

# ‘We finally did it’: Indians clinch first Division A state appearance with win over Oak Grove

By Mojo Hill

FARGO — It’s finally happening. After two years of heart-break, the Four Winds/Minnewaukan Indians are going to the Division A state tournament. “You can’t take these for granted, because they don’t come along too often,” FW/M head coach Rick Smith said. “We’ve had some really, really good teams, and we just couldn’t punch our ticket. We didn’t have the breaks down the stretch. We had to stay home. And you’re watching teams in the Class A state tournament that you beat, but you’re staying home watching on TV.” The Indians (22-3) out-battled Oak Grove (15-10) in a state qualifier game Saturday at SCHEELS Center in the Sanford Health Athletic Complex. They won 60-50 in the same round where they were eliminated by Wahpeton last year. “You don’t want to go in that locker room and make that speech to seniors,” Smith said. “Because it’s not easy. Marial [Deng] wanted it tonight. He wanted it in Mayville. And Jonte [Delorme], the same thing.” Deng had a steady performance with a game-high 22

points. The senior has been on the other side of games like this before. “I think it just made us more hungry,” he said. “We put in all the work over the summer. And then we finally did it.” The last time Deng went to state with the Indians, he was in eighth grade. “I just like how we play together, share the ball,” he said. “We could get after it defensively, too. Sonny [Alberts], Jonte, Dayson [Dubois] — all those guys are pretty good.” Deng got going in the middle of the first quarter with a three-point play and a triple. FW/M led 19-10 after a 9-0 run. “The key was to come out to a quick start tonight,” Smith said. “And that’s exactly what we did.” Senior Dion Jackson Jr. hit two threes in the first quarter for the Indians. Dubois got the offense started with his own triple. Something clicked back into place for the Grovers, though, after they took a timeout with 2:34 left in the first quarter. FW/M went nearly five minutes of game time without scoring. “They’re a pretty good team. They could score the ball everywhere,” Deng said. “Just stay on the

attack, don’t let them run their offense and then just be intense.” Oak Grove clawed within two. The Grovers got 13 points and three triples from Aidan Saunders in the first half. He scored a team-high 19 overall. “We knew they were going to make a push, just because they shoot the ball so well and they attack the rim so well,” Smith said. “We just had to be able to score ourselves.” Shots weren’t landing for the Indians. Joran Lohnes, in particular, missed a few three-ball attempts. Alberts rebounded well but got charged with two offensive fouls. Once FW/M’s offense found its form again, though, it was hard to stop. Deng found ways to get to the hole, including his second three-point play of the game. He had 13 in the first half. Lohnes finally connected on a pair of triples. Once he hit one, it seemed to ignite some confidence back into him. He scored eight points late in the first half to help FW/M take a 36-24 lead at the break. Oak Grove got a single basket from five different players in the third quarter, doing enough to hang within eight. Jackson Jr. hit his third



Marial Deng leaps to the basket during Four Winds/Minnewaukan’s state qualifier game against Oak Grove in Fargo. (Photo by Mojo Hill)

triple of the game to give the Indians a jolt. “Another senior that made some big shots today,” Smith said of Jackson. “He’s very capable of doing that. The seniors don’t want it ever to end. Because you don’t get to do it anymore.” Jackson and Lohnes each scored nine off the bench. “They’ve been doing it all year. They’re two of our best shooters,” Smith said. “And to give us that bench lift is key.” Despite making two threes in the fourth quarter, along with a one-handed dunk on a breakaway from Ryder Soper, the Grovers ran out of gas. Deng, Dubois and Delorme combined to go 7-for-10 from the free throw line in the final period. The Indians celebrated, hugged and posed for pictures on the floor after the game. They’ve finally reversed history. “We thought there might be a Class A jinx there for a bit,” Smith said. “We had some great teams. But it’s such a tough region to get out of.” FW/M will join Devils Lake among the eight teams playing in the Fargodome next Thursday through Saturday. Smith noted that his team beat the four region champions at various points in the regular season. “We’ve seen the teams before. We’ve beaten the teams before,” Smith said. “It’s gonna be fun, and it’ll give you a little confidence booster that we can play with all these teams.”



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