

**By Pastor Vince Carrig**

*Sports Writer*

Reserve power forward Cole Taylor's berserk first quarter scoring spree and guard Matt McCleod's high, gliding drives to the basket captured Sandhills-Thedford the 2012 Perkins County Booster Club Holiday Tournament championship with a 55-43 win over the Plainsmen Saturday night in Grant.

Making a strong case for his insertion into the starting lineup, the senior Taylor blasted hard to the basket for eight points in the first eight minutes and slashed the Knights to a 13-2 lead.

Perkins County, which got plenty of power from Alex Johnston's two buckets and four free scores in the fourth quarter, never approached closer than trailing 49-41 in the fourth quarter.

The Knights kept control of the game thanks to McCloud's ability to puncture Perkins County's interior defense with long, smooth jumps and scoop the ball in with his left hand. His extensions gained him 15 free throw attempts as well as seven field goals on his way to a game-high 20 points.

The Plainsmen scored 17 of their 43 points in the fourth quarter, with two of senior power center Blake Poppe's nine points from a mid-lane jumper drawing Perkins County to within eight points of the lead (49-41).

Perkins County guard Quinton Hite connected on two three pointers and collected 10 points, but the Plainsmen received little scoring beyond Johnston, Hite and Poppe's visits with double digits.

Taylor scored 14 points and 6-foot-4 senior guard Tyler Lee buried the rock when he didn't, counting 11 points on two jumpers he swished in the third quarter to run Sandhills-Thedford's lead to 17 at 37-20.

The 7-3 Knights' height unquestionably bothered the host Perkins County team, as both McCleod and Taylor grew to 6-foot-4. Their physical advantage and athleticism caused enough frustration for Perkins County that two members of the Plainsmen received technical fouls for arguing with referees during the game.

**Next Action**

The Plainsmen's loss dropped their record to 3-6, with 6-3 North Platte St. Pat's coming to Grant on Friday night. St. Pat's has beaten common opponents Sandhills-Thedford, Hershey and Ogallala by 10 points or more. Perkins County visits 0-8 Sutherland on Saturday. Sutherland gave Ogallala something to think about (57-53) and lost in overtime to Hayes Center.

**Sand./Thed. 55, P.C. 43**

Sand.-Thed. 17 14 13 11-55

Perkins Co. 8 9 9 17-43

Scoring leaders—Perkins County: Johnston 3FG 5/8FT—11; Hite 2 (2[x3])—10; Poppe 2 5/9—9; Johnson 1 (1)—5; Carlson 1 (1)—5; Sandhills-Thedford: McCleod 7 6/15—20; Taylor 6 2/2—14; Lee, T. 4 3/4—11; Sierks 2 6/10—10.