

Shelton emerges as IR main man in new title tale

By JACK IRELAND

Staff reporter

On a talented basketball team that features All-State center Charlie Rayne and forward Matt Spence, Indian River High senior Chris Shelton has often been overlooked during their two championship seasons.

Yesterday afternoon, before a sell-out crowd of more than 2,700 at the Delaware Fieldhouse, Shelton was in the spotlight as the Indians rallied to beat scrappy Howard 48-47 in the final of the Delaware High School Boys Basketball Tournament to claim their second straight state championship.

While Howard's tenacious 1-2-2 zone defense held Rayne and Spence to eight points each, Shelton, a 6-foot-2 forward, poured in a game-high 20 points. He hit 10 of 16 shots from the field and grabbed nine rebounds.

Shelton was impressive in the clutch, scoring 10 points in the final period. His pressure follow-up basket after his own miss with 1:14 remaining gave Indian River the lead for keeps, 47-45.

"To play like this in the championship game really makes me feel good," said Shelton, who was an All-State end in football last fall and is also an outstanding baseball player. "On that basket at the end, I was going to pass the ball back to Charlie (Rayne) after I got the rebound, but I decided to try a little finger roll to the bucket and it went in."

"Charlie and Matt get most of the credit, but sometimes I do, too. It feels even better winning the second time. I just wish I had a couple more years left. I would like to do it all over again. Howard really played well in the first half, but we felt the second half was ours."

Shelton capped his clutch performance by grabbing a rebound after Howard's Jeff Lott missed a jump shot with 17 seconds left and the Indians clinging to a 48-45 lead.

"Chris always plays great for us in the big games," said Coach Dave Cook, in the jubilation of the Indian River locker room.

"Last year in the championship game (a 66-65 win over Cape Henlopen), he came off the bench to score 14 points and hit four big foul shots in the closing minutes to help us win. I just think Chris was going at a little faster pace than everybody else. Chris is just a great athlete. Good all-around athletes like Chris just do it when it counts."

IR does it when it counts, too.

"What Shelton did today — that's Indian River," said Coach Joe Hussey of Howard. "Last year when everybody was expecting Rayne to do everything, it was Spence. This

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Chris Shelton

year it was Shelton. Yes, he did hurt us. I think everybody on the court today played above their capabilities."

Rayne, who grabbed a game-high 15 rebounds, and Spence, felt it was a typical clutch game for Shelton.

"No, it didn't surprise me because he can do it. He did it last year," said Spence, whose big three-point play with 5:02 left tied the game 41-41. He made two free throws last year to ice our win over Cape. He's that type of a player."

"If they stop Charlie or me, someone else will do something for us. That's the way this team is," said Spence, who plans to continue the celebration by getting married later this month. "Today, Chris was the man."

Rayne felt Shelton was the man to upset Howard's defensive strategy.

"When they keyed on Matt and me, that left Chris open," said Rayne, who played in three state championship games in his brilliant four-year career. "They left Shelton wide open and he was hitting that baseline jumper."

Despite his credentials in football and basketball, Shelton is leaning toward a baseball career. He has been offered a full football scholarship to Delaware State, but said baseball is his No. 1 love.

"I have a baseball game on Tuesday," said Shelton. "My baseball coach is Joe Palermo and he has already talked to a couple pro scouts. If I can get a good contract and still be able to get a free education, I will go with baseball. I really love baseball. I can play left field, catch and pitch. I can do it all."

"Hey Chris is a great baseball player," said Cook. "The scouts ought to sign him to a pro contract. He makes things happen. I was just glad to have him out there for us the last two years."

HOWARD (47)

Moore 5 0-2 10, Drummond 4 6-7 14, Lott 2 2-2 6, A. Martin 4 3-3 11, Dutton 2 2-4 6, Brown 0 0-0 0, Fuller 0 0-0 0, Carter 0 0-0 0. Totals 17 13-16.

INDIAN RIVER (48)

Shelton 10 0-1 20, Spence 3 2-3 8, Rayne 4 0-2 8, Garrison 1 2-4 4, Turlington 1 1-4 7, Sturgis 0 1-2 1, Thomas 0 0-0 0. Totals 21 6-16.

Howard 13 16 4 12-47
Indian River 9 14 9 16-48