

Rolling down the Rivers: Rice wins JV city title in dramatic fashion

By Dylan Butler March 8, 2009 (www.fiveborosports.com)

Khari Rivers stood on the foul line, about to live out a dream scenario. On the outside, the forward looked calm as he stared at the rim with 0.6 seconds remaining and the score tied in the CHSAA Class AA junior varsity championship game. But inside, Rivers was a bundle of nerves.

"I was real nervous, legs tingling," said Rivers, who was mobbed on the court by teammates and fans after the game. "I knew I had to knock the shots down to win the game."

Rivers did just that, burying both free throws to seal Rice's 74-72 victory against Christ the King Sunday at Holy Cross.

Rivers finished with 15 points, including the two biggest free throws of his life as the Raiders lifted the championship plaque two hours after the Rice freshmen defeated Xaverian in the CHSAA Class AA freshman championship game.

"It motivated us to win the chip," Rivers said of watching the freshmen win the city title. "It feels great."

Rivers' two free throws were the final dramatic moments of a fourth quarter played at a frenetic pace with a bevy of plot twists. With 6.4 seconds left, TJ Curry went 1-of-2 from the line to tie the score at 72 for Christ the King, but Chris Ortiz fouled Rivers on a drive to the basket. The nerves were gone once Rivers drained the first free throw.

"I knew we won the game there," he said.

It seemed Rice had the game won midway through the third quarter when Kevin Perez's 3-pointer capped a 14-1 run to give the Raiders a 43-29 lead. The lead remained at 14, 52-38, heading into the fourth quarter thanks to a 3-pointer by Emmanuel Andujar with four seconds left in the third quarter.

But Christ the King staged a stirring comeback in a dramatic final eight

minutes that left the crowd at William J. O'Meara Gymnasium breathless. Both teams went punch for punch down the stretch, but the Royals finally tied the game on a pull-up jumper by Malcolm Covington with 2:01 left.

Justin Rodriguez, though, came right back with a clutch layup to put Rice back in front, 70-68, with 1:31 remaining in the fourth quarter. After Rice's Jahmeek Jones and Christ the King's Aaron Williams were called for a double foul with 1:27 seconds left, Curry (20 points) gave the Royals a 71-70 lead 14 seconds later, their first lead since late in the first quarter.

Rodriguez came right back with a layup while getting fouled with 45.5 seconds left. But he missed the free throw and Rice led, 72-71. Curry tied it at 72 with one free throw before Rivers' dramatic, clutch game-winning foul shots.

Andujar scored 17 points and Perez added 13 for Rice, which captured a pair of one-point regular-season victories as well. Williams had 19 and Covington and Ortiz scored nine points apiece for Christ the King.

The two schools could very well meet again for the CHSAA Class AA intersectional title next Sunday at Rose Hill Gymnasium in the Bronx. A Rice victory would give the school a clean sweep of the city championships.

dbutler@fiveborosports.com