

Deshler (24-7): Survive and Advance



The last Shoals team to take the floor on Tuesday will be another Tiger team, but these are from Tuscumbia. Deshler boys basketball is back in the final four for the second time in three seasons after escaping West Morgan to advance. They are the lone team from the Shoals to make it to state without winning their area tournament or regular season championship.

Improbable. Would be a proper word to summarize this run for Deshler. While their record is 24-7 it comes with a lot of ups and downs along the way. They began the calendar year with a one-point loss to Hatton at home, which sunk their area record to 1-3 and gave a major knock to any chance of hosting the area tournament. Coach Brian Pounders talked about that game simply because they did not play as hard as they should have. He mentioned how they went back and watched film and told the team, "If you had run back hard one time instead of jogging, you would have gotten the stop." He then added how when they (players) see it on film, they realize it is not just talk, but they can see where it mattered. Deshler would finish 4-4 in area play and as the 3-seed. They would then avenge the Hatton loss eleven days later, beating Hatton by 20 at Hatton. Then, in the area tournament, they beat Hatton by four to make the playoffs.

4A Area 14 this season can be summed up as not for the faint of heart. Deshler was the 3-seed in the area. They beat Hatton and then lost to Brooks for the area championship. Coach Pounders noted how brutal the area was this season. Ten of the twenty area games were decided by 10 or fewer points. Six of those 10 were decided by three or fewer points. Three of those six games were decided at the buzzer. Deshler was in four of the games decided by 10 or fewer points and on the losing side of two of the three decided by three or fewer points. Coach Pounders attributed to how good all five teams were this season despite records. He then describes how the eventual 5-seed Central beat the eventual 1-seed Brooks at the buzzer. "Our whole goal all year, we just want to get out of the area tournament," he said. "In my 14 years here, it was by far the most balanced area I've been a part of," he added.

Everyone knows the northwest part of the state is loaded with basketball talent. You get numerous top-10, top-5 matchups at Wallace every year. Coach Pounders attributed that in part to TVBA (Tennessee Valley Basketball Association) as well as the coaching has improved. The great part about that is you do not have to look far for competition each night on your schedule.

Physical. The word that changed the season for Deshler. Deshler has not lost to anyone but Brooks twice since they lost to Hatton by 1. “We got to be a little more physical and tougher there towards the middle and end of January, especially the Hatton game.” Coach Pounders said. They emphasized rebounding and being tougher physically.

Being the 3-seed in an area tournament can be rough, but you have to be ready for anything. Coach Pounders said they did not have any concerns about being on the road for the area tournament for the first time in a while. Despite the different gym layouts of the Dome versus the county school gyms. He noted how if you play in one, then you've played in all of them, just with a different color paint. One of the main differences in the gyms is the proximity of fans to the court. The dome is more apart from the court than the county gyms having fans inches from the court.

Despite losing the area championship to Brooks, Deshler was still alive and had win or go home road game at Fayette County to advance to Wallace. Coach Pounders gave Fayette credit, saying “they were the best 10-15 team in the state.” He continued to credit their student section for being behind the away bench. Deshler showed the team some film of Fayette to show the environment as well as strategy. Deshler wins that game on a defensive stand and advances to the Sweet 16.

Part of Deshler’s run is the players' and big game experience. Garrett Reid, Jalen Thirlkill, Jay Murner, Everette Minshew, and Dylan Morgan all have had big moments in other sports. Garrett and Jay were on the 2025 Baseball State Championship Team. Everette has won two individual tennis championships and was on the runner-up team last season. Jalen, Garrett, Jay, and Dylan were on the quarterfinalist football team last season. “They have been there and done that in big moments,” said Coach Pounders.

However, that is not the only key guys for Deshler. CJ Grant has stepped up as a sophomore. Kendrick Gunn off the bench has been a big help as well. Freshman Tyler Holmes has given some guys breathers or helped out when foul trouble arrives. Then you have the Caudle boys (Chase and Cruise, both sophomores). Chase Caudle had a few clutch free throws in the area tournament to help Deshler seal the win.

Now, we arrive at the elite eight, where it is Deshler-West Morgan for the 6th straight season in basketball playoffs. Deshler overcame a slow start and stepped on the gas in the second quarter as West Morgan then went cold. West Morgan went 9:00 without a FG from the end of the first quarter until under a minute to play in the first half. Deshler led by nine at halftime, and Coach Pounders said they told the team it is not over. Noting how West Morgan is too good not to make a run. The game was tied at the end of the third quarter. West Morgan goes ahead by

four with 2:27 to play. The score is 47-43, West Morgan. West Morgan would not score again. Jalen Thirlkill has four straight points to tie the game. Then, West Morgan turns it over with :45 to play. West Morgan winds up with the ball again and a chance for the last shot. They make a pass, and Garrett Reid intercepts the pass, driving down the floor for a layup with time ticking down, and lays up a shot. “When I saw the pass being made and saw Garrett, I got a little happy,” said Coach Pounders. Foul is called. Garrett misses one free throw, makes the second. Deshler led 48-47. West Morgan would have five seconds to find a shot.

Let’s rewind for a minute. December 9th tiegame, Brooks at Deshler, around five seconds to play. Brooks’ Miles Warren runs the length of the floor and hits a game-winner. Deshler had one foul to give before Brooks would have shot free throws. They did not foul. They tried to foul but did not get the call.

Back to West Morgan, Deshler has a couple of fouls to give in this game before West Morgan would go to the line. Deshler does get the fouls called and resets West Morgan each time on the inbound. West Morgan gets a really good look at the basket. Jalen Thirlkill to the rescue with a block shot at the buzzer. Game over! Deshler wins? Deshler celebrates. We think. Is it a foul call, or is it the clock? Referees added 0.2 back to the clock. “I felt like it wasn’t a foul. Assistant Coach Ty White watched it on film on the bus ride back and said it was clean. Now, with 0.2 seconds, it has to be a tip-in. 0.4 or less seconds has to be a tip-in. No chance for a catch and shoot. The inbound was far from the basket, clock expires. Deshler celebrates again, this time for real.

Fairfield Tigers will be the opponent that Deshler will see. So the Tigers will win, of course, but Deshler coaches went to Montgomery Tuesday to watch them in-person. Coach Pounders mentioned how they are big and athletic. He then said they told their guys, “You don’t make the final four and play a nobody in 4A boys basketball.” He then credited Fairfield head coach Maurice Ford for winning a couple of championships (2024 5A, 2020 5A).

Deshler also has family ties in this run. Coach Brian Pounders’ dad, mom, and daughter are involved. Steve Pounders (dad) is an assistant coach. Teresa Pounders (mom) is the bookkeeper for the team. Presley Pounders (Brian’s daughter) is one of the managers. Assistant Coach Michael Phillips’ step-daughter, Jill Abrams, is one of the managers as well. Then you have three-sport star Garrett Reid, whose dad (Shane Reid) is also an assistant coach for the team.

Deshler, like Lauderdale County, is rare to see the boys make the final four without the girls. However, the Deshler boys have never played in a basketball state championship game. They are looking to make more history as well this season. Maybe the 9th time is the charm.

Zack Pounders

Shoals Sports Report