

## **Another big comeback for Fort Defiance: 59 – 56 over Turner Ashby**

For the second game in a row, the Fort Defiance Indians pulled out a second half, come-from-behind, victory, 59 – 56, over the Turner Ashby High School Knights on December 6 in the Don Landes Gym at Fort Defiance High School. Both teams entered the contest with an undefeated start to the 2024-25 season; Fort had defeated Broadway while Turner Ashby took down Waynesboro on December 3. Fort trailed by as many as 15 points in the first half as TA came out hot from the three point line, making seven three pointers in the first quarter as they took an early 23 – 11 lead and extended it to 28 – 13 before Fort began its comeback. Fort trailed throughout the second and third quarters and took the lead finally at the 3:00 minute mark in the fourth quarter on a three point shot by Rhyland Martin to go up 55 – 53. They managed to hold on for the 59 – 56 win as TAHS missed several three point attempts in the final seconds. The win improves the Fort Defiance record to 2 – 0 for the season.

It was a huge night for grandson Gus Gutshall. Gus played sparingly at first, but when he finally got his chance, he dominated in the paint, getting his first double-double with 11 points and 11 rebounds. His eleven points came on 5 – 7 shooting from the field and 1 – 2 from the free throw line. He snagged five offensive and six defensive rebounds. It was his best game in an Indian uniform, for sure.

Fort tried to give the game away from the free throw line. The Indians made only 13 of 28 attempts from the foul line. As it was in the previous game, good defense and rebounding were keys to the FDHS win.

Evan Braun gave Fort an early lead with a three pointer to start the game but Turner Ashby roared back with two straight three pointers. Tripp Hanger's drive got the Indians back to 6 – 5 but another TAHS trey put them up 9 – 5 before Bradley Hebb scored on a drive for FDHS with 6:10 to go in the quarter. Another triple put TA up 12 – 7. Bradley hit a free throw then the visitors scored in the paint to go up 14 – 7 as Fort took a timeout with 2:49 to go in the period. Again the red hot Knights scored on a three pointer to go up 17 – 8 before Miguel Uribe scored his first point as a varsity player to make it 17 – 9 with 1:39 to go. Two more three pointers by the Knights made it 23 – 9 before Jasigh Ransome got an offensive rebound and scored to close the quarter's scoring with the visitors holding a 23 – 11 lead.

In the second quarter, Bradley drove for two but Turner Ashby scored on a jumper then hit their eighth three pointer of the contest to go up 28 – 13, their largest lead of the night. That's when Gus came in and went to work. He scored on an inbounds play then made one of two free throws after TA hit their ninth three pointer. Gio Armandariz Cruz scored on a drive then Gus scored after an offensive rebound to make it 30 – 21. Gio made a free throw with 3:59 to go then Gus again turned an offensive rebound into two points to make it 31 – 23. TAHS got the final bucket of the quarter and took a ten point lead, 33 – 23, into the locker room at the half. In this quarter alone, Gus had seven points and nine rebounds.

To open the second half, Gus took a nice pass from Gio and brought the Indians within five at 30 – 25. After yet another triple by the Knights, Gio scored on a drive to make it 33 – 27. After a Turner Ashby deuce, Gio turned a steal into a layup and Rhyland banked a three pointer to make it 35 – 32 with 4:53 to go in the quarter. Carter Berry made a foul shot then Bradley tied the game at 35's with a drive at the 4:07 mark. Over the next three minutes the Indians went cold again, managing only one free throw by Gio while the Knights scored six to make it 42 – 32 with 1:37 to go. Gio, who had not shot well for the night, managed to get a three pointer to drop but TAHS scored another three to go up 45 – 39. Gio made two foul shots then Tripp dropped in a trey to get the Indians within one at 45 – 44 but TAHS scored in the closing seconds to go up 47 – 44 at the end of the third.

The fourth quarter was rough, with many jump balls that appeared more like wrestling matches. Gus notched his 11<sup>th</sup> point with two on a nice pass from Tripp but TA scored the next four points to go up 51 – 46. Jasigh got hammered trying to score in close and had to be helped off the floor. Tripp shot his free throws for him, making one to close the gap to 51 – 47. TAHS pushed its lead to 53 – 47 but Fort responded with twelve consecutive points over the next two minutes. Evan hit a three, Gio made two free throws, and Rhyland's triple gave Fort the lead at 55 – 53. Gio made two more free throws with 2:14 to go then scored in close with 1:23 to go as Fort pulled out to a 59 – 53 advantage. Turner Ashby made another three pointer to close the gap to 59 – 56.

The last thirty seconds were wild and woolly. Evan missed two free throws with 27.1 to go but TA was unable to score. Fort got a jump ball possession but threw the ball away. Turner Ashby missed a three but regained possession with 1.4 seconds to go. Their last gasp attempt was off the mark and the home team celebrated its second straight win of the early season, 59 – 56.

In order to keep this winning streak going, Fort will have to improve its ball handling. FDHS had twenty turnovers in the contest. Three point shooting was very poor again tonight. Fort made only six of twenty one attempts. Fort's guards have got to learn to avoid driving into a crowded lane. On a dozen trips down the floor, the guards, with their heads down, plowed into the paint and tossed up a poor shot that resulted in a Turner Ashby rebound. The team does so much better when they look for the open man. Another problem area is foul shooting. For the year, the team is only shooting 42% from the free throw line. In tonight's game warm-up, the FD team attempted 198 three pointers yet only 2 foul shots (Gus shot these). It is no wonder their foul shooting percentage is so poor. Despite all these negatives, it was still good to pull out a come-from-behind win against a neighboring school, though.

Gio led the Indians with 19. Gus was the only other Fort player in double digits. Turner Ashby made eleven three point shots in the game though only two came in the second half.

Grandfather's note: I was exceptionally proud of Gus tonight. As I wrote above, he had eleven points and at least eleven rebounds. He dominated when he was in. He was given more playing time in the second half than he has been getting but this was certainly earned by his second quarter performance. His increased court time needs to continue in future games. It was great to see his smile as he came out of the locker room after the game. The local newspaper article about the game made it sound like Gio led the Indians to the win. It is true that Gio had a decent

second half but his game featured many turnovers, missed shots, and inexcusable ball hogging. He is not a team player. I think the headlines should have read “Augustus Gutshall comes off the bench with a double-double to lead Fort to victory!”

Fort returns to action with a long trip to Clarke County next Tuesday night.

Here’s Fort’s box score

| <b>Name</b>         | <b>2 Pt Goals</b> | <b>3 Pt Goals</b> | <b>Free Throws</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| John Whetzel        | 0                 | 0                 | 0-0                | 0            |
| Bradley Hebb        | 3                 | 0                 | 1-2                | 7            |
| Jasigh Ransome      | 1                 | 0                 | 0-2                | 2            |
| Gio Armendariz Cruz | 4                 | 1                 | 8-12               | 19           |
| Miguel Uribe        | 0                 | 0                 | 1-2                | 1            |
| Evan Braun          | 0                 | 2                 | 0-2                | 6            |
| Carter Berry        | 0                 | 0                 | 1-2                | 1            |
| Rhylan Martin       | 0                 | 2                 | 0-2                | 6            |
| Elijah Pultz        | 0                 | 0                 | 0-0                | 0            |
| Tripp Hanger        | 1                 | 1                 | 1-2                | 6            |
| Connor Batten       | 0                 | 0                 | 0-0                | 0            |
| Ayden Thornton      | 0                 | 0                 | 0-0                | 0            |
| Gus Gutshall        | 5                 | 0                 | 1-2                | 11           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>        | <b>14</b>         | <b>6</b>          | <b>13-28</b>       | <b>59</b>    |

The Staunton NewsLeader had a short article about the game:

## **Fort boys win**

Giovani Armendariz Cruz finished with 19 points, including 10 in the third quarter, in Fort Defiance's 59-56 win over Turner Ashby Friday night in boys basketball.

Fort trailed by 10 at halftime and Cruz had just three points at the break. But a 21-14 third-quarter run got Fort back in the game and Fort completed the comeback in the fourth to improve to 2-0 on the season.

Augustus Gutshall added 11 points in the win.

The Fort coaches selected Gus as the Indian Pride winner for the game:

# INDIAN PRIDE



**GUS GUTSHALL**

12/6/2024

vs. Turner Ashby

| Offensive<br>Rebounds | Defensive<br>Rebounds | Deflections |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 6                     | 6                     | 3           |

The Harrisonburg Daily News Leader had a nice article about the game:

BOYS BASKETBALL | FORT DEFIANCE 59, TURNER ASHBY 56

# Indians down Knights in thriller

By JOHN BREEDEN Daily News-Record

Dec 6, 2024 Updated 16 hrs ago



Fort Defiance's Evan Braun drives to the basket against Turner Ashby's Anthony Perez. Fort Defiance defeated Turner Ashby 59-56 on Friday night.  
Daniel Lin / DN-R

**FORT DEFIANCE** — You could feel the tension inside the Don Landes Gymnasium as the seconds ticked off the game clock on Friday night.

Turner Ashby fell behind non-district opponent Fort Defiance in the waning minutes of the fourth quarter after leading for the bulk of the contest.

The Knights continued to fight, however, and had a shot to send the game to overtime in the final seconds.

Down three with 1.3 seconds on the clock, junior guard Solomon Shifflett launched a well-guarded shot from beyond the arc.

Time stood still as the ball made its way to the basket, but ultimately, the shot fell short, helping the Indians secure a 59-56 home victory after working from behind for nearly the game's entirety.

"Our effort obviously picked up in the second half," FD head coach Mike Gale said. "TA hit a bunch of shots early on, especially in the first half. I thought we kept it reasonable, kept the score at a reasonable distance, and just kind of chipped away. Once we got the lead, we made some crucial plays there at the end."

The Indian snagged crucial defensive rebounds and steals down the stretch, as well as hit some key buckets and free throws to pull ahead by as many as six in the final minutes of the fourth quarter.

Gale said those types of defensive stops are what win ballgames, and it won them one on Friday night.

"Just proud of the overall effort there, especially in the second half," Gale said.

The Knights held a steady lead throughout the first half and led by double digits at halftime, due in large part to draining nine 3-pointers.

"The shots fell early on," TA head coach Clay Harris said. "It was a blessing and a curse. We were hitting them, we were really confident. ... I was proud of them. They

executed the game plan there, they were getting open looks, and they shot it with confidence.”

The third quarter told a different story as the Indians outscored the Knights by seven to close the deficit to three by the end of the period.

In the final minutes, a few key shots from senior forward Rylan Martin and junior guard Giovanni Armendariz Cruz helped push the Indians ahead.

Although it was a rather heartbreaking loss for the Knights, Harris couldn’t have asked for more out of his players as they gave themselves a chance to win in the final second of the game after being down by six with 20 seconds remaining.

“I’ll have to commend my kids for never giving up,” Harris said. “They fought and gave themselves a chance to win at the end, so I’m proud of them for that.”

Armendariz Cruz led the Indians with 19 points while senior forward Augustus Gutshall added 11 points. For Turner Ashby, Shifflett had a game-high 22 points while sophomore guard Jayden Lacey tallied 21 points.

“Gutshall had a nice night for us,” Gale said. “To be able to rebound, especially in the first half, kinda set the tone inside there. [Armendariz Cruz] is one of our leaders and we look for him to do a lot of things for us. We had different guys step up. [Martin] hit a big [3-pointer] there in the second half. ... Bunch of guys got after it tonight.”

Friday’s loss for the Knights hurt, but Harris stressed to his guys that they’ve got to learn from it as the season continues. Hopefully, Harris said next time they’re in a late-game situation, they’ll come out on top.

“It can go one of two ways,” Harris said. “We’re either going to learn from it or we can make this be a step back. I’m hoping we learn from it and improve. It’s early on. It’s game two and it’s a big, long season. We’re trying to get better and better each and



every week. I thought we took a step in the right direction and I just hope we can keep going in that direction.”

The Indians (2-0) face non-district Clarke County on the road Tuesday at 7:30 p.m., while the Knights (1-1) travel to Waynesboro for non-district action Monday at 7 p.m.

In both of their games to start this season, the Indians had to find a way to battle back and come from behind to win. Gale said anytime you can do that, it builds confidence within the program and makes the players realize they’re never out of a game.

“If you start losing games like this, you kinda have doubts,” Gale said. “Just being able to fight back and never give up, I think it helps you throughout a long season.”

It’s still early in the season as Gale said they’re still learning and have made some “tweaks” to a few things they’re doing. Luckily, Gale added that they have a veteran squad, which has the veteran head coach feeling confident moving forward.

“That’s one thing,” Gale said. “A lot of returners and guys that understand what they’re doing. They’re just learning. We’ll just continue to do that and build off each game.”

Turner Ashby 23 10 14 9 — 56 Fort Defiance 11 12 21 15 — 59 TURNER ASHBY (1-1): Shifflett 8 2-2 22, Moyers 0 0-0 0, Alley 0 0-0 0, Lacey 7 2-2 21, Riner 2 0-0 5, Perez 1 0-0 3, Kyomuhendo 2 0-0 2, Judd 0 1-2 1, Wood 0 0-0 0, Good 1 0-0 2. Totals 21 5-6 56. FORT DEFIANCE (2-0): Whetzel 0 0-0 0, Hebb 3 1-2 7, Ransome 1 0-0 2, Armendariz Cruz 5 8-12 19, Uribe 0 1-1 1, Braun 2 0-1 6, Berry 0 1-2 1, Martin 2 0-2 6, Pultz 0 0-0 0, Hanger 2 1-2 6, Batten 0 0-0 0, Thornton 0 0-0 0, Gutshall 5 1-2 11. Totals 20 13-24 59. 3-Point Goals — Turner Ashby 11 (Shifflett 4, Lacey 5, Riner, Perez), Fort Defiance 5 (Braun 2, Armendariz Cruz, Martin 2).