

Denver East knocks off host ThunderRidge

Angels give the Grizzlies their first loss of season

By Neil H. Devlin

The Denver Post

POSTED: 01/03/2016 12:01:00 AM MST [ADD A COMMENT](#) | UPDATED: ABOUT 18 HOURS AGO

HIGHLANDS RANCH — Now 6-4, [Denver East](#) still entertains the notion that it could be 10-0. No, arrogance hasn't taken over the perennially challenging Angels. They admit they have much work in front of them. But they took a big stride Saturday afternoon, and their minds wandered toward how good they can be. The Angels went into [Highlands Ranch](#) and knocked off previously undefeated ThunderRidge 63-59 in a Class 5A nonleague game at the Grizzly Den. And it was the way they did it in what annually is one of the state's top nonleague gatherings. The Angels played under control, enjoyed crisp passing and ball handling, protected the lead late and cashed free throws when necessary. Denver East's nonleague schedule usually is as good as anyone's, and the team was coming off a trip to Maui, where it split four games. "We had some great competition (in Hawaii) and it helped us come together as a team," said East senior Deron Harrell, who contributed 17 points and regularly got to the basket against the Grizzlies' defense. "We're growing." Coach Rudy Carey agreed. The Angels, state semifinalists a year ago and now ranked No. 5 in The Associated Press 5A media poll, avoided turnovers and were 16-of-21 at the free-throw line in the fourth quarter, 23-of-30 overall. "Free throws and protecting the ball, that's what we have to do," Carey said. "This was a quality win over a quality team." The third-ranked Grizzlies (9-1) regularly challenged the Angels and stayed within range into the closing seconds, but never quite managed enough to take the lead and hold it. Denver East, behind senior guard Jack Buckmelter (19 points), Harrell, Daytone Jennings (12) and Joseph Abiakam (11), led most of the way and defended well inside. The Angels also received quality minutes from Alex May and Kwane Marble. It was just enough to offset the Grizzlies' Austin Mueller (14 points), Corey Seng (12), Clay Verk (11) and Troy Brady (10). Verk was harassed repeatedly inside by the likes of Jennings and May, and Brady had a tough shooting game (2-of-9). Plus, the Grizzlies shot only 15 free throws.