J pay a house call and got kicked out of a dressing room by Wilt Chamberlain. That's pretty good. He said, 'Guys, we got a game, you gotta get out.'"

Haire said coaching basketball had one distinct advantage over football and track.

"It's a controlled environment," he said. "There are cold nights in football and cold nights in track and I'm not a cold weather fan. It's always been basketball for me. I have a great love for football and I like track. I won a state championship in track in '96. I had a heck of a team. It wasn't me at all.

"Basketball is a team sport, but it's highly individualized. The uniqueness of the locker room is great. When I played back in the '70s, I really can't remember a lot of things about games, but that locker room was a special place. The guys I played with I still see them today, guys like Ray French. I lost a dear friend in Pat Donnelly (who passed away in January). We go back to the seventh grade together.

"When I see a teammate of mine anywhere, we stop and talk for a few minutes. When we're playing in their hometown and they know we're coming through to play a game, I always see them at the game. Time stands still with that.

"It's more like that in basketball because you have 10 to 15 players and we seem to be well connected for a long period of time."

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AREA COACH OF THE YEAR

E'town's Haire selected as top coach for third time in five years

By **CHUCK JONES**

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ELIZABETHTOWN — When Elizabethtown coach James Haire was told he was named the Area Coach of the Year, it seemed to catch the coach by surprise.

"That award could go to any coach in the area," Haire said. "Artie Braden, Barry Cox, J.C. Wright ... it's all about what you do with the talent you have. I think every coach in the area did that. Look at what (Ron) Bevars did with a young team. This is very surprising."

Haire was named the Area Coach of the Year by the seven area coaches and the three-member *News-Enterprise* sports staff for the third time in the past five years. Voting was based on a 5-3-1 scale with first-place votes worth five points.

Haire tallied 26 points, including five of a possible nine first-place votes. Wright was second with 20 points followed by Braden with 16 and Cox with 14.

The Panthers rolled to a 28-4 record, including winning the King of the Bluegrass Holiday Classic and the

17th District Tournament. They finished second in the Marion County Invitational and the Toyota Classic at Scott County.

Elizabethtown was trying to become the first team since North Hardin to win back-to-back 5th Region championships, but John Hardin knocked them off in double overtime.

Although the loss was a bitter end to the season, Haire said he was proud of what this team was able to accomplish.

"I think this award says a lot about

the people you coach," Haire said. "I never thought we'd win 28 games with the schedule we played. But these kids always believed they were going to win. It's a credit to them."

Haire said having a veteran team — nine seniors — made his job easier, especially in terms of practices.

"They knew if I mentioned just one word, they'd echo it and they'd know what drill we were doing," Haire said. "They had been conditioned that they knew me as well as any group I've had. It was like having nine more assistant coaches."

Speaking of assistant coaches, Haire said the familiarity of the staff was another reason for the team's success. Alex Todd and David Johnson have been with Haire for seven years, while Kyle Goodlett has spent two years on the staff.

"They know what I expect and they know what the school expects," Haire said. "David played at E'town so he understands what it's like. They do a tremendous job and they don't often get the credit they deserve."

Chuck Jones can be reached at 769-1200, Ext. 292

THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE

SPORTS

TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2006

ALL-AREA BASKETBALL

All-Star games have area feel

Haire coaching, Patterson playing in boys' game; Cleaver, Turner, Brewer on girls' team

By **CHUCK JONES**
The News-Enterprise

Elizabethtown coach James Haire admitted he usually doesn't like coaching All-Star teams, but this isn't just any ordinary All-Star game.

Haire, who has been Elizabethtown's boys' coach for 20 years, is the head coach for the Kentucky All-Stars after serving as an assistant the last two years. Kentucky plays Indiana tonight at Transylvania University's Beck Center and then Saturday at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.

"It is an honor," Haire said.

"They have a selection committee and one thing I asked them is how they knew about me. Honestly, the reason I did it was to bring attention to basketball in our area."

Haire has built quite a resume during his tenure. He is only 18 wins shy of 400. He has 17 seasons with 20 or more wins, including guiding the Panthers to a 30-5 mark and the 2000 state championship.

Haire faces a difficult challenge as he must try to figure out a way to end Indiana's dominance. Indiana, which leads the all-time series 91-42, has swept Kentucky six years in a row and has won

20 of the past 21. Kentucky's last victory in the boys' series came in 2008.

If it wasn't already a monumental task, Haire hasn't had his full roster for practice yet. Kentucky Mr. Basketball Camron Justice won't be playing in the series and Haire has only had six or seven players in practice.

"It's been challenging," Haire said. "We've kept everything really simple so when we get our entire team, they will be able to pick it up really fast. It's not complicated. We did that for a reason."

Turn to ALL-STAR, B5



JILL PICKETT/The News-Enterprise

Elizabethtown coach James Haire gestures during the Boys' 17th District Basketball Tournament championship at Central Hardin.



2013-2014
5th Region Coaches Association

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CO-COACH OF THE YEAR

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2019-2020
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**JOHN R. WOODEN
LEGACY AWARD
2025**

THIS CERTIFICATE IS PRESENTED TO:

JAMES HAIRE

In recognition for being an educator and achieving excellence on the floor, in the classroom, and in the community that embodies the characteristics and legacy of Coach John R. Wooden.

Dave Archer

Dave Archer

NHSBCA Executive Director



Greg Wooden

John Wooden Family