

2024-25 Season Overview

The Fort Defiance High School boys basketball team had an up and down season in 2024-25. There were highs, such as opening the season at 5 - 0, beating Stuarts Draft in the regular season after losing to them the first time, ending the season with a winning record, and making it to post-season play where they came back from eighteen down to again beat Stuarts Draft 62 - 61 then gave heavily favored Central a great game in the Regional Semifinals. There were lows such as going 0 for 15 from the foul line in the second half of the Page County game and losing to hapless Waynesboro in the last regular season game.

In the preseason article, Coach Mike Gale said “We expect to be competitive and finish in the top half of the district. We hope to be playing our best basketball by the end of the season.” Unfortunately, these goals were not reached. Fort, 7 - 6 in the Shenandoah District, finished fourth out of seven teams in the district. They lost three of their last four games including the regular season finale at Waynesboro. Probably the worst game the team played all season. Fort did play better in its two Region 2B games but still was haunted by poor ball handling and shooting. Sadly, these skills made no noticeable improvements throughout the season.



The disappointment I felt with this team did not apply to Grandson Gus Gutshall. Lynn and I watched Gus perform in over 100 games while he wore a Fort Defiance High School jersey for the past five years. I wrote articles published on this website for nearly all of those games so nothing in this overview hasn't been said before.

First, I am extremely proud of Gus for many reasons:

- He was a good power forward who rebounded and shot well.
- He did his job faithfully and unselfishly, setting screens and looking to pass to open teammates.
- He did not try to do things that weren't in his wheelhouse. His teammates attempted over 750 three point shots during the season, making fewer than 27% of them. Gus attempted zero the entire season.
- He had some memorable games. Twice he had double-doubles and four times he was won the Indian Spirit award for game performances.
- He hustled on both ends of the court and seemed to handle well the disappointment he must have felt from having been underused by the coaching staff throughout the season.
- Unlike several of his classmates, he stuck with basketball for three years of JV and two years of varsity. He lived with the fact that he spent way too much time on the bench and

when he was on the floor his greatest chance of touching the ball was to get an offensive rebound.

- He played smart. He did what he was told. Unlike many of his teammates, he did not turn the ball over nor take foolish shots.

Conversely, as I wrote about constantly in my game articles, I was very disappointed with his coaches and some of his teammates. Here is a recap of my complaints for the past five years:

- The coaches' substitution policy seemed to be random, not based on performance or data. Players were shuffled in and out constantly with no understandable strategy. Individual good performances were not rewarded with more playing time nor were mistakes punished with less court time.
- There was entirely too much emphasis on three point shooting. This team was not blessed with any pure shooters but that didn't stop them from taking those 750+ three point attempts during the season. The team's warmup, frequently a subject of my ire, was entirely focused on teenagers shooting 20 - 25 foot shots. There seemed to be no emphasis on foul shooting on a team that shot *under 50%* for the year from the foul line. Free throw shooting was just plain awful and undoubtedly cost the Indians a few wins.
- Clock management was non-existent. Players tried 25 foot shots with no regard for how much time was left in the quarter nor the score.
- The coaches allowed the guards to constantly drive into a crowded lane and take poor shots, frequently going one-on-three. Frequently fans in the gym could be heard yelling "PASS THE BALL."
- Selfishness became the norm for many players who looked first to launch a prayer instead of finding an open teammate. I don't fault the players as much as the coaching staff for this; selfish play makes for poor team camaraderie which I think describes well this year's squad. I wrote last year that "they wear the same uniforms but were not a team."
- Coaches apparently did not make use of readily available statistics in deciding who plays and who does not. Consider these statistics about Gus' playing time:
 - Gus' playing time was 9th on the team. Some played twice as much as he did. He averaged playing under 12 minutes out of the 32 minutes of possible play per game.
 - Despite his limited playing time, Gus was the second leading rebounder on the team and scored nearly four points per game.
 - Gus had the highest field goal percentage on the team excepting Ayden who missed ten games. As a team, FDHS made only 35.4% of their field goal attempts this year. Gus made 46.8% of us.
 - He had the fewest number of turnovers of any of the players who played in at least 15 games. He also had the best turnover percentage of any player.
 - Hudl.com had a rating system called Value Point System which assesses each player's overall performance. According to Hudl, "VPS provides an all-encompassing look at how players and teams perform by weighing their positive contributions against their negative ones. The resulting number shows how effective the player is." Gus' score, for the second year in a row, was the **best on the team** not counting Ayden who missed nearly half the season with a medical issue. Incidentally, his brother Henry had the highest VPS score on his team for his junior and senior years, also. So why didn't he play more??

Of course I realize that my opinions are biased. What grandfather doesn't want his grandson to be on the court all the time? And despite my rantings, I was very, very happy to watch the last five seasons of Fort Defiance boys basketball. Surely Gus was happy to have seen the support he got at every single game from family and friends. It didn't matter if the team won or lost or if he had a good game or not, his family was there to encourage and support #40. Gus' basketball will not continue but the support will.

Two great chapters in the Gutshall Family High School Basketball book are now finished, one for Henry and one for Gus. Another will start in a few years as Freddie hopes to continue the family tradition. I can't wait to start writing articles about the Indians with him on the team....

Granddaddy Joe Hill

