

Fort struggles past Page County 63 - 60

Can a team miss all 15 free throw attempts in the crucial second half, commit 20 turnovers, shoot 34% from the three point zone, and still win? Yes, Fort Defiance did all this against Page County in their third game in the Ram Hardwood Classic held at Strasburg High School on December 28. Fortunately, Junior Jasigh Ransome had his second straight hot shooting game, scoring 22 points including six three pointers, to lead the Indians past the Panthers 63 – 60.

As they have often this season, Fort Defiance came back from a significant deficit to up its season record to 6 – 2. Page led by as many as ten points early on as Fort couldn't find its shooting touch. But Fort overcame a bad first quarter by outscoring the Panthers 38 – 27 over the second and third quarters to take a 54 – 47 lead at the end of the third, then held off a charge by Page County at the end. After Page County had come back to tie the score 60 – 60 with 1:06 to go, Evan Braun hit a big three pointer with 47 seconds left to give Fort the margin it needed. It was the second time this season Evan has hit a three pointer in the final minute of play to boost the Indians to victory. The loss left the Panthers with a 4 – 6 record.

Page County had no trouble with Fort's press and quickly ran out to a big lead in the first quarter. They opened scoring with a bucket and three pointer before Evan hit a three to make it 5 – 3 in favor of the Panthers. A basket and free throw made it 8 – 3 before Gio Armandariz Cruz tipped in a missed shot to get the Indians within three. Two more buckets by the Panthers upped their lead to 12 – 5 before Tripp Hanger found the range for three from the corner. Page poured it on, at that point, and rushed out to a 18 – 8 lead before Jasigh got two on a putback. Another easy bucket beating the press gave Page their biggest lead of the night, 20 – 10. Fort then begin clawing back. Jasigh hit a three as did Bradley Hebb to close out the quarter, making it 20 – 16 in favor of Page County.

Gio then was able to slip through the Panther defense on three consecutive possessions. His last bucket tied the score 22 – 22. Page went back up 24 – 22 until Bradley scored in close to tie it again. Fort got its first lead on a three pointer by Carter Berry though Page countered with a three of its own to tie the score at 27's with 3:33 to go in the quarter. Jasigh pumped in two three pointers though Page answered with baskets of their own to make it 33 – 31. Elijah Pultz scored in the lane then Jasigh's third triple of the quarter gave Fort a five point lead, 38 – 33 with 57 seconds to go in the half. Page County got a basket and Fort a foul shot from Tripp Hanger to end the half with the Indians on top, 39 – 35. Fort's three point shooting in the first half was better than it has been in previous games, 8 – 20, aided by Jasigh's four treys.

To open the second half, Jasigh made two more three pointers early in the quarter and Gio scored to give Fort a 47 – 40 lead. Elijah scored after Page County had closed to 47 – 44 but a three pointer got the Panthers within two at 49 – 47 with 1:23 to go. Connor Batten then found the range from beyond the arc and Bradley scored to leave the Indians in charge, 54 – 47, at the end of three quarters.

The fourth quarter was nothing short of bizarre. After missing its first five free throws of the second half in the third period, Fort then missed ten consecutive free throws in the fourth quarter, allowing Page County to tie the game at 60's with 1:06 to go. Before that, Fort's scoring came

on a layup by Bradley after a steal, and baskets after steals by Gio and Jasigh. Meanwhile, the Panthers rallied to tie the game which set up Evan's heroics with 47 seconds to go. His three point shot gave Fort a 63 – 60 lead. Page County had several opportunities to score over the rest of the game but came up empty as Fort held on for the 63 – 60 victory.

For the game, Fort shot an embarrassing 1 – 18 from the free throw line including the ten misses in the critical fourth quarter. They were 12 – 35 in three point shooting. Jasigh's 22 points were his best so far of the season. Gio was the only other Indian who scored in double figures. He had 12. For the Panthers, Reed Richards finished with 19 points, Caden Coombs had 18, and Nate Holloway scored 16. Fort played the game without Rhyland Martin.

Grandfather's notes: I was livid at the end of this game. No grandfather is happy when his grandson is mistreated and Gus was badly mistreated tonight. He played zero seconds in the first quarter, 2:02 in the second, 4:02 in the third, and 19 seconds in the fourth quarter. Thus, he sat on the bench for approximately 80% of the game. Why was he not given a chance to play more? When he was in, he had three rebounds and a steal. He is the only player to have two double-double games this season. His free throw shooting for the season is 60% so I can imagine how he felt watching his teammates throw up brick after brick from the foul line in this game. Gus again had zero turnovers during his time on the court; his teammates had 20. He is a senior, works hard, hustles when he is on the court, and can perform when he is given a chance. Out of the 13 players on the team, there are six players listed as forwards and seven guards. Of the six forwards, Gus has the 2nd highest scoring average despite playing much less than four of the six. It is increasingly hard for me to keep quiet over this. He deserves more playing time. And some of his teammates deserve much less.

Fort's next game in the Ram Hardwood Classic is Monday, December 30, against Central.

Here's Fort's box score:

Name	2 Pt Goals	3 Pt Goals	Free Throws	Total
John Whetzel	0	0	0-0	0
Bradley Hebb	3	1	0-8	9
Jasigh Ransome	2	6	0-0	22
Gio Armendariz Cruz	6	0	0-0	12
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	2	0-0	6
Carter Berry	0	1	0-2	3
Rhylan Martin	0	0	0-0	0
Elijah Pultz	2	0	0-4	4
Tripp Hanger	0	1	1-4	4
Connor Batten	0	1	0-0	3
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	0	0	0-0	0
TOTAL	13	12	1-18	63