

Celtics ousted from YRAA playoffs in 51-49 loss to Middlefield Silver Hawks

The Cardinal Carter Celtics Senior Boys Basketball team celebrated the thrill of victory sixteen times this season. However, the 16-3 powerhouse experienced the agony of defeat in a sudden-death opening round playoff loss on home court last Thursday afternoon.

The stunning 51-49 upset at the hands of the Middlefield C.I. Silver Hawks ended the season for the heavily-favored, veteran-laden Celtics.

Sadly, the Celtics were not able to replicate the Dr. G.W. Williams Wildcats' 'Cinderella Story' from 2024. The Wildcats captured their first YRAA Senior Boys Tier 1 championship with a 'unicorn team' and fared well at its inaugural provincial championships by winning four of five games en-route to the Ontario Consolation Championship.

Celtics Head Coach Zach Zapanta, whose squad defeated the defending champion Wildcats 73-50 in their only meeting this season, was gracious in defeat and gave credit to the Silver Hawks for 'taking advantage of their size' and 'for running down the clock and scoring on key possessions in the second half.'

Coach Zapanta praised his veteran team for their efforts throughout the Celtics' 16-4 season and pointed to Carter's 'tournament win at Bur Oak as the highlight of the season.'

The Celtics led 12-9 after the first quarter but the visitors drew even at half time with the teams deadlocked at 26-26. The Silver Hawks took a 42-35 lead after three quarters.

Carter furnished a furious comeback in the waning minutes of the game, but came up agonizingly short when they threw the ball out of bounds with 1.6 seconds left on the clock.

Silver Hawks' small forward Abdulle Musa slashed his way through the Celtics' zone and led all scorers with 17 points.

Power forward Thavanesoan Labishan provided Middlefield with a steady inside game off the blocks and added 12 points to his team's attack.

Guards Awan Hadd and Ajil Basra scored 10 each to provide balance to Middlefield's offence, including three critical 3-pointers in the fourth quarter to thwart the Celtics' comeback.

Veterans Noah Wetzel and Peter George led the Celtics with 14 and 13 points, respectively.

Shooting guard Athan Babalis contributed 10 points to Carter's offense that suffered through an uncharacteristically-weak shooting performance. The Celtics missed putting away their opponent from Markham when they carried the play for most of the first half.

Although the Celtics' YRAA season came to a shocking end on Thursday night, Coach Zapanta noted that the team is 'looking forward to competing in the Battle of Aurora tournament hosted by Aurora High School on February 27.'

The annual event features Aurora's four senior boys basketball teams 'the Cardinal Carter Celtics, Williams Wildcats, St. Maximilian Kolbe Mustangs, and Aurora HS Golden Eagles'in a round-robin tourney.

By Jim Stewart