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Eureka's Travis Tollner goes up for a dunk during the first half of Friday night's Dick Niclai championship at Humboldt State. Jackie Christensen/The Eureka Reporter

Loggers take Niclai

by Jackie Christensen, 2/16/2007

In front of a sell out crowd at Humboldt State's East Gym Friday night, the Eureka High boys left no doubt which team from Eureka was most deserving of the Dick Niclai Tournament championship.

The Loggers held the Crusaders to just 14 points in the first half and went on to win convincingly, 65-43 for the Humboldt-Del Norte Conference title.

"We're just elated," said Eureka head coach Duane Peterson. "It means a lot to me personally because of my relationship with coach Niclai, but this was one of our preseason goals and we played a great game."

St. Bernard's Vince Ayala scored a team-high 22 points, including three 3-pointers, but the Loggers simply outsize the

Crusaders in four out of five positions, and dominated the glass and the scoreboard.

In a complete team effort, Eureka's Greg Allen scored 23 points, pulled in 13 rebounds and dished out five assists, while Travis Tollner scored 16 points and Lee Thibodeaux and Scott Nilsen scored nine apiece.

"It feels great," Tollner said. "We just played aggressive. Last year we lost it at the end but this year we finally got it."

The Loggers built a 15-6 lead at the end of the first quarter, pounding the ball inside, while the Crusaders struggled from the perimeter and couldn't keep up.

Ayala scored nine of his team's 14 first-half points, but poor shooting from the field collectively allowed the Loggers to extend their lead as the game progressed.

"We had a good plan of attack on the defensive end and I think it showed in the first half," Peterson said. "We executed very well and forced them to run a lot of time off the clock before they took their shots."

The Crusaders cut the Loggers' 20-point second half lead to nine with 3:30 remaining in the fourth quarter, but the Loggers ended the game on a 15-3 run to once again silence the buzzing Crusader fans.

"Anybody that's watched St. Bernard's play this year knows they're a 32-minute, give-it-all-you-got team," Peterson said. "We knew they were going to make runs at us, our goal was just to not let those runs go too deep."

With the win, the Loggers improved to 21-7 overall, while the Crusaders dropped to 22-6.

By winning their respective leagues, both teams have automatic berths in the North Coast Section playoffs, which start next week.

A seedings meeting will be held on Sunday in Walnut Creek to determine when and where local teams will compete.