

Staunton blows by Fort Defiance 87 - 72

The Staunton Storm gave the Fort Defiance Indians a shooting lesson in the Don Landes Gym on January 15, outscoring the home team 87 – 72. The Indians, whose offense is built around shooting three point shots, made only 4 out of 26 three point attempts while Staunton was lighting the nets up with ten three pointers. The game came after a twelve day layoff due to snow and ice. The Indians stayed close to the Storm for the first half but Staunton gradually put the game away in the second half. The Storm came into the game hot off a win over previously undefeated Wilson Memorial and are currently on top of the Shenandoah District standings with a 10 – 2 (3 – 0) record. With the loss, Fort fell to 7 – 4 (1 – 1).

Staunton opened the game with a bucket in the paint before Tripp Hanger banged in a trey from the corner to give Fort a brief 3 – 2 lead. Staunton took a 5 – 3 lead on their first three pointer before Elijah Pultz got an offensive rebound and scored for the home team to tie things up. Evan Braun scored to make it 7 – 5 but Staunton tied the score with 4:11 to go. Jasigh Ransome's floater in the lane gave Fort its last lead of the night, 9 – 7. Staunton scored the next six points to go up 13 – 9 before Gio Armendariz Cruz got two in the lane to make it 13 – 11. Another Storm three pointer pushed their lead to 16 – 11. Gio again scored in the lane but the visitors retaliated with a deuce to make it 18 – 13. Gus Gutshall, who played entirely too little in this game, scored twice in a row, the first after a nice pass from Gio but the Staunton team made another three pointer, a foul shot, and a field goal to take a 24 – 17 lead with 1.7 seconds to go in the quarter. Tripp then fired a midcourt shot as time expired that found the bottom of the net to make it 24 – 20 at the end of the first quarter.

The second quarter was close, with Fort matching Staunton bucket for bucket most of the quarter. Evan started Fort's scoring with a free throw. Gio's drive got the Indians within one at 24 – 23 but the Storm made yet another three pointer. Tripp hit a pull-up jumper from 15 feet out to make it 27 – 25 in favor of the Storm but another Staunton three pointer put the Indians down by five. Bradley Hebb then scored on an out-of-bounds play under the Fort bucket but Staunton's third consecutive trey put them ahead 33 – 27. Bradley scored again on a drive to the basket. After Staunton went ahead 35 – 29, Jasigh was fouled attempting a three point shot. He made all three of his foul shots. But, again, Staunton found the range from beyond the arc and went up 38 – 32. Elijah took a nice pass from Carter Berry and Gio followed with a drive to get Fort within two at 38 – 36. Staunton went up 40 – 36 but Elijah responded with a bucket on a feed from Gio. Staunton and Gio traded baskets again, making it 42 – 40 in favor of Staunton. The Storm scored on their next two possessions to go up 46 – 40. Gio made two free throws and Evan made one to make it 46 – 43 with 17 seconds to go in the half. Staunton worked for a good shot and took a 48 – 43 lead at halftime.

The second half did not go as well for the Indians. Staunton opened with a three pointer before Tripp scored on a drive, was fouled, and made his free throw. Bradley scored on a drive to make it 51 – 48 but that's the closest Fort Defiance would get the rest of the night. Staunton zoomed to a 72 – 61 comfortable lead by the end of the quarter. Fort only got scoring from Gio on two drives, Elijah in the paint, and Ayden Thornton on a putback.

Staunton soared to a 79 – 61 lead to start the fourth quarter. Bradley hit a free throw and Gio scored on a drive and was fouled, making the score 82 – 65 at that point. The only other points Fort was able to score were a layup by Gio, a three pointer by Tripp, and two points near the buzzer by Miguel Uribe.

Staunton's Joaquin Bell had a memorable night. The slippery guard knocked in four three pointers, eight two pointers, most coming on drives into the lane, and made nine of ten foul shots to end up with 37 points. Gio led Fort with 21. Tripp had 14 and Bradley 12.

Grandfather's notes: I feel very sorry for grandson Gus. He played for only 2 ½ minutes in the first quarter and went 2 for 2 from the field. He played 53 seconds in the second quarter, 9.7 seconds in the third quarter, and less than two minutes in the fourth when the benches were emptied. He is a senior who has devoted all his high school years to playing basketball. It would be different if those who play ahead of him were excelling. They are not. He has to sit on the bench and watch his teammates miss shot after shot, commit multiple turnovers (16 tonight), and play a porous defense. His clueless coach plays a three or four guard offense with guards who cannot shoot, handle the ball, or certainly pass the ball. They all play selfishly and he has to sit on the bench and watch this. Ugh! One of the guards is shooting 18% for the year FROM THE FOUL LINE (7 of 39)! Another teammate starts, plays at least half of each game, and is averaging 1.5 points per game. Gus, playing only a couple of minutes here and there, averages 5.5 points per game. He has had perhaps one turnover the entire year on a team that is averaging over 15 per game. When he was allowed to play more, he had two double-doubles. I'm proud that he has kept his head high despite his mistreatment. I've got nothing against his teammates as young men; I am just befuddled as to why he doesn't play more.

Fort's next game is a home game against Stuarts Draft on Friday, January 17.

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	4	1	1-5	12
Jasigh Ransome	1	0	3-3	5
Gio Armendariz Cruz	9	0	3-3	21
Miguel Uribe	1	0	0-0	2
Evan Braun	1	0	2-4	4
Carter Berry	0	0	0-0	0
Rhylan Martin	0	0	0-0	0
Elijah Pultz	4	0	0-0	8
Tripp Hanger	2	3	1-1	14
Connor Batten	0	0	0-0	0
Ayden Thornton	1	0	0-0	2
Gus Gutshall	2	0	0-0	4
TOTAL	0	0	10-16	72

The Staunton News Leader had this article about the game by Patrick Hite:

FORT DEFIANCE — Staunton became the first Shenandoah District team with 10 wins this season, beating Fort Defiance 87-72 on Wednesday night in the Don Landes Gym.

Joaquin Bell had a career-high 37 points in the win, the third in three nights and fifth in a row for Staunton (10-2, 3-0 Shenandoah).

"Beginning of the game I shot a couple of air balls," Bell said. "Coach told me to step in a little bit and I just found my shot."

Found it he did. The senior continued to make his case as the best player in the district, knocking down four 3s on the night. In Staunton's three wins this week, Bell is averaging 25.7 points.

Fort Defiance (7-4, 1-1 Shenandoah) hung with Staunton through almost three quarters, getting to within three on a 3-point shot by Bradley Hebb with 3:20 left in quarter.

Leon Woodard scored on a putback on the next trip down the court, the start of a 12-4 run to end the third. Woodard had four points in the run — both off of offensive rebounds — part of his 10 points on the night. It has been back-to-back strong nights offensively for Woodard, who had 17 in a win over Wilson on Tuesday.

"Leon has been solid all year," Staunton coach Kevin Madden said. "Leon was sitting on the bench and said, 'Coach, I'm ready to go get some rebounds,' so I put him back in and he got a big one down there in the third quarter."

Staunton scored the first seven points of the fourth quarter, including a three-point play by Maliq McCauley, to open up an 18-point lead.

Bell said the players were a little worried before the game, knowing Fort Defiance would want to run and already having played two tough games this week.

"We knew they were going to come out with the system, shoot 3s, and we just had to run with them," Bell said. "But Coach had us well-conditioned and well-prepared for the game."

Anthony Renne finished with 11 points, Ky'Ree Scott added 13 and McCauley finished with 10, putting five players in double digits in the win.

Gio Armendariz Cruz led Fort Defiance with 21 points. Fort dropped its fourth game in six outings after opening the season with five wins in a row.

Staunton is at home against Waynesboro on Friday while Fort Defiance will host Stuarts Draft.