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SPORTS

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SECTION B

Trojans defend title

After Johnson County tourney, CG 9-1 at season's halfway point

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Midway through the season, Center Grove boys basketball coach Cliff Hawkins gives his team a passing grade.

The Trojans are 9-1 and defended their Johnson County Tournament title Saturday night with a 74-61 win against Franklin

Trojans 74, Grizzly Cubs 61

in a game that was closer than the final score indicated.

"It's a great midpoint. This is what we called our midterm test this week," he said. "We knew the season was halfway through, and we wanted to be successful, and we certainly were tonight."

Moments after cutting down

the nets Saturday, Center Grove's players were pleased with their progress but not ready to give themselves a perfect grade.

"We could be 10-0," senior Andrew Bowman said.

Center Grove's lone loss was the second game of the season (Nov. 25) against Class 4A No. 7 Franklin Central (11-1). The Flashes, who won Saturday's Marion County tournament, are

among the favorites to win their sectional.

Center Grove hopes to prove an obstacle.

"I think if we play Franklin Central it would be a different game than the first time," senior Tyler Kitchel said. "I think we're a little more experienced, and we're playing great as a team."

(SEE TROJANS, PAGE B4)



Center Grove senior Andrew Bowman goes in for a layup around the defense of Franklin freshman Ross Syphers during Saturday's Johnson County Championship Game at Edinburgh. The Trojans successfully defended their county tourney title with a 74-61 victory against the Grizzly Cubs.

STAFF PHOTO BY JOE SABA

WEB EXTRA: More photos from Saturday's Johnson County Tournament title game. thejournalnet.com

NFL: PLAYOFFS

ONE WIN AWAY



AP PHOTOS

Thanks to five divisional playoff-game field goals by Adam Vinatieri, left, the Indianapolis Colts, led by quarterback Peyton Manning, will play host to the New England Patriots in the AFC Championship Game next weekend.

Indianapolis peaking at right time

Home, sweet dome. How amazing is that? Perhaps no word, or words, in the English language accurately voice it.

Written off as playoff chum little more than three weeks ago, the Indianapolis Colts accomplished with the No. 3 seed what they couldn't last year with the No. 1.

They set up an AFC Championship Game in the RCA Dome.

Well, sort of. The Colts did their part by winning at Baltimore. But they got a huge favor from the San Diego Chargers, who handed (yes, handed) the New England Patriots a 24-21 win in Sunday night's AFC Divisional Playoff game.



Rick Morwick

So the road to the Super Bowl now runs through Indianapolis.

Again, how amazing is that? But, wait. It gets better.

The Colts will get to the Super Bowl. Anyone who watched the AFC playoffs this weekend should have noticed two trends. The Colts do, in fact, have a championship-caliber defense (although no one knows exactly where it came from), and New England is not in championship form.

But Indianapolis is taking shape. Forget the history with the Patriots; the Colts certainly will. Their confidence is off the charts, and this particular matchup is what they've longed for: New England, in the AFC Championship, in the dome.

(SEE TIME, PAGE B3)



SUNDAY'S GAME

New England Patriots (14-4) at Indianapolis Colts (14-4)

Time: 6:30 p.m.
TV: WISH-Channel 8
Radio: WFBQ-94.7 FM

Manning's chance for redemption

Peyton Manning has never played this poorly in the playoffs. He's passing into triple coverage, throwing behind his receivers and wearing his frustration on his face as has become his custom.

And yet, with one more victory, even if it's another multiple-interception performance, Manning will completely alter his national public perception.

A trip to the Super Bowl would not cement Manning's NFL legacy, but it would forever end the discussion of him as a post-season failure.

After three years of struggling to live up to the billing as a favorite, Manning and the Colts are finding success as the third seed

and in the underdog role.

There's great irony in the fact that Manning's rep could get rehabbed while he's playing as badly as he ever has.

He threw for only 150 yards in Saturday's 15-6 victory at Baltimore.

That's the second-lowest total in his playoff career; 13 yards more than what he produced during a 41-0 Jets whitewash in 2002.

Manning threw two interceptions, and the Ravens dropped two more. He has thrown five picks in two victories.

Take out the four-interception nightmare in the 2003 AFC Championship at New England, and Manning had only had six interceptions in his eight previous playoff games before this year.

(SEE CHANCE, PAGE B3)



Jason Martin

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