

Gus Gutshall



FORT
DEFIANCE
HIGH
SCHOOL



Varsity Boys Basketball

2024 - 2025



Fort Defiance High School

Boys Varsity Basketball

2024 – 2025 Roster



Number	Name	Position	Height	Year
1	Whetzel, John	G	5'9"	12
2	Hebb, Bradley	G	5'10"	12
3	Ransome, Allen	G	5'8"	11
4	Armendariz Cruz, Gio	G	6'0"	11
10	Uribe, Miguel	G	5'8"	11
12	Braun, Evan	F	6'0"	11
14	Berry, Carter	F	6'0"	12
20	Martin, Rhylan	F	5'10"	12
22	Pultz, Elijah	F	6'1"	11
24	Hanger, Tripp	G	6'1"	11
31	Batten, Connor	G	5'10"	11
32	Thornton, Ayden	F	6'4"	11
40	Gutshall, Gus	F	6'2"	12

School Colors: Royal Blue and White
 Head Coach: Mike Gale
 Assistant Coach: Jeff Templeton, Jeff Blalock
 Athletic Trainer: Michael Hartman
 Mascot(s): Indians
 Cheerleading advisors: Brittany Jefferson, Hannah Mchone

Fort Defiance School Administration
 Superintendent: Dr. Eric Bond
 Principal: Alan Shull
 Assistant Principals: Mark Mace, Lori Rocco
 Athletic Director: Richard A. Miller

Preseason Predictions

The following article appeared in the Staunton News Leader on December 11:

A week into the boys basketball season, The News Leader takes a look at the teams in the Shenandoah District.

Fort Defiance

Last year: 11-12

Postseason: Lost in regional quarterfinals to Luray

Key returning players (with 2023-24 stats):

- Gio Armendariz Cruz, Jr. (17 ppg, 5 rpg, 4 apg)
- Tripp Hanger, Jr. (7 ppg, 3 rpg, 1 apg)
- Bradley Hebb, Sr. (5 ppg, 2 rpg, 3 apg)
- Evan Braun, Jr. (4 ppg, 4 rpg)
- Jasigh Ransome, Jr. (5 ppg, 3 rpg, 2 apg)
- Rhylan Martin, Sr. (4 ppg, 2 rpg, 1 apg)
- Carter Berry, Sr. (3 ppg, 3 rpg)
- Gus Gutshall, Sr. (3 ppg, 3 rpg)

Newcomers:

- Elijah Pultz, Jr.
- Connor Batten, Jr.
- Ayden Thornton, Jr.

Fort Defiance has eight returners so they are an experienced squad. They have a lot of guys who can play multiple positions and produce in many ways.

"We expect to be competitive and finish in the top half of the district," said Fort coach Mike Gale.
"We hope to be playing our best basketball by the end of the season."



Fort Defiance High School

Boys Varsity Basketball

2024 – 2025 Schedule and Results

Date	Opponent	Location	Score	W/L
Nov. 21, 2024	Luray (Scrimmage)	Luray High School		
Nov 26, 2024	Nelson County (Scrimmage)	Fort Defiance High School		
Dec 3, 2024	Broadway	Fort Defiance High School	58 – 53	W
Dec 6, 2024	Turner Ashby	Fort Defiance High School	59 – 56	W
Dec 10, 2024	Clarke County	Clark County High School	79 – 41	W
Dec 13, 2024	Broadway	Broadway High School	57 – 53	W
Dec 16, 2024	Turner Ashby	Turner Ashby High School	64 – 63	W
Dec 21, 2024	Sherando	Strasburg High School	45 – 63	L
Dec 27, 2024	Strasburg	Strasburg High School	52 – 58	L
Dec 28, 2024	Page County	Strasburg High School	63 – 60	W
Dec 30, 2024	Central	Strasburg High School	53 – 78	L
Jan 3, 2025	Riverheads	Riverheads High School	88 – 62	W
Jan 15, 2025	Staunton	Fort Defiance High School	72 – 87	L
Jan 17, 2025	Stuarts Draft	Fort Defiance High School	55 – 70	L
Jan 21, 2025	Wilson Memorial	Wilson Memorial High School	62 – 82	L
Jan 24, 2025	Waynesboro	Fort Defiance High School	76 – 60	W
Jan 25, 2025	Roanoke Catholic	Rockbridge County High School	69 – 87	L
Jan 28, 2025	Riverheads	Fort Defiance High School	79 – 74	W
Jan 30, 2025	Buffalo Gap	Buffalo Gap High School	95 – 51	W
Jan 31, 2025	Staunton	Staunton High School	69 - 84	L
Feb 4, 2025	Buffalo Gap	Fort Defiance High School	80 - 33	W
Feb 10, 2025	Stuarts Draft	Stuarts Draft High School	66 - 61	W
Feb 14, 2025	Wilson Memorial	Fort Defiance High School	48 - 61	L
Feb 17, 2025	Waynesboro	Waynesboro High School	59 - 63	L
Feb 25, 2025	Stuarts Draft --Regional Quarterfinals	Stuarts Draft High School	62 - 61	W
Feb 27, 2025	Central Woodstock - Regional Semifinals	Central High School	68 - 70	L
OVERALL RECORD			13 - 11	



Scrimmage: Fort Defiance 72, Luray 66

Fort Defiance tops Luray in season-opening scrimmage

by Joe Hill

The Fort Defiance Indians began their 2024-25 season with a scrimmage at Luray High School on November 21. The team had hardly had time to practice together since the football team made it to the regional playoffs and several members of the basketball team played on the football team. But the early scrimmage gave fans a preview of what the season may look like with eight varsity players returning from the 2023-24 squad.

Luray is the team that ended Fort's 2023 - 24 season with a convincing 80 - 67 win in the Region B2 quarterfinals last year. This scrimmage showed the teams more evenly matched with Fort actually holding the upper hand in two of the four quarters, one went to Luray, and one was a tie. It is fair to say that both Luray and Fort Defiance were rusty in their first outing of the season. Baskets were hard to come by at times. The scrimmage was played in four individual quarters where the scoreboard was reset at the end of each quarter.

Grandfather's note: I am going to write and post differently this year than I did previously. This is Gus' senior year and I will surely construct a book for him as I did for his brother Henry, highlighting his days on the Indian hardwood. I will try to not post negative comments directed at any individual player in this year's **online** version of my game recaps. I will say things like "the guard play was subpar" without naming individual players in that post. But, I will create another version of each game recap, one that will appear in Gus' book, which won't hold back criticism nor names. The public version of my game stories will be truthful but not harsh on individual players. So here it goes:

Coach Mike Gale had told his players that this year they would not be running the Grinnell system with wholesale substitutions made nearly every minute and a heavy emphasis on three point shooting. The scrimmage showed that he was holding to his word. Substitutions were regularly made, as expected in a scrimmage, but not five players at a time and not after only 60 seconds or so of play. Gus played as much as any other player for Fort, much to my liking. Many of his teammates still were in the 2023-24 mindset that their job was to shoot the ball nearly every time their hands touched it, though. It was déjà vu watching the guards drive into a crowded lane and force up a horrific shot. Many of their three point efforts were air balls. Like last year, passes were too few and far between. I told friends and family that if this continues the only way Gus will touch the ball on offense is if he gets an offensive rebound. Hopefully this will improve over the season.

The first quarter went the Bulldog's way, 20 - 16. Like last year, Fort's ball handling got them in trouble early on which led to some easy Luray baskets. The second quarter was much better for the Indians who posted a 25 - 16 victory in it. Luray got a basket at the buzzer to pull close to Fort Defiance in the third quarter but FDHS still hung on to win it 21 - 20. The fourth quarter, with bench players playing most of the time for both teams, ended in a 10 - 10 tie. If you add up the four quarters' scores, Fort defeated Luray 72 - 66.

Fort did a fine job in two areas: defense and rebounding. The 1 - 2 - 2 half court press was effective at times with several steals. With the big men under the goal this year, unlike last year, rebounds were much better for the visiting Indians. Gus had a bevy of defensive rebounds.

The game was full of fouls, missed free throws and blown layups. Perhaps this is to be expected early in the season. FDHS played ten of its fourteen players most of the time: Carter Berry, Jasiah Ransome, Tripp Hanger, Bradley Hebb, Gio Armendariz-Cruz, Gus Gutshall, Rhylan Martin, Evan Braun, and two players up from last year's JV team, Elijah Pultz and Connor Batten. Like last year's squad, the players need to improve on ball handling, shot selection, and shot making. Very importantly, they need to become a team which looks out for each other. Based on this first scrimmage, I have some optimism that this year's team can better last year's 11 - 12 record.

More Grandfather notes: Gus scored four points, making one field goal after getting a nice assist from Gio and going 2 - 4 from the foul line. As I noted above, he rebounded very well and played good defense. He had zero turnovers and made one very nice assist.



Scrimmage: Nelson County 84, Fort Defiance 61

by Joe Hill

The Luray scrimmage gave the Fort Defiance Indians fans reason for encouragement but the second pre-season scrimmage against Nelson County did a lot to dim that encouragement. Nelson County, only a 7 - 13 team from 2023-24, dominated FDHS in nearly every quarter on the Indians home turf on November 26. Fort fell 16 - 10 in the first quarter, squeaked out a 22 - 18 victory in the second quarter, got blasted 28 - 13 in the third quarter, and was finished off by the Governors 22 - 16 in the fourth quarter. Thus the overall score was Nelson County 84, Fort Defiance 61 in the four main quarters. A fifth quarter with the substitutes playing did go Fort's way, 8 - 7.

Nelson County was a very big team with two players at least 6' 6". But it wasn't their size that killed the Indians, it was Fort's inability to do the fundamentals of shooting, passing, ball handling, and getting into position on defense. Fort's offense can be described best as this: whoever has the ball looks to shoot a three point shot or drive into the lane which is already crowded with big defenders. The FDHS shooting was horrific. Even from the free throw line they made only 6 out of 17 attempts. Three point shooting was even worse than that and nearly every player (except Gus Gutshall and perhaps Elijah Pultz) tried to shoot from beyond the arc. The starters for FDHS were Bradley Hebb, Gio Armendariz Cruz, Elijah Pultz, Evan Braun, and Tripp Hanger. Tripp opened scoring with a nice layup. After a NCHS free throw, Gio scored on a drive. Nelson County went up 6 - 5 before Rhylan Martin hit a three pointer to give the Indians a 9 - 5 lead midway through the quarter. The only point the home team could muster the rest of the quarter was a free throw by Gio. There were many, many three point shots that fell off the mark and drives by the guards which ended up with poorly taken shots. Offensive passes were almost nonexistent. Nelson County made a miracle, banked three point heave at the buzzer to make the score 16 - 10 their way.

The Indians played somewhat better in the second quarter. Bradley scored on a drive then Tripp made another three to give Fort a 5 - 0 lead. After a NCHS bucket, Gio scored on a drive. Nelson County responded with a trey then Evan made one for FD giving them a 10 - 5 lead with 6:03 to go in the quarter. Gio scored again in close and Evan got a bucket to fall giving the home team a 14 - 8 lead. Carter Berry scored after an offensive rebound with 2:36 to go making it 16 - 10 Fort's way. Gio scored again on a drive then Elijah got two in the lane to make it 20 - 15. Bradley scored on a drive in the lane and Nelson County finished the scoring with a free throw and basket to make it 22 - 18 at the end of the quarter in favor of Fort.

The third quarter was nothing short of disastrous for the Indians. With no one in to guard one of the huge post players for Nelson, he quickly scored twice to make it 4 - 0. Two free throws by NCHS and Fort was down 6 - 0 to start the quarter. Tripp hit two three pointers (one a bank shot) but Nelson flew away with a 13 - 6 lead. Gus then took a pass from Gio and scored in the lane with 4:58 to go. It was perhaps one of only two assists the entire night for FDHS. After Nelson County had swollen their lead to 19 - 8, Jasigh Ransom made a three pointer for Fort. The Governors poured it on again, shooting out to a 24 - 11 lead before Gio got two on a drive. The quarter ended 28 - 13 in favor of the visitors.

The fourth quarter was back and forth at first. Bradley made two free throws, Gio a layup, and

Evan took two of three foul shots to tie it at 6's. Gio and Bradley each scored on drives to give FDHS a 10 - 6 advantage but it didn't last. Nelson County spurted to a 13 - 10 lead before Gus again scored in the paint. Bradley and Gio finished the scoring for Fort with field goals but Nelson County pulled away to win the quarter 22 - 16.

A fifth quarter was played with substitutes but nothing noteworthy happened for Fort. Sadly, the squad made only one of six foul shots in this quarter. At the end of the quarter Fort led 8 - 7.

Grandfather's comments: Gus played well when he was in. He only played two minutes in each of the first two quarters but got more playing time in the second half, especially the fourth quarter. He had several rebounds including one offensive one. He went 2 - 3 from the field, a FAR better shooting percentage than his teammates. Unlike others, he attempted to block out the bigger opponents at times. Fort's guards tonight were the highest scorers but it cannot be said that any of them had a good game. Their shooting percentages were abysmal, there were numerous ball handling turnovers, and when one drives in the lane his eyes are just on the rim, not his teammates. What is really telling is that there were zero points scored by FDHS with a mid-range jump shot. All of their points came off three point shots, drives into the lane, or free throws. The shooting percentage for all three of these was nothing short of awful.

Fort opens the season with a trip to Broadway on December 3.



A happy time during warmups

Game #1: Fort Defiance 58, Broadway 53

Fort Defiance opens season with 58 - 53 win over Broadway; First victory over the Gobblers since 2017

by Joe Hill

The Fort Defiance Indians opened their 2024-25 season at home with a great comeback win over Broadway, 58 - 53. With 4:30 to go in the third quarter, the Indians found themselves behind by 14, 41 - 27. Soon thereafter the Gobblers lead stood at 44 - 32. The Fort boys then went on a 23 - 0 spurt, extending into midway in the fourth quarter, to take a 55 - 44 lead which they managed to hold on to secure the first win over Broadway since 2017.

The win came about because of good defense, with numerous steals, and shots finally finding their home after two and a half quarters of miserable shooting. Truth be told, this Broadway team is not the BHS team of previous years. They especially missed Tristan Yoder, a D-1 class runner who chose to forgo basketball this year to concentrate on running. Last year when these teams met, Broadway scorched Fort 108 - 83 with Yoder knocking down 36 points.

Broadway opened the scoring with a basket then Tripp Hanger knocked in a three pointer to give the home team a 3 - 2 lead. BHS took the lead back 5 - 3 then Evan Braun made a trey to put the Indians back on top. BHS flew to a 9 - 6 lead before Rhylan Martin made two free throws. Bradley Hebb drove in the lane for two and Gio Armendariz Cruz did the same to push Fort's lead to 12 - 9. BHS scored near the end of the quarter as Fort led after one, 12 - 11.

The second period was a bad one for the Indians. Fort managed only 11 points while Broadway put 20 on the board. Broadway scored the first five points of the quarter before Gus Gutshall snared an offensive rebound and stuck it back in for two. After Broadway went up 18 - 14, Bradley scored on a drive to get the Indians within two. BHS and FDHS then traded three pointers with Jasigh Ransome hitting for the Indians. BHS extended their lead to 23 - 19 before Evan got two on a put-back. BHS soared to a 29 - 21 lead until Elijah Pultz scored in close with under a minute to go in the half. Broadway got the last bucket of the half which gave them a 31 - 23 lead at the break.

The first four minutes of the third quarter weren't kind to Fort. Fort managed only four points, two on a drive by Gio and two on free throws by Bradley. Meanwhile, BHS pulled out to that big fourteen point lead, 41 - 27 with 4:30 to go. Jasigh made another three pointer and Ayden Thornton scored his first two varsity points to make it 42 - 32. BHS scored after Fort missed free throws to go up 44 - 32. This is where Fort started its tear. Elijah scored two in close, Jasigh hit another three, and Bradley came up with a steal as BHS tried to hold out for the last shot of the quarter. Bradley's layup closed the third quarter with Broadway holding on to a 44 - 39 lead.

The final quarter opened with Tripp scoring six consecutive points, a three pointer and three free throws as he was fouled shooting another. This gave Fort its first advantage since the first quarter, 45 - 44. Fort continued to score while holding the visitors scoreless. Gio, whose drives wouldn't fall at all in the first half, finally got going and made three consecutive shots off drives into the lane. Gus then snared an offensive rebound, perhaps his fifth of the night, and made a

tough shot on the put-back to make it 53 - 44. Bradley scored in close after an offensive rebound as Fort made its 23rd consecutive point to go up 55 - 44 with 3:57 to go.

Down the stretch, BHS attempted to comeback but poor ball handling and shooting spelled their doom. A free throw finally broke the Fort 23 point run. With 2:55 to go BHS scored again to pull within eight at 55 - 47. Gio scored again with 2:02 to go and Broadway countered to make it 57 - 49. BHS scored with 39 seconds to go to get within six at 57 - 51 and scored again with 6.3 seconds to go making it 57 - 53. Tripp shut the lights out on the Gobblers by making one of two free throws leaving the final score at 58 - 53 for the Indians.

For the night, Gio scored twelve points while Bradley and Tripp each scored ten. Jasigh had nine. Evan scored five while Elijah and Gus each got four. Broadway's 6'5" center Eric Santiago was the Gobbler's leading scorer with 12.

As in the last scrimmage, all of Fort's points came on drives into the lane, three point missiles, or free throws. Shooting was not good from any of those places. Fort did score six three pointers, but they missed 21 other attempts, making their three point shooting percentage only 22%. Free throws were almost as bad. Fort made only 8 of 22 foul shots, 36%.

Fort's defense bailed them out, forcing numerous turnovers by the visitors. Rebounding was also good for the Indians tonight. Broadway had only nine boys dressed for the game.

Grandfather's note: Gus played well as he begins his last year playing high school basketball. He had numerous rebounds including at least five offensive ones. He made 2 – 5 shots from the field. On another note, after telling the players they would not be using the Grinnell system this year, Coach Gale again did platoon substitutions throughout the game. In this system, players are not rewarded for good play nor punished for poor play including the taking of improper three point shots and driving into a crowded lane in order to throw up a prayer. It says a lot about your offense when not a single field goal was attempted by a Fort player in the range 8 – 20 feet from the basket. I also worry about the team's free throw shooting especially when in the 20 minute warmup the team takes over 100 three point attempts and zero foul shots.

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	0	2-4	10
Jasigh Ransome	0	3	0-0	9
Gio Armendariz Cruz	6	0	0-4	12
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	1	1	0-1	5
Carter Berry	0	0	0-4	0
Rhylan Martin	0	0	2-2	2
Elijah Pultz	2	0	0-2	4
Tripp Hanger	0	2	4-5	10
Connor Batten	0	0	0-0	0
Ayden Thornton	1	0	0-0	2
Gus Gutshall	2	0	0-0	4
TOTAL	16	6	8-22	58

The Staunton News Leader published the following mini-article about the game:

Fort boys open with win

FORT DEFIANCE — Three players were in double figures as Fort Defiance opened its boys basketball season with a 58-53 win over Broadway Tuesday night.

Bradley Hebb, Giovanni Armendariz Cruz and Tripp Hanger all finished with 10 points for Fort in the win.

Fort hosts Turner Ashby Friday night.

And the Harrisonburg Daily News Record published the following short article about the game:

Fort Defiance 58, Broadway 53: Three different players scored in double digits as Fort Defiance pulled away late for a non-district victory over Broadway at home on Tuesday.

Senior guard Bradley Hebb, junior guard Tripp Hanger and junior guard Giovanni Armendariz Cruz all finished with 10 points apiece for the Indians in the season-opening victory.

Jasigh Ransome, a junior guard, also impressed with nine points for Fort in the win.

Freshman guard Andrew Garber finished with 11 points to lead the Gobblers while senior guard Sam Post and senior forward Braden Burkhalter finished with 10 points apiece.



Gus -- #40

Game #2: Fort Defiance 59. Turner Ashby 56

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

by Joe Hill

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 Rhylan 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 Rhylan 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 11th 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 Rhylan'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

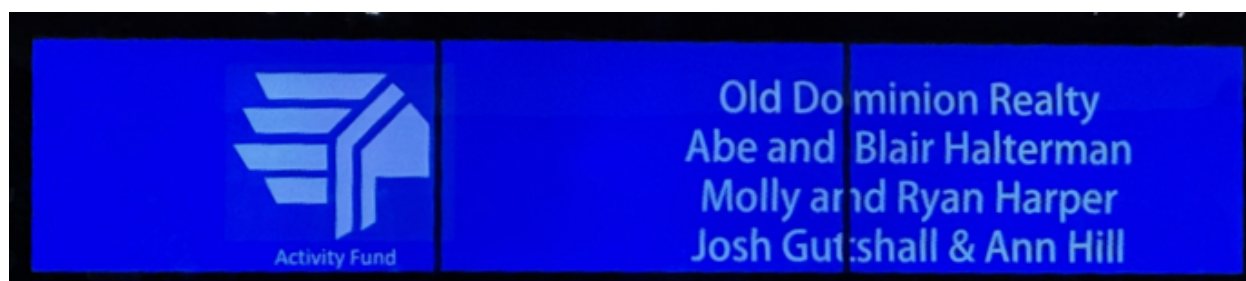
Name	2 Pt Goals	3 Pt Goals	Free Throws	Total
John Whetzel	0	0	0-0	0
Bradley Hebb	3	0	1-2	7
Jasigh Ransome	1	0	0-2	2
Gio Armendariz Cruz	4	1	8-12	19
Miguel Uribe	0	0	1-2	1
Evan Braun	0	2	0-2	6
Carter Berry	0	0	1-2	1
Rhylan Martin	0	2	0-2	6
Elijah Pultz	0	0	0-0	0
Tripp Hanger	1	1	1-2	6
Connor Batten	0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

The Staunton News Leader 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 family supports Fort Defiance athletics

INDIAN PRIDE



GUS GUTSHALL

12/6/2024

vs. Turner Ashby

Offensive Rebounds	Defensive Rebounds	Deflections
6	6	3

The Fort coaches selected Gus for the Indian Pride Award for this game

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



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."

FORT DEFIANCE BASKETBALL 2024- 25

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).



Gus puts up a soft hook over the Turner Ashby defender

Game #3: Fort Defiance 79, Clarke County 41

Indians soar over Clarke County Eagles, 79 - 41

by Joe Hill

The Fort Defiance Indians put together their best offensive performance of the season against Clarke County on December 10 in the Clarke County gym, dominating the Eagles 79 – 41. FDHS shot better than they did in their two previous games and when they missed, senior Gus Gutshall was there to clean up as he chalked up 15 points and 12 rebounds to lead the visitors. For the season, Fort remains undefeated at 3 – 0. Clarke County's record fell to 1 – 2. Thirteen of Gus' 15 points came as a result of his offensive rebounds as he recorded his second consecutive double-double.

Gus' 15 points led the Indians. Rhylan Martin had 12, Connor Patten notched eleven, and Evan Braun and Gio Armendariz Cruz each scored ten. Jasigh Ransom knocked in nine. Fort's defense was very good and caused the Bull Run District team to commit many turnovers.

Evan opened scoring with a trey. After two CCHS free throws, Gus got his first offensive rebound and putback to make it 5 – 2 but the Eagles hit a three to tie the score. It was the last time the score was close as Fort surged to a 18 – 5 lead with 4:12 to go in the quarter. In that spell, Jasigh hit a three pointer, Gio scored on a drive, and Rhylan hit back-to-back three pointers then turned a steal into a layup to give Fort the big lead. FDHS then went ice cold for the rest of the quarter, not scoring a single point while the home team managed to tack on seven more, making it Fort 18, Clarke County 12 at the end of the first quarter.

Gio then scored on a drive then had two consecutive steals with easy layups which gave FD a 24 – 12 lead with 6:05 to go in the second quarter. After a Clarke County made a deuce and a free throw, Bradley scored in the lane to give Fort a 26 – 15 lead with 4:34 to go. Evan scored on a drive into the lane, followed by Connor who scored on a drive and followed that up with a three pointer with 2:55 to go, giving the Indians a commanding 33 – 15 lead. After an Eagles trey, Gio made two free throws then Clark County got a jumper to make the score 35 – 20. Again Gus was able to snare a misfired shot and put it in the hole with 1:15 to go. Clarke County countered with a three pointer before Ayden Thornton got two after an offensive rebound. Evan closed the scoring in the half with a jumper to make it 41 – 23 at the break. For the half, Fort shot 5 for 10 from three point range, much better than they had shot in the first two games. However, they had nine turnovers but made up for it with good defense and rebounding.

Fort's success continued in the second half. Gus got another putback then took a nice feed from Bradley. Jasigh tacked on a three pointer and Fort's lead soared to 48 – 23. On the next two possessions, Gus again muscled offensive rebounds and was fouled. He made three of his four attempts as Fort led 51 – 25 with 5:25 to go in the period. Elijah got an offensive rebound and turned it into two points before the Eagles made two free throws. Evan then made a nice tip-in of a missed shot and Connor added another three pointer as the Indians lead was extended to thirty points, 61 – 31. After an Eagles trey, Evan made one of two free throws. As time expired, Carter Berry managed to snag a rebound and score, making it Fort 64, Clarke County 37.

Elijah's offensive rebound and putback opened the scoring in the final period. After another offensive rebound, Gus made two more free throws. Rhylan then made two foul shots and

scored on a layup to make it 72 – 37 with 5:00 to go. After Bradley missed two free throws, Jasigh drained another three pointer so Coach Mike Gale gave some playing time to John Whetzel and Miguel Uribe. In the meantime, Gus again scored after another offensive rebound and Miguel made two free throws as the game ended in a blowout, 79 – 41.

Grandfather's note: The drive to Clarke County was over an hour and a half but it was worth every minute of it to see Gus perform so well. He was 5–7 from the field, 5–6 from the free throw line, and had twelve rebounds including eight offensive ones. All of this happened with Coach Gale still doing platoon substitution with 11 of the 13 players which means no player plays more than half of each game.

Tonight the strategy worked, though, especially with Fort's ball-hawking and rebounding. Gus started for the first time and clearly showed why he belonged on the court. In the second half, he scored 11 points and missed zero field goals. I realized tonight that Gus actually benefited from his teammates' inability to shoot well as he was able to get almost all of his points as a result of offensive rebounds. He does an excellent job of getting into position to rebound and uses his height, strength, and quick release to score. Watching him perform tonight was great but seeing his smile as he came out from the locker room was even better.



Gus was a starter in several games for the Indians

Eleven Fort players scored in the blowout. Fort shot 9–20 from the three point arc, much better than the two previous games. Even their free throw shooting was better, 12-16, which upped their season average 50%. Fort's next outing is a trip to Broadway High School on Friday night.

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	1	0	0-2	2
Jasigh Ransome	0	3	0-0	9
Gio Armendariz Cruz	4	0	2-2	10
Miguel Uribe	0	0	2-2	2
Evan Braun	3	1	1-2	10
Carter Berry	1	0	0-0	2
Rhylan Martin	2	2	2-2	12
Elijah Pultz	2	0	0-0	4
Tripp Hanger	0	0	0-0	0
Connor Batten	1	3	0-0	11
Ayden Thornton	1	0	0-0	2
Gus Gutshall	5	0	5-6	15
TOTAL	20	9	12-16	79

INDIAN PRIDE



GUS GUTSHALL

12/10/2024

at Clarke County

Offensive Rebounds	Defensive Rebounds	Deflections	Freethrows Made
9	3	2	5

Gus gets his second consecutive double-double and is selected for the Indian Award again

The Harrisonburg Daily News Record had the following article about the game:

BOYS BASKETBALL | FORT DEFIANCE 79, CLARKE COUNTY 41

Indians crush Eagles to remain perfect

By CODY ELLIOTT Daily News-Record
Dec 10, 2024

Fort Defiance made the long trip to Berryville and put on a clinic, cruising to a 79-41 blowout win over Region 2B opponent Clarke County on Tuesday.

There were 10 Indians in the scoring column as they won their third straight.

Fort senior forward Gus Gutshall had a double-double of 15 points and 12 rebounds in the victory while junior guard Gio Armendariz Cruz also impressed.

Armendariz Cruz had 10 points and dished out five assists in the rout while senior forward Rhylan Martin and junior forward Evan Braun scored 12 points apiece.

Conner Batten, another junior guard, added 11 points for the Indians while classmate Jasigh Ransome also brought the energy with nine points of his own.

The Eagles, who lost their second straight, were led by sophomore guard Colton Johnson's 16 points while senior wing Lincoln Booker finished with nine. Isaac Nei, a sophomore guard, also chipped in with eight points for Clarke.

Fort (3-0) is back at it on Friday at non-district opponent Broadway while the Eagles (1-2) will return home on Saturday to face non-district foe James Wood.

Fort Defiance 18 23 23 15 — 79
Clarke County 12 11 14 4 — 41

The following short article appeared in the Staunton News Leader:

Fort rolls over Clarke

Fort Defiance remained unbeaten through three games with an 79-41 win over Clarke County Tuesday night in boys basketball.

Five Fort players scored in double figures, led by Gus Gutshall's 15 points. Rhylan Martin and Evan Braun both had 12 points in the win, while Connor Batten finished with 11 points and Gio Armendariz Cruz had 10.

Fort stretched a six-point first quarter lead to 18 at halftime, pulling away from there for the win.

Game 4: Fort Defiance 57, Broadway 53

Fort squeaks out 57 - 53 win over Broadway

by Joe Hill

In a game in which both teams had many missed shots and missed opportunities, the Fort Defiance Indians kept their unbeaten streak alive by nipping the Broadway Gobblers 59 - 55 at Broadway on December 13. It was not a pretty game by any means, but the visitors managed to come back from a 51 - 49 deficit with 3:16 to go to beat the Broadway boys, who fell to 1 - 3 on the season.

Somehow, Fort Defiance has managed to run out to a 4 - 0 record on the 2024-25 season despite horrific three point shooting, numerous turnovers, and pathetic foul shooting, especially when they needed the ball to go in. Fort's defense and rebounding, as it has throughout the season, was again the saving grace along with some poor play by the home team down the stretch.

The first quarter was very low scoring as neither team could buy a basket. Fort shot poorly but Broadway did even worse. Bradley Hebb opened the scoring with a bucket after a nice pass from Evan Braun. Broadway quickly tied the score then hit a three pointer to go up 5 - 2. This trey, with 6:38 to go in the quarter, would be the last points Broadway would score in the period. Fort got a triple from Tripp Hanger out of the corner, then two free throws from Jasigh Ransome and a putback by Rhylan Martin but that would be all the Indians could muster for the quarter as it ended 9 - 5 in favor of FDHS. Fort shot 1 - 10 from three point land for the quarter.

The second quarter was evenly played; each team scored 15 points. Gus Gutshall scored inside after a pass from Tripp then Tripp followed that up with his second three pointer to quickly give Fort a 14 - 5 lead with 6:36 left in the quarter. Broadway clawed back, though, making a triple then a jumper to close the gap to 14 - 10. Carter Berry made one of two free throws with 4:59 to go before Broadway added a field goal and foul shot to make it 15 - 13. Bradley scored on a drive after a nice pass from Gus then scored again to give FDHS a 19 - 13 lead. Broadway closed to 19 - 15 then Tripp hit his third triple of the half to make the score 22 - 15. The Gobblers answered with a three of their own. Jasigh scored in close on a feed from Gio Armandariz Cruz then BHS scored again, leaving the score FDHS 24, BHS 20 at the half.

In the first half, Fort made only 3 of 17 three point attempts; all by Tripp.

The third quarter was not good for the visitors. Gio made two free throws but then on consecutive trips down the court turned the ball over. After Broadway had pulled within two at 26 - 24, Jasigh made a three pointer then Rhylan did the same and Fort went up 32 - 26. The Indians then went stone cold except for two free throws by Rhylan. Meanwhile, Broadway pushed the ball inside to its 6'5" center Eric Santiago who led the Gobblers to a 36 - 34 advantage with 2:48 to go in the quarter. After two more empty trips down the court with Gio not finding the range again, BHS extended their lead to 39 - 34. Elijah Pultz made one of two free throws to make it 39 - 35 in favor of the Gobblers. BHS upped their lead to 41 - 35 but Jasigh managed to get a steal in the final seconds of the quarter and score, leaving it at BHS 41, FDHS 37 going into the last quarter.

Fort quickly bounced back to open the final period. Jasigh hit a three then Bradley turned a steal into two points to give FDHS the lead, 42 - 41. Bradley made one of two free throws but BHS tied the score at 43's with 6:06 to go. Jasigh hit another big three pointer to return the lead to Fort, 46 - 43 then, after Gus had missed a pair of free throws and Broadway scoring inside, Evan Braun knocked a trey down to put FD ahead 49 - 45. Evan then made a nice steal but missed both of his free throws and BHS scored to make it 49 - 47 with 3:43 to go.

The last four minutes were frenetic. Santiago tried to get BHS back in charge by hitting two free throws then scoring in the lane to give the Gobblers a 51 - 49 advantage with 3:16 left. After another Fort missed three, Santiago again got the ball in the lane but his shot was blocked by Evan. Evan then banged in a three pointer from the corner and Fort was back on top, 52 - 51 with 2:27 to go. Elijah scored on a nice pass from Carter Berry with 1:45 to make it 54 - 51. BHS scored again then FDHS turned the ball over with 1:29 to go leading only by a point. Broadway was unable to score then Gio, who had massive trouble finding the basket all night long, finally scored his first field goal in the paint with 1:11 left giving FDHS a 56 - 53 lead.

The last minute was especially hectic. BHS called a timeout with 56.0 left, then missed two free throws and a three pointer. Instead of freezing the ball, Fort launched another errant three pointer. Bradley was fouled but he missed both of his attempts with 10.5 seconds left. BHS earned the ball back after a jump was called but promptly threw the ball away, allowing Fort to hold the ball. Tripp was fouled and made one of two free throws to make the final score 57 - 53.

Jasigh led the Indians with 15, Tripp had 10, and Bradley had 9. Ten players for Fort scored but the free throw shooting was abysmal, 10 - 22. Samuel Post led BHS with 20; Santiago added 16.

Grandfather's note: This is a game Gus will quickly put behind him. By my count, he had six rebounds and he made one of three field goal attempts. He and his teammates should celebrate the fact that they played poorly but still managed to win and are still undefeated.

Fort's next game is on Monday night with a rematch against Turner Ashby.

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	0	1-6	9
Jasigh Ransome	2	3	2-2	15
Gio Armendariz Cruz	1	0	2-2	4
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	2	0-2	6
Carter Berry	0	0	1-2	1
Rhylan Martin	1	1	2-2	7
Elijah Pultz	1	0	1-2	3
Tripp Hanger	0	3	1-2	10
Connor Batten	0	0	0-0	0
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	1	0	0-2	2
TOTAL	10	9	10-22	57

The Harrisonburg Daily News Record had this story about the game:

**BOYS BASKETBALL | FORT DEFIANCE 57, BROADWAY 53
Indians grind out win over Gobblers to remain perfect**

By JOHN BREEDEN
Daily News-Record
Dec 14, 2024

BROADWAY —Gutting through late-game situations continues to be the story of Fort Defiance's season after four games.

The latest was Friday night at Broadway High School when the Indians fell behind the Gobblers midway through the third quarter after holding a steady lead for the bulk of the first half. In the fourth quarter, the Indians pushed past the Gobblers and made some key plays down the stretch to hang on and win 57-53 in non-district action to remain unbeaten on the campaign.

"I think the whole game was just chaotic," Fort head coach Mike Gale said. "We like that to a point. I'm proud of the guys. Things didn't go our way and Broadway played tough. They get after it. That's a credit to [head coach Dwight Walton] and how he has those teams year after year. Proud of the guys — another road game, getting behind there in the fourth quarter, and doing what we needed to do to pull one out."

Junior forward Evan Braun's 3-pointer with just over two minutes remaining in the fourth period put the Indians ahead by one. Junior guard Giovani Armendariz Cruz added to Fort's lead by scoring a basket with just 1:11 remaining on the clock.

Up three with eight seconds left, junior guard Tripp Hanger made one of two shots from the free throw line to put the Indians ahead by four, ultimately sealing the deal on the victory. "It felt really relieving," Hanger said. "Hitting that shot made it feel like we sealed the deal there. Everybody played well tonight. I feel like we just did an all-around good job, offensively and defensively. ... We're a pretty good ball club."

Junior guard Jasigh Ransome led the Indians with 15 points while Hanger added 10 points. For Broadway, senior guard Samuel Post scored a game-high 20 points while senior forward Eric Santiago registered 16 points.

The disappointment reigned through the BHS gymnasium when Hanger nailed the last-second free throw to put the game out of reach for the Gobblers. The rather young Gobblers team was up against the up-tempo, fast-paced Indians, and in the end, fell short in the waning minutes of the fourth quarter.

"They're very good at what they do," Walton said. "They get in passing lanes, they're very active, they have a lot of energy — we're still just trying to find our way into the rights and the wrongs and reading the defense on the back sides and just trying to attack. I think there's still hesitation."

Their record might not reflect it, but Walton has seen immense growth in his team since day one of the season. “We’re making improvements,” Walton said. “We’re getting there. I think their spirit is good. We’ve just got to continue to keep working and this team has got the ability in there — it’s just taking time to do it.”

It was a heartfelt set of pre-game ceremonies as BHS honored the Vietnam veterans and Buddy Walton, Dwight’s late father, who passed away in February. The school revealed a giant United States flag that now hangs in the rafters of the gymnasium just above the sideline desk.

Dwight recalls his father being adamant about having an American flag hanging in the rafters.

When he passed away, Dwight said his mom reminded him how much he wanted it.

Now, whether it’s practice or a game, Walton will always have a reminder of his father when he sees the stars and stripes hanging above his head.

“I’m very thankful she stayed on me,” Walton said. “Between my brother, my mother, and I making this happen, it’s cool. For me, I can walk back in this gym the rest of my life — regardless if I’m coaching or I’m here coming to a game — not that I need something to make me remember my dad or think about him, but I’m certainly going to think about him every time that flag drops.”

The Indians (4-0) face non-district Turner Ashby on the road Monday at 7 p.m., while the Gobblers (1-3) face Valley District rival Rockbridge County on the road Tuesday at 7 p.m.

It’s been the story of grit for the Indians so far as they continue to prevail in tight-score affairs.

They’ve won some games, but Gale said the Indians understand that there’s a long season ahead and they’re going to keep improving. With so many nail-biters to kick off the season, Gale believes his team has been battle-tested early.

“It can’t hurt,” Gale said. “Of course, you want to win as many as you can. We’ve been fortunate enough to pull some out. You’d think this is one of those where you’re not out of it and able to do enough to pull things out. We’re going to continue playing tough teams and continue to get better and hopefully improve.”

Hanger believes Fort’s ability to gut out victories in late-game scenarios is not only a testament to their talent, but their dedication to the sport of basketball. “It shows we’ve got a lot of heart,” Hanger said. “We’ve got a lot of good talent and we’re working pretty hard as a squad.”

Fort Defiance 9 15 13 20 — 57

Broadway 5 15 21 12 — 53

FORT DEFIANCE (4-0): Whetzel 0 0-0 0, Hebb 4 1-4 9, Ransome 5 2-2 15, Armendariz Cruz 1 2-2 4, Uribe 00-0 0, Braun 2 0-4 6, Berry 0 1-2 1, Martin 2 1-1 7, Pultz 1 1-2 3, Hanger 3 1-2 10, Batten 0 0-0 0, Thornton 00-0 0, Gutshall 1 0-2 2. Totals 19 10-22 57.

BROADWAY (1-3): Rhodes 0 0-2 0, Glovier 2 0-2 4, Dagnoli 0 0-0 0, Ritchie 0 0-0 0, Post 7 0-0 20, Griffin 0 0-0 0, Garber 0 0-0 0, Santiago 7 2-2 16, Burkhalter 5 2-4 13, Trout 0 0-0 0. Totals 21 4-10 53.

3-Point Goals — Fort Defiance 9 (Ransome 3, Braun 2, Martin, Hanger 3), Broadway 4 (Post, Burkhalter).

Game 5: Fort Defiance 64, Turner Ashby 63

Another Comeback: Fort Defiance nips Turner Ashby 64 - 63

by Joe Hill

They did it again! For the fourth time in five games, the Fort Defiance Indians managed to stage a late fourth quarter comeback to squeeze out a 64 – 63 win over the Turner Ashby Knights on the TAHS home floor on December 16. Fort found itself down 63 – 58 with 1:41 to go in the game but outscored the Knights 6 – 0 over the remaining time, overcoming a last second shot by TA's Henry Riner that missed. The shot was actually tipped in by a teammate but just after the buzzer had sounded. The Indians made only 2 of 15 three point attempts in the second half but one of those was a banked trey from the top of the key by Evan Braun with 40 seconds left which erased a 63 – 61 lead by the home team. The win extends Fort's record in the young season to 5 – 0; TAHS fell to 2 – 4.

The game was nip and tuck the entire time. TA opened the game with a three pointer before Carter Berry got Fort started with a deuce on an out-of-bounds play. Gio Armandariz Cruz scored on a drive but Turner Ashby responded to take a 5 – 4 lead with 5:42 to go in the first quarter. Gio again got two points on a drive to return the lead to Fort but TAHS got another trey to give the Knights an 8 – 6 lead. Fort went nearly six minutes without scoring while Turner Ashby scored again to take a 10 – 6 lead. Finally, Jasigh Ransome got two with 48.2 seconds left and that's how the quarter ended, 10 – 8 in favor of TA.

The home team extended their lead to 14 – 8 to open the second quarter. Tripp Hanger then fired in a three pointer from the corner, making it 14 – 8. Then, Gus Gutshall muscled his way to an offensive rebound, scored, and was fouled. He made his free throw which tied the score at 14's with 7:13 to go in the quarter. Gio's drive returned the lead to FDHS, 16 – 14, then he got two more on a drive to make it 18 – 14 before TAHS closed to 18 – 16. Jasigh then pumped in a three pointer to give FD a five point lead, 21 – 16. TAHS scored then Tripp got a rare goal for this Fort team—a pull up 10 foot jump shot, making the score 23 – 18. Fort's biggest lead of the night came next as Evan hit a three pointer and Fort's lead improved to 26 – 18. Turner Ashby then made successive three point shots to get back within two, 36 – 24, before Gus again scored in close. TA would get the last points of the quarter which ended in Fort's favor, 28 – 26.

In the first half, Fort Defiance had 11 turnovers and made only 2 of 9 attempts from beyond the three point arc yet managed to hold on to a lead.

The third quarter was tight from beginning to end. TAHS quickly tied the score before Tripp hit another three pointer to give Fort a 31 – 28 lead. TA responded with a triple of their own and followed that up with two field goals in the paint to take a 35 – 31 lead. Gus then was fouled after he snared an offensive rebound. He made both free throws and with 5:46 to go Fort was down only two points. TA scored again then Tripp answered with two on a drive. Another triple from the Knights extended their lead to 40 – 35. At that point, a technical foul was called on TA. Gio made one of two free throws but he was fouled on the ensuing in-bounds play and this time he made both foul shots to get Fort back within two at 40 – 38. Ayden Thornton was fouled in the lane and he converted both of his free throws to tie the score at 40's. At this point, Fort had

made 8 – 9 free throws for the night, a marked improvement over previous games. The good free throw shooting didn't last, though.

After TAHS made a basket to give them a 42 – 40 lead, Evan was fouled attempting a three point shot. He made only one of his three free throws then TA converted to take a 44 – 41 lead with 2:58 to go. Evan then scored on a drive, was fouled, and this time hit his foul shot to tie the score at 44's. TAHS went up 46 – 44 with 2:16 to go and made two foul shots to extend their lead to 48 – 44. Gio got two and Elijah Pultz scored inside to tie the score. Gio's two pointer with 28 seconds to go gave Fort a 50 – 48 lead but TAHS scored in the waning seconds to tie it at the end of the third period. After shooting free throws so well earlier in the game, Fort made only two of its last eight in that quarter.

The Knights opened the final period with a three pointer then Elijah took a nice pass from Tripp and scored with 6:57 to go. Rhylan, who had missed numerous three point attempts throughout the game, finally got the ball to fall in from inside the arc which pulled the Indians ahead by one, 54 – 53. Gus then got a good pass from Jasigh and scored to push the lead to 56 – 53. TAHS again came back with a three point shot and followed it with a deuce to take a 58 – 56 lead. Rhylan tied it with two on a drive with 3:14 to go. Another triple by the home team's Jayden Lacey, the team's ninth of the evening, gave TA a 61 – 58 lead. Two free throws by Riner made the score 63 – 58 with 1:41 and set the stage for Fort's dramatic comeback.

It started with Gio making one of two free throws. After a nice steal, Bradley got his only bucket of the night in the lane, making the score 63 – 61. On Fort's next possession, with 40 seconds to go, Evan rose from the top of the key and banked home his go-ahead three pointer. Fort then managed to get a steal but turned the ball back over with 24.7 seconds left. TAHS held the ball until 9.2 seconds remained and called time out. The ball ended up in Riner's hands but his three pointer was off the mark and the tip-in came just a fraction of a second after the buzzer had sounded as Fort escaped with another nail-biting win, 64 - 63.

For the game, Fort made only 5 of 25 three point attempts. From the free throw line, they ended up 11 – 19. They committed 17 turnovers, 11 of which were in the first half. Their defense was again very good, causing many Turner Ashby turnovers. All in all, it was a good win, Fort's fourth against Division 3 teams, as they improved their record to 5 – 0.

Gio led Fort's scoring with 16. Evan and Tripp each had 10 and Gus scored nine. Sophomore Lacey scorched the nets for 29 for TAHS including seven three pointers. Interestingly, Turner Ashby had only nine players dressed for the game and had five coaches on the bench.

Grandfather's notes: Gus played sparingly tonight and still ended up scoring nine points on 3 – 6 shooting from the field and 3 – 3 from the free throw line. By my records, he got six offensive rebounds. In a tight game like this one, every point is important and Gus did his job. So far this season, Gus is the second leading scorer on the team with an 8.2 ppg average.

Fort returns to action with a trip to Strasburg on Saturday to face Sherando in the Ram Hardwood Classic.

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	1	0	0-2	2
Jasigh Ransome	1	1	0-2	5
Gio Armendariz Cruz	6	0	4-6	16
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	1	2	2-4	10
Carter Berry	1	0	0-0	2
Rhylan Martin	2	0	0-0	4
Elijah Pultz	2	0	0-0	4
Tripp Hanger	2	2	0-0	10
Connor Batten	0	0	0-0	0
Ayden Thornton	0	0	2-2	2
Gus Gutshall	3	0	3-3	9
TOTAL	19	5	11-19	64

The Staunton News Leader had a nice article about the game complete with several pictures:

[Late 3 sparks Fort win](#)

BRIDGEWATER — Evan Braun hit one fourth-quarter basketball Monday, maybe Fort Defiance's biggest one of the night in a 64-63 win over Turner Ashby in boys basketball.

With 1:11 left, Bradley Hebb's bucket cut the Turner Ashby lead to two. Then, as Turner Ashby brought the ball up the court, Fort's pressure forced a turnover. Gio Armendariz Cruz got the ball and drove the lane, giving the Fort junior a good look at a shot to tie the game, but the ball bounced off the front of the rim.

In the battle for the rebound, Hebb came away with the ball and threw it back out to Braun standing at the top of the key. Braun calmly banked in a 3-pointer to give Fort a lead with 45 seconds remaining.

"It felt like slow motion," Braun said. "Bradley got the board and kicked it out. I had the open look and I knew it was coming off the bank as soon as I shot it, but whatever works."

Turner Ashby turned the ball over on its next possession, but Fort gave it right back and, with 25 seconds left, Turner Ashby had the ball with a chance to win. They held the ball for the final shot, never really getting a good look against the Fort defense, until the final seconds when the Knights got off a 3-point attempt that hit the back of the rim and bounced off, giving Fort Defiance the win.

Braun finished with 10 points Monday, one of three Fort players in double figures. It was Fort Defiance's fifth win in five games, but four of those have been by five points or less. Fort beat Turner Ashby 10 days earlier by three points.



Fort Defiance's Gus Gutshall battles two Turner Ashby players for the ball Monday night in boys basketball.
Patrick Hite/The New Leader

"I think our chemistry together is pretty good to start the season," Braun said of the ability to win the close games. "We just go out there and play our hardest. "

Fort Defiance trailed by five with 1:54 left after TA's Henry Riner knocked down two free throws. Fort then scored the game's final six points to rally for the win.

"You could see that they still believed, there was no panic," Fort Defiance coach Mike Gale said. "You like to see that as a coach, late game, no quit. You can see it in their eyes, 'We've still got a shot.' There's been times in the past teams that I've coached, you could see we were probably done for the night, even that small deficit."

Gale credits a lot of the late-game ability to veteran players. There are only juniors and seniors on the roster this year, all players with experience. Gale has never had a team without at least one sophomore or freshman on the team. Eight of the players are returners to the varsity this season.

That pays off late in games. Gale said he can only coach so much. Eventually, the players have to execute.

"You can't be out there with them," he said. "They've just got to make plays and they did enough of that tonight."

Armendariz Cruz led Fort with 16 points. Tripp Hanger added 10 points and Gus Gutshall finished with nine.

Fort Defiance is off until Saturday when it plays Sherando at Strasburg High School in the Ram Hardwood Classic. Fort tips at 3 p.m.

The Harrisonburg Daily News Record had this article about the game:

**BOYS BASKETBALL | FORT DEFIANCE 64, TURNER ASHBY 63
Braun lifts Indians to thrilling win**

By JOHN BREEDEN Daily News-Record
Dec 17, 2024

Squeaking out a win in the final minutes of the game continues to be a theme for Fort Defiance this season.

The latest example was Monday night in Bridgewater as the Indians faced Turner Ashby in non-district action, a rematch from Dec. 6 when the Indians defeated the Knights 59-56 after trailing for the bulk of the contest.

Monday's night contest saw a similar scenario as Fort found itself trailing by five with under two minutes to go after a 3-point basket from TA sophomore guard Jayden Lacey and a pair of free throws from Knights senior guard Henry Riner.

The Indians cut the gap to two with 1:11 remaining in regulation. Then, junior forward Evan Braun sealed the deal. With 50 seconds left on the clock, Braun found a wide-open 3-pointer that he knocked down to put the Indians ahead by one. From there, the Indians hung on to defeat the Knights 64-63 inside Larry S. Pence Gymnasium and complete the regular-season sweep. "We definitely have experience in the close games," Braun said. "We know what we need to do — play hard. The other teams get tired by the time it gets to the fourth quarter and we just do what we need to do."

Second-year Fort Defiance head coach Mike Gale, also the former head coach of Fort's girls team, noted they've been in a handful of late-game situations this season, and the experience can only help them.

Whether it's hitting a 3-pointer or grabbing a steal, Gale said they have different players stepping up night in and night out, which helps the Indians close the show.

"I'm just proud of them," Gale said. "A lot of things went against us there — battling injuries throughout the night and whatever. Playing as many guys as we do, different guys are going to step up on different nights. Just fortunate enough to get another road win."

On this occasion, it was Braun who stepped up and sunk a clutch 3-point shot to secure the victory.

“He does a lot for us,” Gale said. “He plays three different positions. The whole team, we’re still learning and trying to figure out what we’re doing. We’re kinda learning on the fly and trying to get better.”

Junior Giovanni Armendariz Cruz led the Indians with 16 points while Braun and junior guard Tripp Hanger each pitched in 10 points.

Having a veteran squad is why Gale believes the Indians thrive under the pressure of a close-score affair, noting that he doesn’t have a single freshman or sophomore on the roster.

“It’s only got to help you,” Gale said. “When you have, I believe, eight returners that played last year, there’s nothing better than having experienced guys that have been through different things and are able to pull things out that you can’t coach. You can’t be out there with them, they’ve just got to make plays and they did enough of that tonight.”

On the other end, the Knights had a shot to pull off the dagger as Riner launched a 3-pointer at the buzzer, but the shot fell short. TA head coach Clay Harris immediately went up to console Riner, who was visibly frustrated following the shot.

“I thought it was a great look,” Harris said. “We had a great look at it and he’s one of the shooters we want to get the shot up. I just told him to keep his head up, I thought it was a great look. He shot it with confidence, we had a great look at it, and it just didn’t fall.”

Despite the loss, it was a monster game for Lacey who tallied a game-high 29 points, a 6-foot-4 youngster who continues to shine for the Knights as a sophomore.

“He’s a great player,” Harris said. “He’s a very skilled player and when he plays with confidence, he’s a really great player. What I really liked about him today was he was a little bit more aggressive, especially on the defensive end, going and grabbing some boards. ... I thought [Lacey] was very assertive on offense, looked for his shot, and shot it with confidence. When he shoots it with confidence, we like that.”

Sophomore guard Anthony Perez contributed 11 points for the Knights while junior forward Jackson Good notched 10 points.

The Knights fell short to the Indians again, but Harris couldn’t be disappointed with his team’s heart as they fought until the very end.

“I’m just proud of our team,” Harris said. “I thought we stuck together. We had some adversity, especially in that third quarter. There were a lot of fouls and it could’ve gone one way, but I thought we stuck together and gave ourselves a chance at the end. We have a lot of season left to play. We’ve got to learn from our early mistakes and keep growing.”

The Indians (5-0) face non-district Sherando at home Saturday at 3 p.m., while the Knights (2-4) face Valley District opponent Rocktown at home Tuesday at 7 p.m.

While he hopes the Indians can start to stretch out the lead in future games, Gale can't bat an eye at his team's grit as they rolled to another road victory. "Hopefully, we can keep on winning," Gale said. "We'd like to get a wider margin, but in a perfect world, to come out on top in these close games on the road, there's probably not a better practice or situation for us in the future."

As the Indians remain unbeaten, Braun believes not only does their experience level on the court itself benefit them, but another year of knowledge under Gale's "system" of play has gone a long way in remaining perfect through five games.

"It's a little different than it was last year, but it's similar, so we know what we're doing now," Braun said. "We have quite a bit of older guys on the team that know what they're doing."

Fort Defiance 8 20 22 14 — 64

Turner Ashby 10 16 24 13 — 63

FORT DEFIANCE (5-0) — Whetzel 0 0-0 0, Hebb 1 0-2 2, Ransome 2 0-2 5, Armendariz Cruz 6 4-6 16, Uribe 0 0-0 0, Braun 3 2-4 10, Berry 1 0-0 2, Martin 2 0-0 4, Pultz 2 0-0 4, Hanger 4 0-0 10, Batten 0 0-0 0, Thornton 0 2-2 2, Gutshall 3 3-3 9. Totals 24 11-19 64.

TURNER ASHBY (2-4) — Shifflett 3 0-0 7, Moyers 0 0-0 0, Alley 0 0-0 0, Lacey 10 2-2 29, Riner 0 2-2 2, Perez 5 0-0 11, Kyomuhendo 2 0-1 4, Judd 0 0-0 0, Good 5 0-0 10. Totals 25 4-5 63.

3-Point Goals — Fort Defiance 5 (Braun 2, Hanger 2, Ransome), Turner Ashby 9 (Lacey 7, Shifflett, Perez).



Gus scores in the paint against the Knights

Game 6: Sherando 63, Fort Defiance 45

Sherando Warriors hand Fort Defiance Indians their 1st loss

by Joe Hill

The Fort Defiance Indians lost their undefeated status on December 21 as they dropped a 63 – 45 decision to the Sherando Warriors in the Ram Hardwood Classic held at Strasburg High School. It was, by far, the worst game of the season for FDHS and featured horrific shooting, equally bad shot decisions, many turnovers, and a porous defense. Yes, FDHS was playing a much larger school; in 2022-23, Fort Defiance had 737 students while Sherando has 1,666. But it wasn't the size of the schools which doomed the Indians.

For the night, FD was 4 – 23 from beyond the three point arc. They had fourteen turnovers. Not a single player could say he had a good night. Fort missed Bradley Hebb who was attending an all-star football game.

FDHS quickly fell behind 5 – 0 as the Warriors canned two jumpers and a free throw. Gio Armendariz Cruz finally got two for Fort with 5:35 to go but Sherando followed that up with a three pointer. Evan Braun hit a three for FD to make it 8 – 5 in favor of the Warriors. They pushed the lead to 12 – 5 with 3:10 to go before Jasigh Ransome found the range off a drive. Sherando closed the quarter's scoring with a jumper to make it 14 – 7 at the end of the first quarter.

Sherando hit two foul shots to open the second quarter before Elijah Pultz scored in close after a pass from Gio. But two more foul shots pushed Sherando's lead to 18 – 9 with 6:55 to go in the quarter. Gio scored two on a putback to make it 18 – 11 but Sherando made a bucket and foul shot to go up 21 – 11 with 6:27 to go. Gio then made two free throws and Connor Batten scored off a driver to get Fort back within four, 21 – 17, with 5:00 to go. After a Sherando goal, Jasigh made another jump shot. Two more foul shots for Sherando, who shot well from the free throw line, upped their lead to 25 – 19. Elijah got two on an in-bounds play and was fouled on the play. His free throw got FD within two, 25 – 23 with 3:03 to go. Another Warrior basket and free throw made it 28 – 23 before Rhylan made one of two free throws. Sherando then fired in another trey to go up 31 – 24 before Elijah made two of four free throws to leave the score 31 – 26 in favor of Sherando at the half.

At this point, Fort had made only one of ten from beyond the three point arc. They had committed eight turnovers and had many empty drives where bad shot selection gave Sherando the opportunity to extend their lead.

The second half opened in a promising way. Gio had a three pointer and soon Fort was within two, 31 – 29. But the Indians went stone cold for the next five minutes. Sherando extended their lead to 44 – 29, scoring 13 consecutive points. After a Fort timeout, Gio finally got Fort back on the board by making two free throws. But all Fort could imagine beyond that was a three by Connor and a putback by Elijah. Meanwhile, Sherando opened up a 48 – 36 lead at the end of the third period.

This game would feature no comeback from the Indians like they had in previous games this year. Sherando wisely pulled the ball out, slowed the tempo down, and held Fort to only nine

points in the quarter while scoring 15 themselves. Carter Berry had one of two foul shots and Gio scored 2 on a drive with 6:52 to go. Meanwhile, Sherando improved their lead to 59 – 39. Tripp Hanger, who had shot miserably all night, finally got a three pointer to drop in and Jasigh got a deuce on a drive with 3:14 to go. Fort's only other point was a free throw by Gio.

Gio led Fort's scoring with 16 despite having numerous turnovers and taking shots in the lane that should not have been launched. Elijah was the only other Fort player in double figures with 10.

Grandfather's notes: This was clearly Gus' worst game of the season. He was 0 – 7 from the field and had only two offensive rebounds. Hopefully, he'll put this game behind him and get back on the track he had in previous games.

With the loss, FDHS fell to 5 – 1 on the season. Sherando improved to 2 – 2. Fort's next game is Friday, December 27 against Strasbug in the Ram Hardwood Classic.

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	0	0	0-0	0
Jasigh Ransome	3	0	0-0	6
Gio Armendariz Cruz	4	1	5-6	16
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	1	0-0	3
Carter Berry	0	0	1-2	1
Rhylan Martin	0	0	1-2	1
Elijah Pultz	3	0	4-9	10
Tripp Hanger	0	1	0-0	3
Connor Batten	1	1	0-0	5
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	0	0	0-0	0
TOTAL	11	4	11-19	45



Game 7: Strasburg 58, Fort Defiance 52

Strasburg Rams hand Fort Defiance Indians second straight loss, 58 - 52

by Joe Hill

The Strasburg Rams, playing in only their second game of the season after earlier games were postponed due to their football team advancing to the state finals, defeated the Fort Defiance Indians 58 – 52 in the Ram Hardwood Classic held at Strasburg High School. It was the second bad game in the row for FDHS. After coming back from a slow first half to take the lead early in the second half, 34 – 28, Fort's poor shooting again doomed them. In the second half alone, FD made only two of twenty three point shots attempted and only five of eighteen foul shots.

Strasburg's Gavin Dellinger scorched the Indians' zone, hitting five of his seven three pointers in the second half, enabling the Rams to pull away in the fourth quarter.

Fort made only 8 of its 42 three point attempts for the game and 8 of 22 from the charity stripe. Furthermore, they had sixteen turnovers in a game they could have won. Strasburg did a good job of clogging the lane so the Fort guards found nothing but congestion whenever they tried to drive into the lane. Fort didn't get a single two point field goal in the game until there was 1:37 to go in the second quarter. Jasigh Ransome had a good game, making five three pointers for 15 points, the only Indian scoring in double figures.

Strasburg opened the game with a trey but Rhylan Martin answered with the same for Fort. Fort briefly took a lead when Evan Braun made one of two free throws. After a Strasburg two pointer, Rhylan again connected from beyond the arc which tied the score at 7's. Fort then fell asleep on offense as Strasburg scored the next eight points to go up 15 – 7 before Bradley made one of two free throws to close out the scoring in the quarter. As many as six times in the quarter, Strasburg beat the Fort press and got easy layups.

Evan made a three pointer to start the second quarter but again Strasburg beat the press and went up 17 – 11. A Dellinger three pointer gave them a 20 – 11 before Jasigh hit the first of his three successive three pointers which tied the game at 20's. Dellinger again hit for the Rams before Bradley Hebb scored in close to bring the Indians within one at 23 – 22. But, another Ram three pointer gave the home team a 26 – 22 lead with 44.2 seconds to go in the quarter. Carter Berry then took a nice pass from Tripp Hanger and scored near the end of the quarter leaving the score Strasburg 26, Fort Defiance 24 at the break.

Gio Armendariz Cruz finally got one of his shots to fall to open the second half. His two free throws gave Fort the lead with 7:05 to go. Bradley then scored on a drive, was fouled, and converted his free throw to put the Indians up 31 – 26. After a Strasburg basket, Jasigh banged home another trey and Fort had its biggest lead at 34 – 28. It took only two possessions and two shots for Strasburg to tie the score, though at 34's with 5:32 to go. Elijah Pultz snared an offensive rebound and was fouled with the putback, but he couldn't convert on either of his foul shots. Bradley likewise missed a pair after Strasburg had scored to take the lead but Connor Batten tipped in the miss to knot the score at 36 – 36. After a Strasburg deuce, Evan Braun scored in the paint to tie it again at 38 – 38. Dellinger then broke Fort's back with three straight

three pointers while all Fort could muster was a single foul shot by Gio, leaving the score 47 – 39 in favor of the Rams at the end of the third quarter.

Fort tried to get back in the game at the start of the fourth quarter. Elijah got two on a putback and Gio likewise scored after an offensive rebound. Rhylan was fouled attempting a three pointer but was able to convert only one of his three free throws. Elijah again turned an offensive rebound into two points and Fort was down only 48 – 46 midway in the quarter. After two Strasburg foul shots, Bradley's drive made the score 50 – 48 with 3:17 to go. Another Dellinger three pointer put Strasburg up by five, 53 – 48 before Jasigh answered with his fifth three pointer of the game with 2:30 to go. Down the stretch, though, the only scoring Fort was able to come up with was a single foul shot by Gio as Strasburg held on for a 58 – 52 win.



Jasigh's 15 points led the Indians while Dellinger had 27 for the Rams.

Grandfather's notes: Gus didn't score though I believe he snared four rebounds. He hustled and had zero turnovers. It is increasingly hard to watch him work to get open only to have his teammates not see him then launch poor shots, especially from beyond the three point arc. His best chance at touching the ball continues to be on offensive rebounds.

Fort's record fell to 5 - 2 on the season. The next game in the Ram Hardwood Classic is tomorrow, Saturday, December 28, against Page County.

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	0	2-5	8
Jasigh Ransome	0	5	0-0	15
Gio Armendariz Cruz	2	0	4-6	8
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	1	1	1-2	6
Carter Berry	1	0	0-0	2
Rhylan Martin	0	2	1-3	7
Elijah Pultz	2	0	0-4	4
Tripp Hanger	0	0	0-0	0
Connor Batten	1	0	0-0	2
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	0	0	0-2	0
TOTAL	10	8	8-22	52

Game 8: Fort Defiance 63, Page County 60

Fort struggles past Page County 63 - 60

by Joe Hill

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 Rhyla 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

Game 9: Central 78, Fort Defiance 53

Central outplays Fort Defiance 78 - 53

by Joe Hill

Central of Woodstock, the best team in the Bull Run District, outclassed Fort Defiance 78 – 53 on December 30 in the final game of the Ram Hardwood Classic held at Strasburg High School. The Falcons shot, passed, rebounded, and controlled the ball better than Fort Defiance as they improved their record to 8 – 1 on the year. Fort fell to 6 – 3.

Few teams are going to win when they commit 25 turnovers, 11 in the first five minutes of the game, as Central raced to a 8 – 0 lead and never looked back. Fort's shooting was the same as it has been all year—terrible—including only 4 – 31 from beyond the three-point line. The Indians made only one of their first fifteen three-point shots which enabled Central to take a commanding twenty-point lead at the half, 39 – 19. Central was a well-coached team which worked the ball for a good shot and didn't allow Fort to get many offensive rebounds. And despite Fort's offense depending so heavily on the three-point shot, Central made three more treys than the Indians in the game.

In this game, Coach Mike Gale returned to the Grinnell system where he made wholesale substitutions throughout the game. The final score shows how well that worked.

The Falcons got the opening bucket in the game, then made two free throws to go up 4 – 0. Two more baskets put them up 8 – 0 before Gio Armendariz Cruz finally got Fort on the scoreboard with a basket off a drive. Central then took command, feeding off Fort turnovers, to score the next nine points and go up 17 – 2. Ayden Thornton got a put-back then Jasigh Ransome hit two free throws but the damage was done. Gio scored again in close before Central got the last two of the quarter to go up 21 – 8.

Fort didn't get a field goal in the second quarter until they had fallen behind 37 – 12 with 2:34 to go in the quarter. Their only points were three foul shots by Gio and one by Tripp Hanger. Finally, Jasigh Ransome hit a three pointer then Bradley Hebb and Jasigh each got two, the latter off a steal, to close the gap to 37 – 19 but Central got the final word in the quarter with a deuce to take a twenty-point lead, 39 – 19, into the locker room at the half.

Fort committed fifteen turnovers in the first half and couldn't buy but one three pointer the entire half despite fifteen attempts. It was perhaps the worst half of the season for the Indians.

Tripp was fouled while trying a three pointer to open the second half. He made two of his free throws then Gio got a jumper to pull the Indians to 39 – 23 but consecutive three pointers by the Falcons bumped their lead to 45 – 23. Bradley scored on a drive but Central scored the next six points, making the score 51 – 25. Elijah Pultz scored in the paint to aid the FD cause and Jasigh made one of two free throws. Meanwhile, Central hit two free throws and a jumper to go up 55 – 28. Ayden then surprised himself by banking in a three pointer. Gio scored on a drive and Bradley scored again in the paint making the score 56 – 35. Then, with 2.4 seconds on the clock, Gus Gutshall snared an offensive rebound, turned and fired it in. He was fouled on the shot and completed the three-point play with his free throw, making the score Central 56, Fort Defiance 38 at the end of the third quarter.

After a Central two pointer, Tripp opened the scoring in the fourth quarter for the Indians with a three pointer. Gio scored on a put-back and it looked like Fort might start a comeback with the score 58 – 43, but it was not in the cards. Central scored the next seven points to go up 65 – 43 until Evan Braun hit a three pointer after getting a nice feed from Gus. Central extended its lead to 76 – 46 before Gio scored on a drive. Bradley scored twice in the paint but Fort couldn't cut into the Falcon lead. Gio's foul shot ended the scoring for Fort and made the final Central 78, Fort Defiance 53.

Gio led the Indians with 16 points. Bradley had 10 and Jasigh eight. Central, featuring four players 6' 4" or taller, kept the FDHS front court lineup at bay. Five Central players scored in double figures: Maddox Davis and Donovan Patton each had 14 for the Falcons, Luke Williams and Derek Batiz Lugo scored 12, and Joefred Menendez had 10.

Grandfather's notes: Thankfully, Gus played more in this game than in the previous one. He even started though all five starters were replaced after only 1:15 of action. His three-point play was the offensive highlight for Fort. He had zero turnovers, unlike his teammates who had 25. He got at least three rebounds and blocked a shot that resulted in a jump ball. He shot 50% from the field while his teammates made 13% of their three point shots.

Rewatching the game's video on NFHS, I could easily see how much better Central played as a team than Fort. They passed the ball effectively and none of their shots were forced, unlike Fort's whose guards frequently drove into the lane and force up a contested shot over much taller players. Not surprisingly, even in their warmup for the game the Falcons had a drill where they passed the ball six times before a player shot. Meanwhile, Fort's players in the warmup took one pass from a teammate and fired up three pointers.

You would think that a team that shot 1 for 18 from the free throw line in its previous game would practice its foul shots in the warmup. Nope. A total of one foul shot was attempted in Fort's fifteen-minute warmup. Over 100 three pointers were attempted. At least their free throw percentage in this game was better, 11 – 17, but 65% is not stellar free throw shooting though it beats the 5.6% they shot against Strasburg. For the season, Fort is only shooting 46% from the foul line.

I will never understand the Fort coaches' system whereby a player's performance on the court seems to have no bearing on whether he plays or not. Some mysterious lineup on a clipboard determines who substitutes and when. There is no incentive for a player to try harder, to play smarter, or hustle more since his playing time, or lack thereof, seems to be pre-determined. Players are not pulled out of the game when they make egregious errors nor kept in when they make great plays. Turnovers bring no chastisement. Taking a forced shot against multiple defenders when teammates are standing wide open results in no punishment. In today's game, Fort had two players on the court in the third quarter each with four fouls. Apparently the foul count doesn't figure in playing time, either. Season statistics do not seem to affect whether a player is a starter or benchwarmer. What does?

My complaints above are no reflection on grandson Gus. He tries hard on the court. He doesn't attempt three point shots and will pass to others who are open. He has very few turnovers this season. He works to get into position to rebound. He seems to have accepted that his teammates

selfishly only look for forcing up shots and his greatest chance of touching the ball is to get an offensive rebound. He does what he is expected to do. I am exceedingly proud of him though I confess it is hard to watch this team in action.

Fort's next game is its Shenandoah District opener at Riverheads on Friday, January 3.

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	5	0	0-1	10
Jasigh Ransome	1	1	3-4	8
Gio Armendariz Cruz	6	0	4-6	16
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	1	0-0	3
Carter Berry	0	0	0-0	0
Rhylan Martin	0	0	0-0	0
Elijah Pultz	1	0	0-0	2
Tripp Hanger	0	1	3-5	6
Connor Batten	0	0	0-0	0
Ayden Thornton	1	1	0-0	5
Gus Gutshall	1	0	1-1	3
TOTAL	15	4	11-17	53

The Staunton News Leader had this short article about the game:

Fort boys fall

STRASBURG — Fort Defiance dropped its third game in four outings Monday, falling to Central Woodstock 78-53 in boys basketball. The game was part of the Ram Hardwood Classic at Strasburg.

Gio Armendariz Cruz led Fort with 16 points. Bradley Hebb added 10 points in the loss.

After starting the season 5-0, Fort Defiance is now 6-3 with a couple of days off before starting Shenandoah District play Friday at Riverheads.

Game 10: Fort Defiance 88, Riverheads 62

Fort Defiance overwhelms Riverheads 88 - 62

by Joe Hill

The Fort Defiance Indians finally had a decent shooting game, led by Tripp Hanger's six three pointers, to blow away Riverheads 88 – 62 on January 3 in the Riverheads gym. It was the first Shenandoah District game for both teams. The win boosted Fort's record to 7 – 3 (1 – 0) while the Gladiators fell to 6 – 5 (0 – 1).

The first quarter was tight. Bradley Hebb started things off for the visitors with a quick bucket off the opening tip. Riverheads tied then went up 4 – 2. Evan Braun was fouled attempting a three point shot and made two of his three free throws to even up the score with 6:04 to go in the quarter. Gus Gutshall then came into the game for the Indians and quickly scored after taking a pass from Jasigh Ransome to give FDHS a 6 – 4 lead but Riverheads answered with a three pointer to go up 7 – 6. Gio Armandariz Cruz scored on a drive then Connor Batten banged in a three to give the Indians an 11 – 7 lead with four minutes to go. Riverheads got a basket to close to 11 – 9 then scored their next five points from the free throw line as Fort only managed a putback by Ayden Thornton. After a Gladiator bucket, Fort found themselves down 16 – 13 but Tripp hit the first two of his three pointers from the corner sandwiched around a Riverheads basket to make it 19 – 18 at the end of the quarter in favor of the Indians.

Fort would not trail the rest of the game. Jasigh hit a three from the corner to open the second quarter then Gio made a trey to push the visitors lead to 25 – 18 with 6:38 to go in the quarter. After a Riverheads timeout, the Gladiators made a three pointer but Gio answered with two free throws then Elijah Pultz turned another offensive rebound into two points to give Fort a 29 – 21 advantage with 4:55 to go in the quarter. Riverheads made two free throws then Tripp hit a three pointer from the corner for the third time to give Fort a 32 – 23 lead. Riverheads closed to 32 – 27 until Bradley scored on a drive with 3:49 to go making it 34 – 27. Riverheads then went on a hot streak, scoring in the paint then making five consecutive free throws to knot the score at 34's. Elijah again came through with a putback and Carter Berry made one of two free throws then snagged an offensive rebound and scored to make the score 39 – 34. Tripp then made one of two free throws and closed the half with his fourth three pointer to give the Indians a comfortable 43 – 34 lead at the break.

The first half saw Fort shoot better than it has in previous games. Fort made seven three pointers out of 12 attempts. They still committed too many turnovers, nine, but improved their ball handling in the second half.

Riverheads scored to start the second half. After Jasigh made one of two foul shots, the Gladiators made a three pointer to make the score 44 – 39. Gio then scored on a drive, Jasigh followed up with a three pointer to give Fort its first double digit lead, 49 – 39, with 5:42 to go in the quarter. A putback by Ayden and a bucket off a steal by Bradley gave the Indians a 53 – 39 lead with 3:48 to go. After a Riverheads basket, Jasigh turned a steal into two points then Tripp hammered home his fifth three pointer to give Fort a 58 – 41 advantage. The Gladiators got a trey before Bradley scored again on a drive to make it 60 – 44. Three foul shots by the home team left the score at 60 – 47. Gus then grabbed an offensive rebound, turned, and lofted a nice

soft hook that found the bottom of the net. Riverheads scored again but Gio hit his second three of the game to make it 65 – 49 at the end of the quarter.

Gio's two free throws gave Fort a 67 – 49 lead to start the final period. After a Gladiators two pointer, Bradley scored in the paint. Riverheads got a three pointer to close to 69 – 55 before Gio made one of two foul shots. The Gladiators got another deuce to make the score 70 – 57 with 5:04 to go. Gus snared an offensive rebound and was fouled on his attempted putback. He made one of two free throws. Riverheads then made two foul shots to get within 12 with 4:56 to go, 71 – 59. From there, Fort went on a 17 – 3 tear to end the game. Riverheads could only manage three free throws in the final five minutes. Meanwhile, Fort got another triple from Tripp, another two on a drive by Bradley, a bucket in the paint by Evan, two on a drive by Gio, and a two pointer by Connor, and a layup by Jasigh after a steal to give the Indians a 84 – 60 lead. Miguel Uribe then became the 11th Fort player to score. Gus closed the night's scoring with another offensive rebound putback to give the Indians a fine 88 – 62 win.

Tripp led the Indians in scoring with 19. Gio tossed in 17 and Bradley 14. Jasigh had nine and Gus seven. For Riverheads, William Gardner had 14, 11 in the first quarter, Henley Dunlap had 16, and J.P. Crawford scored 13.

Grandfather's notes: Gus had a good game, scoring seven points on 3 – 4 shooting from the field. He gathered eight rebounds including five offensive ones. He played some in each quarter.

Fort's next game is a home matchup against the Staunton Storm on Tuesday, January 7.

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	7	0	0-4	14
Jasigh Ransome	1	2	1-2	9
Gio Armendariz Cruz	3	2	5-6	17
Miguel Uribe	1	0	0-0	2
Evan Braun	1	0	2-3	4
Carter Berry	1	0	1-2	3
Rhylan Martin	0	0	0-0	0
Elijah Pultz	2	0	0-0	4
Tripp Hanger	0	6	1-2	19
Connor Batten	1	1	0-1	5
Ayden Thornton	2	0	0-0	4
Gus Gutshall	3	0	1-2	7
TOTAL	22	11	11-22	88

The Staunton News Leader had this short article about the game:

Fort boys top Riverheads

GREENVILLE — Tripp Hanger had 19 points to lead three players in double figures as Fort Defiance beat Riverheads 88-62 Friday in boys basketball.

Hanger had six 3-pointers in the win, four coming in the first half as Fort built a nine-point lead.

Gio Armendariz Cruz added 17 points for Fort and Bradley Hebb had 14 in the win. Fort improved to 7-3 overall and 1-0 in the Shenandoah District. Fort hosts Staunton Tuesday.

Henley Dunlap had 16 for Riverheads in the loss. Will Gardner added 14 and JP Crawford had 12 for the Gladiators.

Riverheads is now 6-5 overall, 0-1 in the district with a trip to Stuarts Draft set for Tuesday



Gus gets set to rebound a missed free throw against Riverheads

Game 11: Staunton 87, Fort Defiance 72

Staunton blows by Fort Defiance 87 - 72

by Joe Hill

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.

Game 12: Stuarts Draft 70, Fort Defiance 55

Stuarts Draft dominates Fort Defiance 70 – 55

by Joe Hill

The Stuarts Draft Cougars built up a huge first half lead then coasted to a 70 – 55 win over the Fort Defiance Indians on January 17 in the Fort gym. The Cougars, 9 – 4 (3 – 0) used a 23 – 10 second quarter to bust open a game that was tight at first. The loss, Fort's second consecutive and fifth in its last seven games, left Fort with a 7 – 5 record, 1 – 2 in the Shenandoah District.

The first quarter was competitive. Tripp opened with a three pointer from the corner but the Cougars answered with a trey of their own. Gio Armendariz Cruz scored on a drive but again the Cougars responded to tie the score. Tripp had another three pointer and Gio scored in close again to give Fort a 10 – 5 lead with 3:54 to go. The lead would be short lived. SDHS scored the next six points to take a 11 – 10 lead before Carter Berry took a nice pass from Bradley and put the home team back ahead. The Cougars regained the lead at 13 – 12 but Tripp banged in his third three pointer of the quarter to give Fort a 15 – 13 lead. It would be the last lead Fort would have. Draft scored the last four points in the quarter to take a 17 – 15 lead at the end of the period.

Gio tied the score with a drive to start the second quarter but the visitors knocked in another three pointer to go up 20 – 17. Gio got two more on a drive making it 20 – 19. Draft scored the next four to take a 24 – 19 lead. Gio then hit a three pointer but after that Fort's offense died. Draft scored the next 13 consecutive points to extend their lead to 37 – 22. Rhylan Martin got Fort's last points of the quarter with a trey but the Cougars ran out to a comfortable 40 – 25 lead at the half.

In the first half, Fort only had four different players score. They shot 5 – 16 from beyond the arc and 0 – 3 from the foul line. It was hard to watch.

Fort came out cold to start the second half. Stuarts Draft scored the first nine points of the quarter which put the game out of reach at 49 – 25. Bradley Hebb got two on an out-of-bounds play, Gio scored in the paint, and Carter made one of two free throws but Draft kept pouring it on to take their biggest lead, 56 – 30, with three minutes left to go in the quarter. Gio made another three pointer and a deuce and Evan Braun made a three at the end of the quarter but Draft still led 58 – 38 going into the fourth.

Fort made a mini-run in the fourth but never were able to get closer than a ten point deficit. Bradley had two on a drive, Jasigh Ransome two, Tripp another three pointer, and Bradley a layup to make it 63 – 51. After a Draft goal, Jasigh was fouled while making a three pointer then made his foul shot to get to 65 – 55 but that was it for Indian scoring for the night. The final was 70 – 55 in favor of Stuarts Draft.

The Indians switched to man-to-man defense for the second half but their impotent offense wouldn't allow them to catch up. Jenkins and Graber each had 18 for the Cougars while Moore tossed in 14. Gio scored 22 for the Indians and Tripp had twelve.

Grandfather's notes: This game, like many this season, showed how Fort has not been taught an offense that will win games. Time after time, the Indians went one-and-done when they had the ball and most of the time the shot taken was ill-advised. In Fort's offense, players stand around waiting for the guards to drive in the crowded lane and toss up a prayer. There is little teamwork; play is selfish and uncoordinated. It is tough for seasoned Indian fans to watch opposing teams work the ball for a good shot then see the Indians either throw up a three point shot with little chance of going in or driving into the lane, going one-on-four, and taking a horrible shot, all without any objections from the Fort coaching staff.

As I have written time after time, the Fort players have never been taught how to shoot the basketball. For the season, they shoot under 50% *from the free throw line*. Tonight they were 4 for 10 from the charity stripe. It is worse from beyond the three point arc. Tonight they made 9 of 31 three point shots.

Gus is frustrated and for good reason. Tonight he played less than three minutes in the first half and only 2:02 in the second half. He sat on the bench the entire fourth quarter. When he played, he got three rebounds including one offensive one. He was wide open under the basket a couple of times but, of course, was not passed the ball. Why pass when you can take a wild three pointer or fling up a brick on a drive? I am disgusted with his teammates but even more so at the coaching staff. Their substitution philosophy is based on favoritism instead of data. There is no deference given to seniors who have stuck with the program for years. Their offensive coaching strategy is non-existent. Turnovers, bad shots, and selfish play seem to be fine with them. Another player's grandfather remarked to me that they don't coach, they just watch the game.

Tonight, like the previous game at Fort against Staunton, the gym was much less than half full. There were empty rows of seats everywhere. Gus, as always, had his family there but apparently other fans have decided this type of play isn't worth watching. This is sad, especially for the boys.

Fort's next game is a home game against Clarke County on Monday, January 20.

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	0	0-2	6
Jasigh Ransome	1	1	1-1	6
Gio Armendariz Cruz	7	2	2-5	22
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	1	0-0	3
Carter Berry	1	0	1-2	3
Rhylan Martin	0	1	0-0	3
Elijah Pultz	0	0	0-0	0
Tripp Hanger	0	4	0-0	12
Connor Batten	0	0	0-0	0
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	0	0	0-0	0
TOTAL	12	9	4-10	55

The Staunton News Leader had this article about the game:

Draft boys win

FORT DEFIANCE — Stuarts Draft beat Fort Defiance 70-55 Friday night in Shenandoah District boys basketball.

Landon Graber and Donovan Jenkins both finished with 18 points to lead Stuarts Draft (8-4, 3-0 Shenandoah).

Draft led by just two after one, but a 14-point second quarter by Graber — six buckets, including a pair of 3s — helped lift the Cougars to a 15-point halftime lead.

Derrick Moore had 14 for the Cougars.

Stuarts Draft is at Central Woodstock Saturday before traveling to Riverheads and home against Wilson next week.

Gio Armendariz Cruz scored 22 for Fort Defiance (7-5, 1-2 Shenandoah). Tripp Hanger added 12 for Fort.

Fort Defiance is home against Clarke and Waynesboro with a road trip to Wilson Memorial in between next week.



2024-25 Seniors Johnny Whetzel, Bradley Hebb, Carter Berry, Rhylan Martin, and Gus Gutshall get their posters on the gym wall

Game 13: Wilson Memorial 82, Fort Defiance 62

Wilson hands Fort its sixth loss in the last eight games, 82 - 62

by Joe Hill

Wilson Memorial used a 28 – 12 second quarter spurt to turn a close game into a rout as they easily beat the Fort Defiance Indians 82 – 62 on Tuesday, January 21 in the Wilson gym. It was same old, same old for the Indians who shot miserably, committed 21 turnovers, and allowed the Hornets to get layup after layup. The win improved Wilson's record to 11 – 1, 2 – 1 in the Shenandoah District while Fort lost its sixth game in the last eight, making its record 7 – 6, 1 – 3.

Bradley Hebb started the scoring with a three pointer and fans perhaps thought FDHS would finally have a good game shooting from beyond the arc. That clearly did not happen as they missed 13 of their next 14 three point shots in the first half. It only got worse in the second half. The good news is that they made their last two three point attempts by subs Connor Batten and John Whetzel. The bad news is that, prior to those two shots, they had missed 16 of 17 attempts. For the game, they made only five of 34 three point tries.

As I have written many times prior to this game, Fort only tries two things on offense—shoot an off-balance three pointer or drive and go one-against-four in the lane. I'm not sure there were any legitimate assists in this game.

After Bradley's three pointer, Wilson ran off the next five points including a three of their own. Evan Braun was fouled attempting a trey and made two of his three resulting foul shots. Wilson went up 7 – 5 then Gio Armendariz Cruz tied it on a drive. After Wilson went up 8 – 7, Elijah Pultz put the Indians ahead 9-8 with a jumper in the lane. Wilson answered with the next five points to take a 13 – 9 lead. Carter Berry got a deuce for the Indians and Bradley tied the score on a drive. On the next possession, he made one of two free throws and gave the visitors a 14 – 13 lead with 1:05 to go in the quarter. The Hornets tossed in two free throws to retake the lead before Elijah got two on a putback to give Fort its last lead of the game, 16 – 15, with under 30 seconds to go in the half. A Wilson foul shot tied the score. Then, as time expired, Keyvon Jones hit a three pointer from the corner to give the Hornets a 19 – 16 lead at the end of the first quarter.

Tripp Hanger started the second quarter with a three pointer to knot the score at 19 but the rest of the quarter belonged to Wilson. Bradley scored on a drive and Evan likewise got two points on a drive in the lane which kept the Indians close at 24 – 23. Wilson went up 28 – 23 until Gio scored on a drive in the lane. Wilson scored seven consecutive points and took a 35 – 25 lead with 4:08 to go in the quarter. For the rest of the quarter, all Fort could muster was a layup and a foul shot by Gio. Meanwhile, Wilson got many easy layups off Fort's poor defense and breezed to a 47 – 28 lead at the half.

In the third, all teamwork was abandoned by the Indians. On nearly every play, Gio would drive in the lane or a teammate would launch a poorly-taken three pointer. Gio did end up scoring 13 points in the quarter, but the only other person who scored was Connor who made a foul shot. Meanwhile, Wilson continued to pour it on and led 64 – 42 at the end of the third.

Subs from both teams played a lot in the fourth. Tripp hit a jumper then Bradley got an old fashioned three point play. Wilson continued to get easy shots and took a twenty four point lead, 71 – 47, before Evan hit a three for FDHS. Wilson extended their lead to 77 – 50 before Gio scored on a drive. With the score 80 – 52, Connor scored in the paint. Miguel Uribe made two foul shots for the Indians. In the final minutes, Connor made a three pointer and John Whetzel got his first points of the season with a trey which made the final score 82 – 62.

Gio led Fort with 22 points. Bradley added 11. For Wilson, Chase Snyder had 19, Eli Irving 13, and Jones 12.

Grandfather's notes: Gus played only 24 seconds in the first quarter, 2:49 in the second, 2:08 in the third, and 3:44 in the fourth. This is more than he played in the previous game. He got four rebounds but missed his only two shots. I hope he and the rest of his teammates put this game behind them because there was little encouraging to remember about it. It is disturbing that the season is more than half over but no one on the team is showing any real improvement since the first game. Certainly shooting and ball handling have not improved. Defense has gotten worse. When Fort's guards both drive into the lane, there is no one back on defense so if their opponents take possession, either by rebound or turnover, they get easy layups on the opposite end of the court. Fort's press tonight netted few turnovers. It is obvious that the coaches don't pick up on individual or team mistakes and never seem to work with the players individually on improving. It's also telling that multiple Fort fans can be heard yelling for the FD guards to pass the ball. Basketball is supposed to be a team sport.

FDHS was supposed to have four games this week but the January 20 game against Clarke County was postponed. Fort's next game is a home game at against on Waynesboro on Friday, January 24.

Here's Fort's box score:

Name	2 Pt Goals	3 Pt Goals	Free Throws	Total
John Whetzel	0	1	0-0	3
Bradley Hebb	3	1	2-4	11
Jasigh Ransome	0	0	0-0	0
Gio Armendariz Cruz	10	0	2-3	22
Miguel Uribe	0	0	2-2	2
Evan Braun	1	1	2-3	7
Carter Berry	1	0	0-0	2
Rhylan Martin	0	0	0-0	0
Elijah Pultz	2	0	0-2	4
Tripp Hanger	1	1	0-0	5
Connor Batten	1	1	1-2	6
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	0	0	0-0	0
TOTAL	19	5	9-16	62

The Harrisonburg Daily News Record had the following article about the game:

WILSON MEMORIAL 82, FORT DEFIANCE 62

Big second quarter propels Wilson over Fort

By BRANDON ELLIS For The Daily News-Record

FISHERSVILLE — Wilson Memorial used a big second quarter to catapult it to a big-time 82-62 Shenandoah District victory over Fort Defiance on Tuesday.

Chase Snyder had another big scoring night for the Green Hornets, finishing with a team-high 22 points, including four 3-pointers.

Knotted at 16 apiece late in the first quarter, Isaiah Scott grabbed an offense rebound and dished it out to Snyder for a trey from the corner.

That gave Wilson a 19-16 lead and it never looked back from there.

“Isaiah Scott keeps the ball alive there, gets the offense rebound and kicks it out,” WMHS head coach Jeremy Hartman said. “He has enough sense to kick it out to a wide-open [Snyder] and that’s who you want shooting the ball at the end of the quarter. That set us up to get going from there.”

The Green Hornets poured in 28 second-quarter points to open up a 19-point advantage by half and were never threatened the remainder of the way.

“Isaiah got to the rim and did a great job,” Snyder said about the momentum-shifting first-quarter shot. “I was just yelling his name. I had no how much time was left. ... I just shot it and didn’t want to pressure it, to rush it. It definitely provided the energy, I think, and we dominated the second quarter after that.”

Eli Irving also hit double digits with 13 points for Wilson in its second consecutive win while Keyvon Jones and Mason McWhorter each scored nine, Micah Adams added eight and Scott finished with seven.

There were 10 different players who got in the scoring column for the Hornets.

“We felt with [last week’s loss to] Staunton, we kind of beat ourselves,” Hartman said. “We were 11-for-22 at the free-throw line, turned it over 19 times. We’re still struggling at the line, but our energy, effort, rebounding [are better]. We’re taking care of the ball a little better, sharing the ball better. That’s what you hope to learn from losses like that, so that they can help you later down the road.”

Gio Armendariz Cruz poured in 22 points for the Indians, who have dropped three straight, while Bradley Hebb scored 11 and Evan Braun added seven.

Wilson (11-1, 2-1 Shenandoah) returns to action on Friday against Augusta County rival Stuarts Draft in a big district game at home while Fort (7-6, 1-3 Shenandoah) will aim to get on track that night against Waynesboro at home.

“It’s one game at a time,” Hartman said. “We just need to be 1-0 at the end of the night. We can’t look ahead, can’t look back. We just need to focus on what is in front of us and move on. They’ve done a really good job of doing that. Irving and Snyder are senior who have been around for a long time, so they are good about keeping these guys on the straight and narrow.”

Fort Defiance 16 12 14 20 — 62
Wilson Memorial 19 28 17 18 — 82

FORT DEFIANCE (7-6) — Whetzel 1 0-0 3, Hebb 4 2-4 11, Ransome 0 0-0 0, Armendariz Cruz 10 2-3 22, Uribe 0 2-2 2, Braun 2 2-3 7, Berry 1 0-0 2, Martin 0 0-0 0, Pultz 2 0-2 4, Hanger 2 0-0 5, Batten 2 1-2 6, Thornton 0 0-0 0, Gutshall 0 0-0 0. Totals 24 9-16 62.

WILSON MEMORIAL (11-1) — A. Flesher 1 1-2 3, Snyder 6 6-7 22, Jones 2 5-6 9, Young 0 0-0 0, Scott 3 1-2 7, Pulley 2 1-1 5, McWhorter 4 1-3 9, Irving 5 2-2 13, Collier 2 0-2 4, McAllister 0 0-0 0, Fortune 0 0-0 0, Adams 4 0-0 8, C. Flesher 1 0-2 2. Totals 30 17-27 82.

3-Point Goals — Fort Defiance 5 (Whetzel, Hebb, Braun, Hanger, Batten), Wilson Memorial 5 (Snyder 4, Irving).



One of Gus' Senior Basketball Pictures

Game 14: Fort Defiance 76, Waynesboro 60

Fort blows past Waynesboro 76 - 60

by Joe Hill

Fort Defiance got back on the winning track with a 76 – 60 victory over the Waynesboro Little Giants on January 24. Fort grabbed the lead early in the first quarter and kept it the entire game as nine Indians scored for the home team. The win upped Fort's record to 8 – 6, 2 – 3 in the Shenandoah District while Waynesboro dropped to 3 – 11, 1 – 4.

Waynesboro opened the game with a three pointer but Tripp Hanger answered with the same for FDHS. Waynesboro took a 5 – 3 lead but that would be their last lead of the night. Jasigh Ransome scored in the lane then Gio Armendariz Cruz scored on a drive to give Fort a 7 – 5 lead. Jasigh then swished a trey for the Indians. Elijah Pultz then stepped in front of a Waynesboro player for the steal and raced down the court to score to give Fort a 12 – 5 lead. Carter Berry got two to give FD a 14 – 5 advantage. WHS scored but Elijah followed with a bucket on a nice pass from Tripp to make it 16 – 7. Waynesboro scored a field goal and foul shot to close to 16 – 10 then Gio scored on a drive, was fouled, and made his foul shot with 3.4 seconds to go to make it 19 – 10. Waynesboro wasn't done, though, as they quickly passed the ball and fired in a three pointer from near half court as the buzzer sounded leaving the score Fort Defiance 19, Waynesboro 13 at the end of the first quarter.

Waynesboro went on a mini-run to open the second quarter, scoring the first five points to get within one at 19 – 18 but Evan Braun responded with a three pointer to make it 22 – 18. Gus Gutshall snagged an offensive rebound and was fouled on his putback. He made one of his two free throws to make it 23 – 18. Connor Batten then fired in a three pointer from the corner to give Fort an eight point lead, 26 – 18. Waynesboro hit a three pointer but so did Tripp so again Fort led by eight. Gio scored on a drive and Bradley Hebb followed with two in the lane to make it 33 – 24 with 1:46 to go. Jasigh then popped in a shot from beyond the arc to give Fort a comfortable 36 – 24 lead at the half.

The first half was a decent half for Fort, for a change. They had only two turnovers and made 6 of 17 three point shots. Nine FDHS players scored in the half. Waynesboro was playing with only eight players and one went out with a hurt ankle early in the half leaving them with a small bench.

After Waynesboro scored to open the second half, Gio drove in the lane for two. Waynesboro netted two more then once again Gio scored in the paint to make it 40 – 28. Tripp bombed in two consecutive three pointers sandwiched around a WHS field goal to make the score 46 – 32. Waynesboro made another three pointer, then Tripp was fouled attempting another three pointer and made all three foul shots giving the home team a 49 – 35 lead with 4:38 to go in the quarter. Gio made a trey and the Little Giants tossed in a field goal and foul shot to make it 52 – 38. Jasigh then made a three pointer giving Fort a seventeen point lead, 55 – 38. Waynesboro scored the next two baskets before Bradley scored in the lane. Fort got a foul shot from Elijah to make it 58 – 42 at the end of the third.

Gio scored four points early in the final quarter, first on a foul shot then on a three pointer. Elijah took a nice pass from Bradley and gave Fort its biggest lead of the night, 64 – 42. The

FORT DEFIANCE BASKETBALL 2024- 25

Little Giants made a three pointer but Jasigh again hit a trey for the Indians. After another Waynesboro three pointer, Tripp scored in the lane to make it 69 – 48. WHS scored and Gio drove in the lane for his final points of the night with 3:44 to go. Fort’s final scoring was a deuce by Elijah on a nice pass from Gio and a three pointer by Conner. The final was 76 - 60.

Fort’s three point shooting was better tonight than in the last several games, 13 – 36. Gio led the Indians with 20. Tripp scored 17 and Jasigh 14. Ayden Thornton was not dressed for the game. For the Little Giants, Deonta Brown had 16, Jackson Powell scored 12, and Ka’Marion Martin had 11. Waynesboro’s eight players included five freshmen including Brown, Powell, and Martin.

Grandfather’s notes: Gus played much more tonight than he has in the past several games. He even started though he was only left in for 55 seconds then. But he did return to play several minutes in each quarter. By my count, he got six rebounds (four offensive). He was more content after this game, as expected.

Fort’s next game is a game against Roanoke Catholic tomorrow night, January 25, as part of the Rock The Ribbon Roundball Shootout at Rockbridge High School.

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	2	0	0-4	4
Jasigh Ransome	1	4	0-0	14
Gio Armendariz Cruz	6	2	2-5	20
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	1	0-0	3
Carter Berry	1	0	0-0	2
Rhylan Martin	0	0	0-0	0
Elijah Pultz	4	0	1-2	9
Tripp Hanger	1	4	3-3	17
Connor Batten	0	2	0-0	6
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	0	0	1-2	1
TOTAL	15	13	7-16	76



The Staunton News Leader had the following short article about the game:

Fort boys win

FORT DEFIANCE — Gio Armendariz Cruz scored 20 points Friday to help Fort Defiance to a 76-60 win over Waynesboro.

Fort (8-6, 2-3 Shenandoah) also got 17 points from Tripp Hanger and 14 from Jasigh Ransome in the win.

Waynesboro (3-11, 1-4 Shenandoah) was led by freshman Deonta Brown's 16 points and 12 points from freshman Jackson Powell.

Fort plays Riverheads at home and Buffalo Gap and Staunton on the road next week, while Waynesboro is at Stuarts Draft and home against Monticello and Wilson.



Gus buries free throw against Waynesboro

Game 15: Roanoke Catholic 87, Fort Defiance 69

Roanoke Catholic overpowers Fort Defiance 87 - 69

by Joe Hill

Fort Defiance lost a 87 – 69 verdict to Roanoke Catholic in the Rock The Ribbon Roundball Shootout at Rockbridge High School held on January 25. Roanoke Catholic was a tall, fast, good-shooting team that just had too much fire power for the FDHS Indians who looked tired throughout the game.

Being tired was understandable. This game was the 10th of 10 games scheduled on Saturday and was supposed to begin at 8:30 after national powers Oak Hill Academy and Blue Ridge School squared off. But earlier games, including Oak Hill's, ran late so tipoff for this game didn't occur until almost 10:00 pm and it lasted until close to midnight.

The loss left Fort with a 8 -7 season record but since this was a non-district game their district record remained at 2-3. Roanoke Catholic's win, their eighth in a row, improved their record to 13 – 6.

Gio Armendariz Cruz drove in for the game's opening points but Roanoke Catholic responded with a field goal and three pointer to go up 5 – 2. Two more field goals increased their lead to 9 -2 before Bradley Hebb knocked in a trey for the Indians. Connor Batten then turned an offensive rebound into two points and the Indians were back to 9 – 7 but Catholic scored the next five points to take a 14 – 7 lead. Gio made a trey for FD and Elijah Pultz got a putback to get FDHS within two at 14 – 12 with 1:26 to go in the quarter. Roanoke Catholic scored two more field goals while Fort could just muster two foul shots from Gio to leave the score at 18 – 14 at the end of the first quarter.

Fort has experienced many second quarter let-downs this season. Tonight was no exception. After Bradley got two points in the lane to start the second quarter, Roanoke scored five consecutive points before Jasigh Ransome made a triple for Fort. Fort really got cold at this point as Roanoke scored the next 13 consecutive points to go up 36 – 19. Elijah stopped the bleeding with two baskets in the lane sandwiched around a two pointer for Roanoke which made the score 38 – 23. At this point, Fort and Roanoke traded making three pointers with Jasigh and Tripp Hanger scoring for FDHS. Roanoke got the final two points of the half which gave them a comfortable 46 – 29 lead at the halfway point.

Fort's first half three point shooting was better than usual, making five of fourteen attempts though Roanoke Catholic had eight three pointers. What really put Fort in the hole was ball handling; they committed 13 turnovers in the first two quarters. Throughout the half, Fort made frequent, wholesale substitutions reminiscent of the Grinnell system they used last year and tried to use their half court zone press to stop Catholic, but the end result was 46 first half points for the visitors.

All of this changed in the third quarter. At this point, Fort played man-to-man and playing time was monopolized by juniors (Gio, Jasigh, Tripp, Evan Braun, and Elijah) nearly the entire quarter. The strategy seemed to work at one point with Fort closing the lead to 52 – 50 but by

the end of the quarter they had fallen behind by seven and the downward trend continued until the end of the game.

Elijah got a foul shot and drive to make the score 46 – 32. After Roanoke scored, Jasigh hit a three pointer and Gio a foul shot. Catholic scored then Gio got two on a putback. After Roanoke went up 52 – 38, the Indians rallied, scoring the next twelve points. Tripp made two foul shots and two straight three pointers. Carter Berry scored twice on putbacks to make it a game at 52 – 50. Roanoke hit a triple to go up 55 – 50 but Rhylan Martin answered with a three for Fort. Catholic scored two field goals and a foul shot to extend their lead to 62 – 53 before Gio got the final points of the quarter for the Indians, leaving it at 62 – 55 after three quarters.

The tired Indians were no match for Roanoke in the final period who quickly extended their lead to 67 – 55 before Elijah made a free throw. After a Catholic goal, Evan made a three pointer but Roanoke made six more consecutive points before Rhylan made another three. Six more consecutive points made the lead 83 – 62. Gus Gutshall then snagged a rebound, scored and was fouled. He completed the three point play making it 83 – 65. Two more Catholic goals improved their lead to 87 – 65 before Connor finished scoring for the night with two baskets. The final score was 87 – 69.

Gio led Fort's scoring with 12 followed closely by Tripp with 11 and Elijah with 10. Ten players scored for the Indians. Fort did not have Ayden Thornton who will out for the rest of the season with a liver condition. The Indians committed 23 turnovers in the game.

Grandfather's notes: This was not a game Gus will cherish in his memories. He did have a fine three point play in the fourth quarter but missed a few shots that I'm sure he'd like to have back. And I know he wasn't happy about playing for only 21.1 seconds in the third quarter.

Fort's next outing is a home game against Riverheads on January 28.

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	1	1	0-0	5
Jasigh Ransome	0	3	0-0	9
Gio Armendariz Cruz	3	1	3-4	12
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	1	0-0	3
Carter Berry	2	0	0-0	4
Rhylan Martin	0	2	0-0	6
Elijah Pultz	4	0	2-4	10
Tripp Hanger	0	3	2-2	11
Connor Batten	3	0	0-0	6
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	1	0	1-1	3
TOTAL	14	11	8-11	69

Game 16: Fort Defiance 79, Riverheads 74

Fort Defiance uses HUGE third quarter to topple Riverheads, 79 – 74

by Joe Hill

After a lackluster first half where Fort Defiance only scored 22 points and found themselves behind by ten at one point, the Indians put together a phenomenal 35-point third quarter, eventually breaking out to a 15 point advantage, and held on to secure a 79 – 74 win over the Riverheads Gladiators on January 28 in the Don Landes Gym. It was the second time this season FDHS has beaten RHS as the two teams battle for fourth place in the Shenandoah District. The win improved Fort's record to 9 – 7, 3 – 3 in the district, while Riverheads slipped to 9 – 8, 2 – 4.

There is little to write positively about the home team's first half. They committed five turnovers and missed ten three point shots. Even their two point shooting was consistently off the mark. Bradley Hebb started the scoring for the Indians but Riverheads hit a three pointer, foul shot, and a jumper to take a 6 – 2 lead. Gio Armendariz Cruz got a putback but Riverheads answered to make it 8 – 4 with 4:34 to go in the quarter. Jasigh Ransome got a floater in the lane to make it 8 – 6. Riverheads scored a free throw then Carter Berry got two on a jumper in the paint. The Gladiators made the next two field goals to go up 13 – 8 before Bradley turned an offensive rebound into two points. Riverheads got two more field goals before the quarter expired to take a 18 – 10 lead at the end of the first. At this point, FDHS was 0 – 6 shooting three pointers, had made four turnovers, and missed multiple shots on drives into the lane.

Elijah Pultz came through to start the second quarter, scoring two consecutive buckets in the lane, the second after an offensive rebound. Riverheads extended their lead to 20 – 14 before Rhylan Martin made a three pointer to make it 20 – 17. The Indians then went cold and Riverheads scored the next seven points to take their largest lead of the night, 27 – 17. Fortunately for the home team, Rhylan made another three pointer and Gio got a putback near the end of the quarter to make the halftime score Riverheads 27, Fort Defiance 22.

At this point, I wrote in my notes “How did we score 88 points against them the first time?” when we were only able to score 22 in the first half. My question got answered in the third quarter. After a Riverheads foul shot and three pointer, Fort found itself down by nine, 31 – 22. Then the team got rolling. Bradley got another two on a putback then Tripp Hanger drained a trey. Gio scored in the paint and Fort was only down by two, 31 – 29. After a Riverheads bucket with 6:07 to go, Gio scored with his left hand on a drive to make it 33 – 31. Gus Gutshall then found Gio open under the basket and Gio knotted the score at 33's. Soon thereafter, Carter scored in the lane on a nice pass from Gio to give Fort its first lead since the opening moments, 35 – 33. The Gladiators retook the lead on a three pointer but that would be their last lead of the night. Rhylan made a trey with 3:38 to go to put FD back on top. After two Gladiator foul shots tied the score at 38's, Bradley banked in two foul shots then Tripp and Bradley each hit three pointers to push Fort's lead to 46 – 38. Riverheads scored a field goal then Carter got two more in the lane. Riverheads made two more free throws before Evan Braun took a pass from Gio and scored. Bradley scored to give FD a 52 – 46 lead. Riverheads scored then Rhylan hit his third three pointer of the night. Tripp got two at the buzzer and Fort had turned the tables on Riverheads, leading 57 – 44 after three periods.

Fort's biggest lead of the night came at the start of the fourth quarter when Carter scored on an assist from Gio to make it 59 - 44. Evan made two of three foul shots but Riverheads clawed back to close the score to 61 - 51. Tripp banged in a triple and Elijah scored on a Gio assist but still Riverheads kept coming back. With 3:01 to go the score was 66 - 62. Tripp hit another three pointer and from there, it was mostly foul shots for the home team, with Gio making six of eight free throws and Evan and Jasigh each adding one. With 1:09 to go Tripp found Jasigh by himself under the basket which stymied the Riverheads comeback. The Gladiators made a late three to leave the final score at Fort 79, Riverheads 74.

Fort had foul boys in double figures: Bradley with 15, Gio and Tripp with 14, and Rhylan 12. For Riverheads, JP Crawford pitched in 18, Henley Dunlap had 13, and William Gardner had 19.

Grandfather's notes: Gus played only two minutes the entire first half, none in the opening quarter. He played more in the third quarter when Fort made its big run. Is that a coincidence? I think not. He had a couple of rebounds and a great assist to Gio. Much of the time Fort has four guards on the floor. As they have all season, they've abandoned everything on offense except for the three point bomb and one of the guards driving into the lane. Tonight the shooters did somewhat better from beyond the arc, 9 - 27, and the guards recorded several assists, especially in the crucial third quarter. There is something to be learned from this! But many times FD had a two-on-one which ended up as a shot from the person handling the ball instead of a pass to his open teammate. Selfish play! Thanks to the big third quarter, it was a good win for the Indians, but there is still so much to be learned.

Fort's next outing is a game at Buffalo Gap on Thursday, January 30.

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	5	1	2-2	15
Jasigh Ransome	2	0	1-2	5
Gio Armendariz Cruz	4	0	6-8	14
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	1	0	3-5	5
Carter Berry	4	0	0-0	8
Rhylan Martin	0	4	0-1	12
Elijah Pultz	3	0	0-0	6
Tripp Hanger	1	4	0-0	14
Connor Batten	0	0	0-0	0
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	0	0	0-0	0
TOTAL	20	9	12-18	79

The following article appeared in the Staunton News Leader:

HIGH SCHOOL

Second-half surge leads Fort Defiance boys to victory; Fort girls get 1st district win: Basketball roundup

Patrick Hite



Gus battles for a rebound against the Gladiators

FORT DEFIANCE — After a sluggish first half that found Fort Defiance trailing by five at halftime, the Indians looked like a brand new team coming out of the locker room to beat Riverheads 79-74 in Shenandoah District boys basketball Tuesday night.

The second half didn't start out great, with Riverheads getting a free throw from JP Crawford and a 3-pointer from Will Gardner to grab a 31-22 lead. That's when Fort flipped a switch. Bradley Hebb grabbed an offensive rebound

and scored, starting a 13-2 run that gave Fort Defiance its first lead since the opening seconds of the game.

Then, with 2:18 left in the third and the game tied at 38-38, Fort had another run, this time sparked by a Tripp Hanger 3. Fort outscored Riverheads 19-6 the rest of the quarter.

"The energy level, it was obvious it was a difference from multiple games this year," Fort coach Mike Gale said.

As for what he attributed it to, Gale was pretty honest with his answer.

"I have no idea," he said. "It's just one of those things, it's contagious. We have a positive play and another positive play and it just kind of builds."

Fort Defiance (9-7, 3-3 Shenandoah) was led by multiple players Tuesday night. Bradley Hebb finished with 15 points while Gio Armendariz Cruz and Tripp Hanger both had 14 points. Rhylan Martin had 12 for the Indians.

It's been a bit of a roller coaster season for Fort Defiance, which came out of the gates hot, winning its first five games, but winning just four since then. With six games left in the regular season, maybe the second-half spark is one that can ignite the team down the stretch.

"Hopefully guys are able to see that and see that there was a difference," Gale said. "That was pretty much the ball game right there, the way they came out."

Fort is at Buffalo Gap on Thursday and at Staunton on Friday.

Riverheads (9-8, 2-4 Shenandoah) managed to battle back from down double digits in the fourth quarter, getting it to four points with just over two minutes left, but Fort hit 8-of-12 free throws — six coming from Armendariz Cruz — to seal the win.

The Gladiators were led by Will Gardner's 20 points and J.P. Crawford's 18. Riverheads is at home against Stuarts Draft Friday



The Harrisonburg Daily News Record had this article about the game:

BOYS BASKETBALL | FORT DEFIANCE 79, RIVERHEADS 74

Balanced effort lifts Indians past Gladiators

By CODY ELLIOTT Daily News-Record

Jan 28, 2025

Fort Defiance used a massive third-quarter run to take control and held on late for a 79-74 Shenandoah District win over Riverheads inside Don Landes Gymnasium on Tuesday.

The Indians were led by senior guard Bradley Hebb with 15 points while Tripp Hanger and Gio Armendariz Cruz also impressed with 14 each.

Rhylan Martin finished with 12 points for Fort while Carter Berry scored eight and Elijah Pultz finished with six.

Jasigh Ransome and Evan added five points each for the Indians.

As for the Gladiators, senior guard Will Gardner poured in a game-high 20 points.

JP Crawford added 18 for Riverheads while Henley Dunlap scored 13, Jaxon Duff finished with seven and Joseph George chipped in with six.

Fort (9-7, 3-3 Shenandoah) returns to action Thursday at Augusta County foe Buffalo Gap while the Gladiators (9-8, 2-4 Shenandoah) will host Stuarts Draft in another district game on Friday.

Riverheads 18 9 17 30 — 74

Fort Defiance 10 12 35 22 — 79



The Hill family in support of FDHS athletics

Game 17: Fort Defiance 95, Buffalo Gap 51

Fort Defiance blows away Buffalo Gap 95 - 51

by Joe Hill

Fort Defiance scored at will against hapless Buffalo Gap in the Bison's gym on January 30, trouncing the home team 95 – 51. Fort led the entire game, led by 35 at halftime and by as much as 49 in the fourth quarter. Eleven Indians scored including Tripp Hanger who had 14 in the second quarter and 19 in all. The win makes Fort's record 10 - 7, 4 – 3 in the Shenandoah District. Buffalo Gap fell to 4 – 9, 0 – 7.

Tripp opened scoring with a pull-up jumper. Gio Armendariz Cruz followed that with two in the lane and Jasigh Ransome scored to give FDHS a 6 – 0 advantage. Gap committed numerous turnovers and didn't score until 3:55 to go in the quarter when they finally made a free throw. A bucket and foul shot by Rhylan Martin upped Fort's lead to 9 – 1 before Gap finally got a field goal. Gus Gutshall then snagged an offensive rebound and scored for Fort followed up by Rhylan and Bradley Hebb who gave Fort a 15 – 3 lead. Gap got another free throw then Connor Batten scored in the lane. Gus was fouled after attempting another offensive putback and he made both of his free throws to increase the first quarter lead to 19 - 4 with 2:11 left. Gap got two three pointers to drop sandwiched around a Gio putback to make it 21 – 10. Rhylan then fired in a three pointer, Elijah Pultz scored after an offensive rebound, and Gio got two more at the buzzer to give Fort an insurmountable 28 – 10 lead at the end of the period.

After a Bison bucket, Jasigh hit a triple to make it 31 – 14. Tripp then made a three pointer and Evan Braun scored in the lane to make it 36 – 14. After a Gap foul shot, Bradley got two on a drive to the basket. Tripp, Gio, and Tripp again fired in three pointers to make the FDHS lead 47 – 15. Elijah scored in the lane then Gap scored to make it 49 – 19. Tripp hit his fourth three pointer of the quarter to increase the lead to 52 – 19. Elijah made a free throw as did Buffalo Gap, then Tripp got his 13th and 14th points of the quarter with a layup to give FD a 35 point lead at halftime, 55 – 20.

The slaughter continued in the second half. Gap scored first but Gio got a layup and two free throws and Bradley made one of two foul shots to make it 60 – 22. After a Gap basket, Gio scored on a drive then Tripp hit his fifth three pointer of the night, giving Fort a 65 – 24 lead with 4:17 to go in the third. Evan got two then BGHS scored two baskets. Jasigh got a deuce as did Gap. Jasigh's three pointer made it 72 – 30 and Evan increased the lead to 74 – 30 with 1:46 to go in the quarter. Carter Berry got on the scoreboard with two in the lane before Gap made two free throws and a three pointer. Jasigh then took a nice pass from Carter and made a layup to make the score 78 – 35. Gap scored near the end of the quarter and Rhylan ended the period with another three pointer. The score was Fort 81, Gap 37 at the end of the third.

Substitutes played liberally in the fourth quarter. The clock also ran nonstop for most of the time. The two teams played evenly, 14 – 14 for the quarter. Fort's scoring came on two three pointers by Rhylan, one by Connor Batten, and one by Johnny Whetzel. Johnny also scored on a drive into the lane giving him 5 points for the quarter.

Tripp led the Indians with 19. Rhylan had 17, Gio 15, and Jasigh 12. For Buffalo Gap, Mason Snyder had 14, Aiden Asturb also netted 14, and Isaac Goff scored 10. Fort made more three pointers than they have in any previous game, 14, making 14 of 37 attempts.

Grandfather's notes: I was quite proud of Gus tonight. I have complained for two years that the players on his team have been extremely selfish, never passing to him or others and instead shooting sometimes desperate three point shots in attempting to score for themselves or going one-on-three in the lane without looking for the open teammate. That continued tonight, of course. The exception was Gus, who routinely hauled in offensive rebounds but then passed the ball back out so his teammates who usually don't play, like Miguel Uribe and Johnny Whetzel, could get on the scoreboard. He could have taken a follow-up shot himself but instead chose to kick the ball out for others. After the game he confirmed with me that he was trying to help them. This team has about eight players who think that they have been ordained by God (or at least by the coaching staff) to be the official team shooters. Their eyes are always on the rim, not the open teammate. It was refreshing tonight to see one player who didn't play that way. By the way, he had at least nine rebounds to go with his four points tonight. Adding to my pride was learning that he had earned his third Indian Pride Award of the season for this game, chosen by the coaches as the player with the best statistics for the game.



Fort's next outing is a tough game at Staunton tomorrow, Friday, January 31.

Here's Fort's box score:

Name	2 Pt Goals	3 Pt Goals	Free Throws	Total
John Whetzel	1	1	0-0	5
Bradley Hebb	2	0	1-4	5
Jasigh Ransome	3	2	0-0	12
Gio Armendariz Cruz	5	1	2-2	15
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	3	0	0-0	6
Carter Berry	1	0	0-0	2
Rhylan Martin	2	4	1-3	17
Elijah Pultz	2	0	1-2	5
Tripp Hanger	2	5	0-0	19
Connor Batten	1	1	0-0	5
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	1	0	2-2	4
TOTAL	23	14	7-13	95

INDIAN PRIDE



GUS GUTSHALL

1/30/2025

at Buffalo Gap

Offensive Rebounds	Defensive Rebounds	Deflections	Turnovers
5	5	3	0

Gus picks up his third Indian Pride Award of the season against Buffalo Gap



Gus on defense against the Buffalo Gap Bison



Evan, Gus, and Rhylan

Game 18: Staunton 84, Fort Defiance 69

Staunton Storms past Fort 84 - 69

by Joe Hill

The Staunton Storm breezed past the Fort Defiance Indians 84 – 69 in the Paul Hatcher Gym on January 31. The final score may lead one to believe this game was close but, in fact, it was over in the first quarter when the Storm roared past the Indians 31 – 11. Time after time Fort either missed a three point shot attempt or turned the ball over and Staunton flew down the court and scored off the fast break. Fort was 1 for 12 from beyond the arc in the quarter and committed seven turnovers. Fort scored on the opening tip but didn't score again for over 4 ½ minutes while the Storm raced to a 18 – 2 lead and never looked back. Fort Defiance's record fell to 10 - 8, 4 – 4 in the Shenandoah District while Staunton, now on an eleven game win streak, improved to 16 – 2, 8 – 0.

Bradley Hebb grabbed the opening tip and drove in for a layup to give Fort its only lead, 2 – 0. Staunton then made two consecutive three pointers, two more field goals, two foul shots, another three pointer, and a field goal to take an insurmountable 18 – 2 lead with 3:29 to go in the quarter. Gio Armendariz Cruz scored twice in the lane but Staunton answered with five more points to go up 23 – 6. Gio again scored in the lane and Evan Braun finally got a three pointer to drop as Fort inched back to 23 – 11 but Staunton finished the quarter with eight unanswered points to go up 31 – 11. In the quarter, Fort's three point shooting was consistently off the mark while Staunton's Anthony Renne dropped in three treys for the home team and Ky'Ree Scott two.

The second quarter was better for the Indians who scored 16 points while Staunton knocked in 18. Evan started Fort's scoring with a foul shot but Staunton upped its lead to 37 – 12. Connor Batten then found the range from beyond the arc. After a Staunton score, Carter Berry also hit a triple. Again Staunton scored but Tripp Hanger fired in a trey to make it 41 – 21 in favor of the Storm. Staunton made another three pointer before Rhylan Martin scored to make it 44 – 23. Another Staunton three pointer improved their lead to 47 – 23. Down the stretch in the quarter, Fort got free throws from Bradley and Evan and a putback from Elijah Pultz. Staunton finished the quarter with a 49 – 27 lead.

For the half, FDHS shot a miserable 4 for 28 from beyond the 3 point line. If they had only made half of these shots they would have had the lead instead of being behind by 22. They also had 13 turnovers, most of which resulted in easy baskets for the home team.

The third quarter started like the first quarter. Carter made a free throw then Fort wasn't able to score again until Staunton had increased their lead to 30, 58 – 28. Evan scored on a pass from Gio to make it 58 – 30. Staunton went up 63 – 30 before Rhylan got another jumper to fall. Staunton increased their lead to 65 – 32 before Gus Gutshall missed twice but got his own rebound both times and finally stuck it in the hole. Evan's three pointer made it 65 – 37 but Staunton responded with a field goal to make it 67 – 37. Gio then found Gus open under the hoop and he converted to make it 67 – 39. Tripp finished Fort's scoring with a deuce and the Storm finished the quarter up 69 – 41.

Both teams substituted liberally in the fourth quarter. Fort actually outscored Staunton 28 – 15 in the period. Staunton opened with a three pointer then Carter made another three point shot then Jasigh not only made a triple but was fouled doing so and converted his foul shot. After a Staunton scored again, Jasigh was fouled attempting a trey and made all three of his foul shots. Gus then scored on an out-of-bounds play to make it 77 – 53 and Rhylan got another two pointer. After Staunton made the score 79 – 55, Rhylan dropped in two foul shots. In the last 2:46, Evan got a foul shot then Tripp scored both on a putback in the lane, was fouled, and made his free throw. He then popped in a shot from the corner outside the three point line to make the score 81 – 64. Rhylan made a field goal and Tripp again banged in a trey for the visitors. The final was 84 – 69.

Fort ended up making only 9 of 43 shots from beyond the three point arc and had 19 turnovers. Tripp led the Indians in scoring with 14. Evan had 11 points and Rhylan 10. Anthony Renne had 22 points, including five three pointers, to lead the Storm. Three other players were in double figures: Joaquin Bell had 14, Maliq McCauley 10, and Ky'Ree Scott 10.

Grandfather's notes: Gus got some decent playing time in this game. He did a good job on the boards. By my account he had 10 rebounds. He was definitely tired when the game was over—a good thing. As always, he would have scored lots more if his teammates had dished to him when they should have. Fort was clearly outclassed in this game, though, and will do well to pick up at least three wins in their last four regular season games (Buffalo Gap, Waynesboro, Stuarts Draft, Wilson Memorial).

Fort's next outing is a home game against Buffalo Gap on February 4.

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	1	0	1-4	3
Jasigh Ransome	0	1	4-4	7
Gio Armendariz Cruz	3	0	0-0	6
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	1	2	3-6	11
Carter Berry	0	2	1-2	7
Rhylan Martin	4	0	2-6	10
Elijah Pultz	1	0	0-0	2
Tripp Hanger	2	3	1-1	14
Connor Batten	0	1	0-0	3
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	3	0	0-2	6
TOTAL	15	9	12-25	69

The Harrisonburg Daily News Record had this article about the game by Cody Elliott:

BOYS BASKETBALL | STAUNTON 84, FORT DEFIANCE 69

Fast start helps Storm take down Indians

Staunton built a 22-point lead by half and never looked back en route to an 84-69 victory over Shenandoah District rival Fort Defiance inside Paul Hatcher Gymnasium on Friday.

The Storm, who are unbeaten in district play, have won 11 straight.

Anthony Renne finished with a team-high 22 points for Staunton in the win. The backcourt tandem of Joaquin Bell and Ky'Ree Scott added 14 points apiece for the Storm.

Staunton also got nine points apiece from seniors Maliq McCauley and Thomas Chisley.

As for the Indians, they were led by Tripp Hanger with 14 points.

Evan Braun added 11 points for Fort while Rhylan Martin finished with 10.

Other key contributors for the Indians included Jasigh Ransome and Carter Berry with seven points apiece and Gio Armendariz Cruz and Augustus Gutshall with six each.

Both teams return to the court on Tuesday with the Storm (16-2, 8-0 Shenandoah) traveling to Stuarts Draft for a district showdown while Fort (10-8, 4-4 Shenandoah) hosts Buffalo Gap.

Fort Defiance 11 16 14 28 — 69

Staunton 31 18 20 15 — 84



Gio, Tripp, Bradley, Evan, and Gus prepare to hit the floor

The Staunton News Leader had this short article about the game:

Renne's 22 fuels Storm

STAUNTON — Anthony Renne knocked down three 3-pointers and scored 12 points in the opening quarter to help Staunton beat Fort Defiance 84-69 in Shenandoah District boys basketball Friday.

Renne finished with 22 points for Staunton (16-2, 8-0 Shenandoah), winners of 11 games in a row.

Ky'Ree Scott and Joaquin Bell both had 14 points in the win.

Tripp Hanger's 14 points led Fort Defiance (10-8, 4-4 Shenandoah) while Evan Braun had 11 and Rhylan Martin scored 10 for the Indians.

On Tuesday, Staunton travels to Stuarts Draft and Fort hosts Buffalo Gap.



The Indians prepare for the Star Spangled Banner in a home contest

INDIAN PRIDE



GUS GUTSHALL

1/31/2025

at Staunton

Offensive Rebounds	Defensive Rebounds	Deflections	Turnovers	Fouls
10	4	2	0	0

Gus won the coaches' Indian Pride Award for the Staunton game--his fourth of the season

Game 19: Fort Defiance 80, Buffalo Gap 33

Indians Corral Bison 80 – 33

by Joe Hill

Fort Defiance jumped out to a 21 – 1 lead in the first quarter in blowing out the Buffalo Gap Bison 80 – 33 at FDHS on February 5. The Indians were in command the entire game and had ten players who scored as they pushed their season record to 11 – 8, 5 – 4 in the Shenandoah District. Gap fell to 4 – 10, 0 – 8.

Gus Gutshall started things for the Indians with a putback after an offensive rebound. Rhylan Martin also scored after an offensive rebound and Carter Berry cashed in on a drive to give the home team a 6 – 0 lead in the first two minutes of play. Gio Armendariz Cruz made a free throw then Jasigh Ransome found the range from outside the arc to make it 10 – 0. Buffalo Gap finally got on the board with a foul shot with 5:03 left in the quarter. Evan Braun then scored on an out-of-bounds play, Gio on a drive, Elijah Pultz with a layup, Jasigh again on a putback, and Tripp Hanger banged in a three pointer to make it 21 – 1 with 2:17 to go. Gap got two free throws before Jasigh again got two after an offensive rebound. Gap got its only field goal of the quarter before Tripp's deuce made it 25 – 5 after one quarter. During the quarter, Fort had eight players who scored and committed zero turnovers.

BGHS scored the first two field goals of the second quarter before Tripp nailed a triple to make it 28 – 9. After a Gap score, Rhylan made a three pointer and Tripp got two on a pull-up jumper to make it 33 – 11. Bradley Hebb made a free throw and Gio made a jump shot to end the quarter's scoring at 36 – 12 in favor of the home team.

During the half, Fort got many second chances as they outrebounded Buffalo Gap. From the three point zone, Fort made 4 of 20 attempts.

Bradley's layup opened the second half. After a Gap field goal, Gio made a three pointer and Bradley got a layup off a steal to make it 43 – 14. Gap scored again before Gio nailed another three pointer, followed by two field goals on drives for his tenth point of the quarter. With the score 50 – 19, Jasigh made a three pointer and Elijah got two on a putback. After a Gap score, Jasigh again swished a three pointer, then Elijah scored in the paint. Rhylan made a three pointer and Tripp ended the quarter with a trey from the corner. He was fouled on the shot and converted the four point play to make it Fort 67, Gap 21 after three quarters.

Jasigh hit another three pointer to open the fourth quarter. After a Gap field goal, Connor Batten got on the score board with a jumper to make it 72 – 23. After a Bison score, Gus got an offensive rebound and flipped in a nice soft hook. Down the stretch, Jasigh scored in the paint as did Connor and Rhylan. The final score was Fort Defiance 80, Buffalo Gap 33.

For the game, Fort had ten players who scored, led by Jasigh with 18. Also in double figures were Gio with 15, Tripp with 14, and Rhylan with 10. Isaac Goff is the only Buffalo Gap player who scored in double figures. He had 12. Fort shot better than usual from the three point line, making 11 out of 40 attempts including six in the third quarter.

Grandfather's notes: Gus had a very good game against the shorter Bison. He was one of the starters. He had four points on 2 of 3 shooting. By my count, he had eight rebounds. He played the entire fourth quarter. Another positive note is that we learned that he won the Indian Pride award for the Staunton game, giving him two in a row since he also won it for the previous Buffalo Gap game. This means that he has been chosen for this award four times out of Fort's 19 games. Needless to say, we are very proud of him.

I do want to echo a previous complaint of mine—Fort's warmup. Tonight, in the twenty minute warmup before the game, the team shot 192 three pointers (I counted them!) and only 3 foul shots. In a good warmup, a team would practice ball handling, passing, and all aspects of shooting. Not FDHS....

Fort's next outing is an away game at Stuarts Draft on February 10.

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	2	0	1-2	5
Jasigh Ransome	3	4	0-0	18
Gio Armendariz Cruz	4	2	1-4	15
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	1	0	0-0	2
Carter Berry	1	0	0-0	2
Rhylan Martin	2	2	0-0	10
Elijah Pultz	3	0	0-0	6
Tripp Hanger	2	3	1-1	14
Connor Batten	2	0	0-0	4
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	2	0	0-0	4
TOTAL	22	11	3-7	80

The Harrisonburg Daily News Record had this article about the game:

BOYS BASKETBALL | FORT DEFIANCE 80, BUFFALO GAP 33

Four Indians score in double figures in blowout of Bison

By CODY ELLIOTT Daily News-Record

Fort Defiance dominated from start to finish in an 80-33 blowout of Shenandoah District opponent Buffalo Gap inside Don Landes Gymnasium on Tuesday.

The Indians were led by Jasigh Ransome with 18 points while Gio Armendariz Cruz added 15.

Tripp Hanger added 14 points for Fort while Rhylan Martin finished with 10.

Other key contributors for the Indians, who have won four of their last six, included Bradley Hebb with five points and Conner Batten and Augustus Gutshall with four apiece.

The Bison were led by Isaac Goff with 12 points and Aiden Astarb with six.

Alston North, Dalton Coffey and Gage Hartman added four points each for Gap.

Fort (11-8, 5-4 Shenandoah) will hit the road to Stuarts Draft on Monday for a district matchup while the Bison (4-10, 0-8) will aim to snap an eight-game skid when they host non-district opponent Grace Christian on Thursday.

Buffalo Gap 5 7 9 12 — 33

Fort Defiance 25 11 31 13 — 80

The Staunton News Leader had this short article:

Fort boys beat Gap

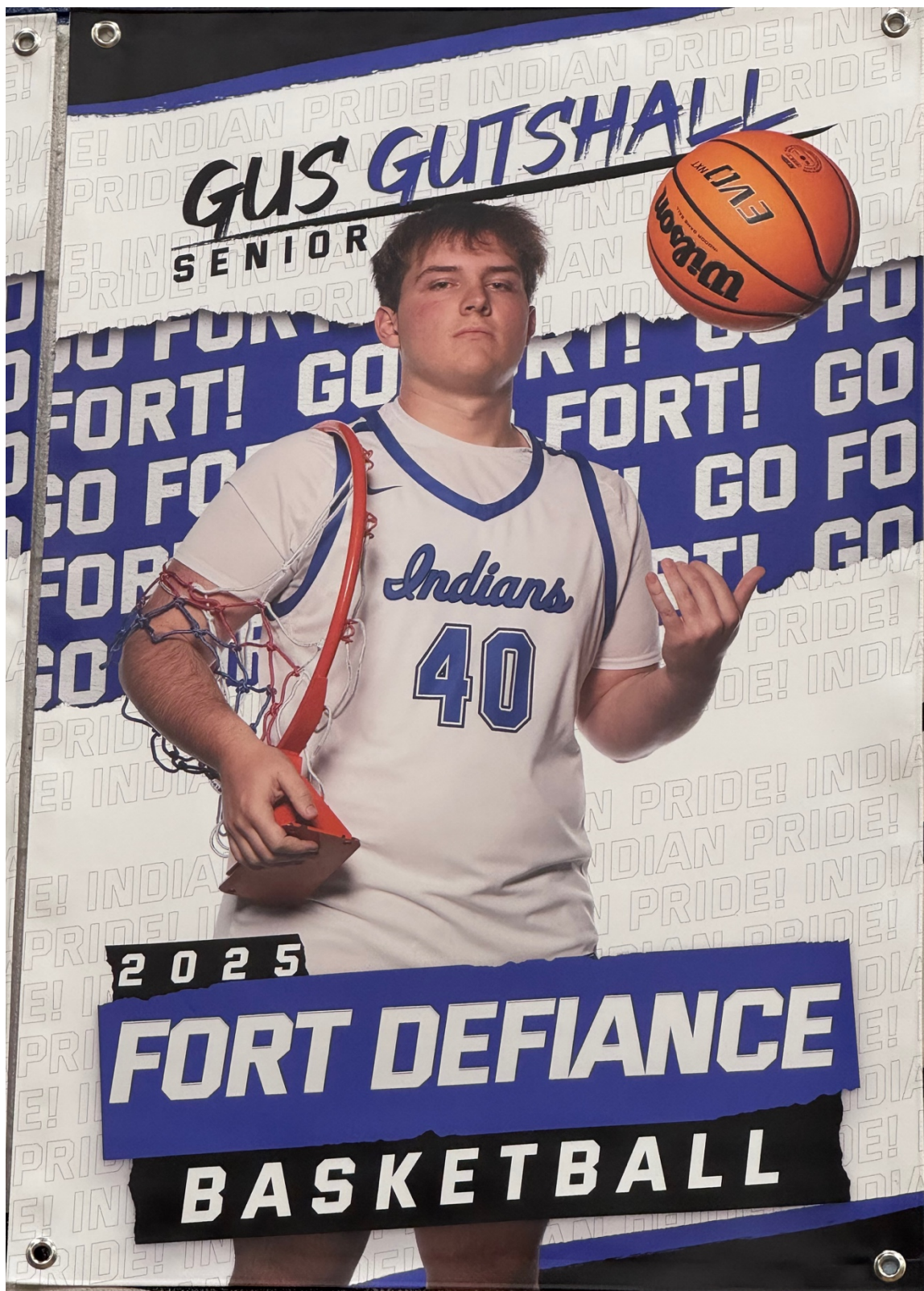
FORT DEFIANCE — Fort Defiance had a 20-point lead after a quarter and beat Buffalo Gap 80-33 Tuesday night in Shenandoah District basketball.

Jasigh Ransome led Fort Defiance (11-7, 5-4 Shenandoah) with 18 points, including four 3s, while Gio Armendariz Cruz had 15 and Tripp Hanger finished with 14.

Buffalo Gap (4-10, 0-8 Shenandoah) got 12 points from Isaac Goff. The Bison host Grace Christian Thursday and Stuarts Draft Friday.

Fort Defiance is finished for the week, not playing again until Monday night.





This senior banner hung in the Don Landes gym

Game 20: Fort Defiance 66, Stuarts Draft 61

Indians get revenge against Stuarts Draft, 66 - 61

by Joe Hill

Fort Defiance built a double digit lead in the first quarter then held off several Stuarts Draft comeback attempts to take a 66 – 61 well-earned victory over the Cougars on February 10 at Stuarts Draft. The win, which gave them a split with SDHS this season, improved their record to 12 – 8, 6 – 4 in the Shenandoah District. Draft's record fell to 13 – 8, 7 – 4 as they duel Fort for third place in the Shenandoah District. The win guarantees Fort will have a winning season with two regular season games left plus Regionals.

Fort came out smoking in the first quarter. Tripp Hanger fired in a three pointer to open the scoring. After a Stuarts Draft foul shot Bradley Hebb scored in the lane. Draft made a three pointer to get them within one at 5 – 4 with 5:35 to go in the quarter before Jasigh Ransome hit two consecutive three pointers to give the visitors a 11 – 4 lead with 3:10 to go. The Cougars got a bucket then Gio Armendariz Cruz swished a three pointer and followed that up with a drive in the lane to give Fort a 16 – 6 lead. Gus Gutshall then picked up an offensive rebound and returned the ball to the hoop to close the quarter with the score FDHS 18, SDHS 6. It was a great defensive quarter for the Indians who also made 4 of their 6 three point shots.

As was the case all night, Stuarts Draft kept coming back as they scored the first seven points of the second quarter to close to 18 – 13 before Connor Batten got two on a putback. Gio drove for two more with 4:38 to go to make it 22 – 13 before Draft scored in the paint. Jasigh got fouled attempting a three point shot but was able to make only one of his three free throws so the score stood at 23 – 15 with 3:42 to go in the quarter. On an out-of-bounds play, Gus was fed the ball and he pumped it in to make it 25 – 15. Draft scored but Tripp got his second three pointer before the quarter expired to give FD a comfortable 28 – 17 lead at the half.



Gus and Stuarts Draft's Christian Moats prepare to do battle

Fort's defense in the first half was very good, not allowing Draft to get good looks at the goal. Holding a good team to only 17 points in the half was monumental.

The third quarter started with another Draft run. They scored the first eight points in the second half to get within three with 6:22 to go. Gio then came up with a steal and his layup gave Fort a 30 – 25 advantage. Draft scored the next four points to tighten the score to 30 – 29 with 4:12 to go. At this point, they had outscored Fort 12 – 2 in the quarter. But, Fort then responded with a deuce by Gio and another three pointer by Jasigh to make it 35 – 29. Two free throws by the home team made it 35 – 31 with 3:18 to go. Evan Braun then made a free throw and Gio followed with an old-fashioned three point play to make it 39 – 31 with 2:36 left. Elijah Pultz made a nice bucket in the lane then Gio's foul shot gave Fort back its 11 point lead at 42 – 31. Tripp banged in his third three pointer of the night, then Jasigh got his third trey to make it 48 – 34. Again Gus came through with a nice jumper after an offensive rebound to give Fort a 50 – 34 lead. Draft hit a three then Jasigh scored on a drive to end the quarter with FDHS hanging on to a 52 – 37 lead.

Fort has never learned how to hold the ball for a good shot, especially when they have the lead late in a game, and it almost caused them to blow the comfortable lead in the fourth quarter. Stuarts Draft opened the quarter with a triple, then Gio got a foul shot and Tripp another three pointer to make it 56 – 42 with 6:51 to go. Draft swished a three pointer but Evan answered with a nice drive in the lane. Carter Berry then got on the board with a putback to give Fort what should have been an invincible lead at 60 – 45 but Fort's poor shot selection and Draft's improved shooting closed the score to 60 – 52. Bradley got two to make it 62 – 52 but the Cougars hit another triple with 56 seconds to go to reduce the lead to seven at 62 – 55. Stuarts Draft was forced to foul at this point and the Indians did OK at the free throw line. Gio made two, Jasigh one of two, and Tripp one of two. Stuarts Draft hit a late three pointer to make the final score Fort Defiance 66, Stuarts Draft 61.

For the game, Fort made 9 of 24 three point attempts which isn't anything to brag about but is still better than they've shot most of the season. Gio again led the Indians with 18 points followed by Jasigh with 16 and Tripp with 13. For Stuarts Draft, Derrick Moore had 21 and Landon Graber 13.

Grandfather's notes: Gus had a fine game. He scored six, making three of his four attempts from the floor. I believe he had at least four rebounds. What was so strange is that he played a good bit in the first three quarters but not one second in the fourth. He started on the floor in each of the two halves but sat for the last eight minutes. I have no idea what was going through his coaches' heads. For no more than he played, he was still Fort's fourth leading scorer. FDHS needed his six points as their final margin of victory was only five.

Fort's next outing is a home game on Senior Night against Wilson Memorial on Friday, February 14.

FORT DEFIANCE BASKETBALL 2024- 25

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	2	0	0-0	4
Jasigh Ransome	1	4	2-5	16
Gio Armendariz Cruz	5	1	5-7	18
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	1	0	1-2	3
Carter Berry	1	0	0-0	2
Rhylan Martin	0	0	0-0	0
Elijah Pultz	1	0	0-0	2
Tripp Hanger	0	4	1-1	13
Connor Batten	1	0	0-0	2
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	3	0	0-0	6
TOTAL	15	9	9-15	66



Fort's defense was too much for the Cougars

The Harrisonburg Daily News Record had this article about the game:

Fort earns big road win over Draft

By CODY ELLIOTT Daily News-Record

Fort Defiance built a double-digit lead in the opening quarter and never looked back en route to a key 66-61 Shenandoah District victory over Stuarts Draft on the road on Monday.

Gio Armendariz Cruz had a big night with 18 points to lead the Indians while Jasigh Ransome scored 16.

Fort guard Tripp Hanger also hit double digits with 13 points while senior forward Gus Gutshall had six.

The Cougars were led by standout junior guard Derrick Moore with a game-high 21 points.

Landon Graber had 13 points for Draft while Ja'Saun Kier-Brown and Donovan scored eight apiece and Denzel Diggs finished with seven.

The Indians (12-8, 6-4 Shenandoah) have won five of their last six and will return to action on Friday against Wilson Memorial at home.

The Cougars (13-8, 7-4 Shenandoah) host the Green Hornets on Monday in a district clash.

Fort Defiance 18 10 24 14 — 66

Stuarts Draft 6 11 20 24 — 61



Game 21: Wilson Memorial 61, Fort Defiance 48

Big Second Quarter Spurt leads Wilson Memorial over Fort Defiance

by Joe Hill

Wilson Memorial went on a 18 – 0 second quarter run to doom the Fort Defiance Indians on Senior Night in the Don Landes gym on February 14. Fort led 28 – 21 with 4:57 to go in the quarter before Wilson went on the rampage to take a 39 – 28 lead they never relinquished. The final score was Wilson 61, Fort Defiance 48. The win left Fort with a 12 – 9, record, 6 – 5 in the Shenandoah District. Wilson extended its record to 18 – 3, 8 – 2. Two of Wilson's three losses were to district leader Staunton.

Fort had won four of its previous five games and the hopes were they could pull an upset. It looked that way early on, as Fort led 21 – 18 at the end of the first quarter and extended their lead to 28 – 21 before the bottom dropped out of their attack.



Wilson got two field goals to go up 4 – 0 before Bradley Hebb made two consecutive three pointers, sandwiched around another Hornet bucket, to level the score at 6's. After a Wilson three pointer from Chase Snyder, who had eight of them for the game, Rhylan Martin got two on a putback. Wilson went up 11 – 8 before Carter Berry tied the score with a triple. Another Snyder three pointer gave Wilson a 14 – 11 lead which was quickly extended to 16 – 11. Tripp Hanger bombed in a three and Connor Batten did likewise to give the home team its first lead, 17 – 16. Wilson went up 18 – 17 but Fort scored the last four of the quarter, all by Connor as he got a jumper then two free throws. So Fort led 21 – 18 at the end of the period.

During the period, Fort made five three pointers. Unfortunately, their good shooting from beyond the arc died after that. They managed only four more the rest of the game, going 9 for 29. Fort played the game without its leading scorer, Gio Armendariz Cruz, who rolled his ankle during practice the day before.

The first half of the second quarter saw Fort extend its lead. Bradley scored in the lane then Tripp got a field goal to drop. Bradley again scored and Evan Braun made a free throw to give the Indians a 28 – 21 lead with 4:57 to go in the quarter. This is where Wilson, led by Snyder's four three pointers, went on their big run, taking a 39 – 28 lead before Tripp finally scored a trey for the Indians. Snyder answered with his own three to give the Hornets a 42 – 31 lead at the break.

The Hornets poured it on to start the second half, zooming out to a 49 – 31 lead before Connor hit his second triple of the night. Tripp made a three, Bradley got a free throw, and Jasigh

Ransome made a trey to give Fort a 10 – 0 run but again the offense ran out of gas. Fort was only able to score one more point the rest of the quarter on a foul shot by Elijah Pultz as Wilson extended its lead to 56 – 42 at the end of the third quarter.

Elijah got a putback to open the fourth quarter then Evan scored to get the Indians to a ten point deficit at 56 – 46 but again the offense cooled as Wilson held the ball well the last three minutes of the game. Fort's only points came on an Elijah putback as the final score was Wilson 61, Fort Defiance 48.

Going into this game, Fort was in 4th place in Region 2B. The top eight schools were 1. Central Woodstock 2. Buckingham 3. Luray 4. Fort Defiance 5. Page County 6. Stuarts Draft 7. Strasburg 8. Riverheads If Fort can hold onto 4th place, the Indians will host a Regional Quarterfinal game in Region 2B Boys. These standings could change before the end of the season, of course.

Fort had three players in double figures: Bradley and Tripp each got 11 while Connor had 10. Snyder led Wilson with 24, all on three pointers. Keyvon Jones tossed in 10. Fort's free throw shooting, as it has been all season, was miserable, 5 for 17.

Grandfather's notes: Since this was Senior night, Gus started for the Indians. He didn't score but played a fair amount in the first three quarters and got at least four rebounds. He did not play in the fourth quarter. I believe he was pleased, though, if for no other reason than he personally had fifteen fans in the stands cheering him on, fourteen of whom were part of his family.

Fort's last regular season game is an away match at Waynesboro on Monday, February 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	2	2	1-6	11
Jasigh Ransome	0	1	0-2	3
Gio Armendariz Cruz	0	0	0-0	0
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	1	0	1-3	3
Carter Berry	0	1	0-0	3
Rhylan Martin	1	0	0-0	2
Elijah Pultz	2	0	1-4	5
Tripp Hanger	1	3	0-0	11
Connor Batten	1	2	2-2	10
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	0	0	0-0	0
TOTAL	8	9	5-17	48

The Staunton News Leader had this article about the game:

HIGH SCHOOL

Wilson boys win behind 24 from Snyder: Friday basketball roundup

Patrick Hite

Staunton News Leader

Wilson tops Fort boys

FORT DEFIANCE — Chase Snyder knocked down four 3-pointers in the second quarter as Wilson went from up three at the start of the second to up 11 at halftime. Wilson went on to beat Fort Defiance 61-48 in Shenandoah District boys basketball Friday.

Snyder finished the night with 24 points, including eight 3s, to lead Wilson Memorial (18-3, 8-2 Shenandoah) to its sixth win in the last seven games. Keyvon Jones added 10 points for the Hornets in the win.

Fort Defiance (12-8, 6-5 Shenandoah) got 11 points each from Bradley Hebb and Tripp Hanger. Connor Batten added 10 points for the Indians.

Wilson is at Riverheads Saturday night and at Stuarts Draft Monday to finish out the regular season. Fort finishes the regular season at Waynesboro Monday.



February 14 was Senior Night at Fort Defiance High



Seniors Johnny Whetzel, Bradley Hebb, Carter Berry, Rhylan Martin, and Gus Gutshall



The Gutshall Kids: Betsy, Gus, Freddie, and Henry

Game 22: Waynesboro 63, Fort Defiance 59

Waynesboro pulls upset over Fort Defiance, 63 – 59

by Joe Hill

The Waynesboro Generals, who were 4 – 18 coming into the game, upset the Fort Defiance Indians 63 – 59 on February 17 to end the regular season for both teams. The loss left Fort with a 12 – 10 record, 6 – 6 in the Shenandoah District, and likely will doom them to having to travel to open Region 2B play on February 25.

Unfortunately, the game was a typical for Fort Defiance: poor free throw shooting, miserable three point shooting, and entirely too many turnovers, including one with 8.5 seconds to go when Fort had a chance to win or at least send the game to overtime. Plus, Haden Morris had a monster game for the Little Giants, scoring 31 points, most of which came in the paint.

Two of Fort's normal starters were injured and played only sparingly. Gio Armendariz Cruz was still nursing a twisted ankle and Elijah Pultz was injured in the first half and didn't play at all afterwards. Ayden Thornton, who has been out of action for several games, was called into duty for a while. Bradley Hebb had his highest scoring night of the season, with 26, but no one else scored in double figures as Fort struggled all night to put the ball in the bucket. The Indians were as cold as it was in Waynesboro's dark gym was though the Little Giants did turn out a good crowd for their last game of the season.

Bradley started the scoring for Fort but Waynesboro responded with two baskets of their own. Carter Berry then popped in a three pointer to give the visitors a 5 – 4 lead. Waynesboro scored twice more before Connor Batten got a jumper to fall making it 8 – 7 in favor of the Little Giants. Waynesboro then scored the next six points before Bradley tossed in a three pointer then made a free throw to make it 14 – 11. Carter's deuce near the end of the quarter got the Indians within one, 14 – 13, at the end of the first quarter.

Bradley turned a steal into a layup and Fort retook the lead, 15 – 14 to open the second quarter. Waynesboro got a bucket then Fort got seven in a row on a trey and deuce by Bradley and two by Jasigh Ransome after an offensive rebound. Fort took its biggest lead of the night, 22 – 16, but Waynesboro roared back with ten unanswered points to go up 26 – 22. Rhylan Martin got a basket on an out-of-bounds play then Gus Gutshall made a free throw to get Fort within one, 26 – 25, but Waynesboro got the last say of the half with a field goal to take a 28 – 25 lead into the locker at the half.

In the first half, Fort made only 3 of its 19 attempts from beyond the three point arc. And they made only two of eight foul shots. They were fortunate to be close at the half.

Bradley made a free throw to open the second half. After a Waynesboro field goal, Rhylan hit a three pointer to get Fort back within one, then Bradley's basket in the lane briefly gave Fort the lead again at 31 – 30. Waynesboro retook the lead at 32 – 31 before Jasigh hammered home a three to make it 34 – 32 in favor of FDHS. Waynesboro then scored the next seven points to go up 39 – 34. Connor scored to make it 39 – 36 with 2:33 to go in the third. Waynesboro made a

three point shot then Evan did the same for the Indians. Both teams got a free throw to close the quarter; Rhylan got the one for Fort when he was fouled after a steal. The quarter ended with the score Waynesboro 43, Fort Defiance 40.

The fourth quarter saw Fort playing catch-up the entire time. Waynesboro went up 45 – 40 then Carter made a free throw. Waynesboro’s foul shot made it 46 – 41 before Bradley hit a nice fade away in the lane to make it 46 – 43. Waynesboro went up 48 – 43 then Bradley scored again and Tripp Hanger scored on a layup to get Fort within one, 48 – 47, with 5:10 to go. After a timeout, Waynesboro went up 51 – 47 before Jasigh made a trey to again get FD within one. Waynesboro then scored five straight to go up 56 – 50. Bradley’s jumper made it 56 – 52 with 3:02 to go. Waynesboro scored then Bradley again was able to score making it 58 – 54 with 2:13 to go. Waynesboro went up 60 – 54 then Fort committed another turnover leaving the home team with a six point lead with 40 seconds to go. The Indians weren’t to be counted out, however, as Tripp nailed a three pointer and Bradley scored after a steal with 18.8 seconds to go, making it 60 – 59. Waynesboro held the ball until there were 8.5 seconds to go when Lamari Nowell, a Waynesboro freshman, was fouled. He missed his first shot but made the second, leaving Fort with a chance to make a three pointer for the win or at least a field goal to send the game to overtime. Alas, Fort’s poor ball handling skills came back to bite them as they turned the ball over. Again Nowell was fouled with 4.6 seconds to go but this time he made both of his free throws, clinching the win for the Little Giants, 63 – 59.

Fort had nine turnovers in the second half, many in the crucial fourth quarter. Their three point shooting was better in the half, 5 – 13, but overall they were 8 – 32 shooting threes.

Grandfather’s notes: Gus was saddled with foul trouble in this game, with one of the three fouls called on him when he was no where near the action and the other two questionable.

Fort will play in a quarterfinal game in the Region 2B tournament starting Tuesday, February 25, against an undetermined foe.

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	9	2	2-7	26
Jasigh Ransome	1	2	0-0	8
Gio Armendariz Cruz	0	0	0-0	0
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	1	0-0	3
Carter Berry	1	1	1-2	6
Rhylan Martin	1	1	1-2	6
Elijah Pultz	0	0	0-0	0
Tripp Hanger	1	1	0-0	5
Connor Batten	2	0	0-1	4
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	0	0	1-2	1
TOTAL	15	8	5-14	59

The Staunton News Leader had this article about the game:

Waynesboro boys win

WAYNESBORO — Waynesboro ended its season on a high note, beating Fort Defiance 63-59 in Shenandoah Distirct boys basketball Monday.

Haden Morris had 31 points and Jackson Darden had 13 for Waynesboro (5-18, 3-9 Shenandoah) who finished the year with back-to-back wins for the first time this season.

Fort Defiance (12-9, 6-6) got 26 points from Bradley Hebb. The Indians are currently seeded fifth in the eight-team Region 2B tournament.



Game 23: Regional Quarterfinal Fort Defiance 62, Stuarts Draft 61

Fort mounts huge comeback to edge Stuarts Draft 62- 61 in Region 2B Quarterfinal

by Joe Hill

It sure looked like the season was over for the Fort Defiance Indians in their Region 2B Quarterfinal game at Stuarts Draft on February 25. With time expiring at the end of the third quarter, Fort fell behind by eighteen points, 55 - 37. Then the miracle started. As the buzzer sounded to end the third period, Gio Armendariz Cruz launched a desperation shot from midcourt which somehow found the bottom of the net.

Still, Fort, seeded 5th behind Stuarts Draft in Region 2B, began the fourth quarter down by fifteen, 55 - 40. Fort's fourth quarter defense was superb, though, forcing Draft to turn the ball over on eight of its last nine possessions. Gio opened the fourth quarter with a spinning move in the lane. That made it 55 - 42. After a Cougar field goal, Bradley Hebb found the range on a three point attempt. Gio made two free throws to get the Indians within ten at 57 - 47. Draft scored again but Gio answered with another three pointer making it 59 - 50. Jasigh Ransome then hit two free throws. Bradley got one of two foul shots to go in making it 59 - 53. At that point, Tripp Hanger swished a three pointer to get Fort within three at 59 - 56. Then, Bradley Hebb picked off a pass and took it all the way to narrow the lead to a single point at 59 - 58. Moments later it was Rhylan Martin's turn to pick off a pass and he was fouled on his way to the hoop. He missed his first free throw but nailed the second one to tie it up with 1:06 to go. After a timeout, Draft held the ball until Derrick Moore scored on an acrobatic drive with 18.6 seconds to put the home team ahead 61 - 59. Gio then came through again, nailing a three pointer from the top of the key with just 6.2 seconds left to give Fort its first lead since the opening minutes of the contest. Draft rushed the ball down the court but Moore walked with just 0.2 seconds left to seal the great comeback victory for Fort, 62 - 61.

The first three quarters belongs to Stuarts Draft. Bradley opened the scoring with a three pointer and Carter Berry got two in the lane to give FDHS an early 5 - 0 lead but it didn't last. Draft scored the next seven points to go up 7 - 5. Bradley then drove in the lane, scored, and was fouled. His free throw gave Fort a 8 - 7 lead. Donovan Jenkins then broke loose for a dunk to put the home team back up 9 - 8 before Gio found Evan Braun open for a deuce to return the lead to Fort, 10 - 9. After a Draft bucket, Jasigh bombed in a three pointer to give Fort a 13 - 11 lead. Draft scored the next seven points to go up 18 - 13 before Bradley again got two in the lane. Jenkins closed out the scoring in the first quarter which found Draft leading, 20 - 17.

Gio's jumper from the foul line got the Indians within one at 20 - 19 to start the second period. Draft then scored five in a row, including a layup after a steal by Moore, to go up 25 - 19 before Evan found Gus Gutshall open under the basket. Gus' basket made it 25 - 21. The Cougars then made another run, scoring eight consecutive points to widen their lead to 33 - 21. Jasigh made a

free throw as did Draft. Gio's two free throws ended the scoring with the home team leading 34 - 24 at the half.

The third quarter wasn't kind to Fort. Draft opened with a basket before Elijah Pultz got two for the Indians in the paint. Draft again scored but Carter Berry got a layup with 5:57 to go. Carter then found Gus open and Gus completed the play to make it 38 - 30. The Cougars went up 42 - 30 before Rhylan's three point missile found paydirt. After a Cougar bucket, Evan scored in the lane to make it 44 - 35. Draft scored again and led 46 - 35 with 1:52 to go in the quarter. The home team scored four more before Gio got two on a drive to make it 50 - 37 but Draft scored again, making it 52 - 37. With just seven seconds left in the period, Moore knocked in a three pointer to give SDHS their largest lead, 55 - 37. This set the stage for Gio's midcourt shot as time expired in the quarter.

Gio led Fort with 21 points. Bradley pitched in 14 and seven other players scored. Fort outscored Stuarts Draft 22 - 6 in the crucial fourth quarter. For SDHS, Moore had 22, fifteen of which came in the third quarter, and Landon Graber scored 18. Jenkins scored 11.

Grandfather's notes: Gus scored four points, making both of his field goal attempts. Those points were sorely needed in this one point win. He did not play in the fourth quarter. It was good to see him and all the Fort players smile as they exited the locker room after such a good win.

Stuarts Draft ended its season with a 14 - 9 record, 8 - 5 in the Shenandoah District. With the win, Fort's season continues with a Regional Semifinal game on Thursday, February 27, at Central Woodstock who defeated Riverheads 99 - 59 tonight. Fort's record improved to 13 - 10, 7 - 6 in the District.

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	2	2-3	14
Jasigh Ransome	0	1	3-4	6
Gio Armendariz Cruz	4	3	4-5	21
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	2	0	0-4	4
Carter Berry	2	0	0-0	4
Rhylan Martin	0	1	1-2	4
Elijah Pultz	1	0	0-0	2
Tripp Hanger	0	1	0-0	3
Connor Batten	0	0	0-0	0
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	2	0	0-0	4
TOTAL	14	8	10-18	62

The Harrisonburg Daily News Record had this article about the game:

BOYS BASKETBALL: REGION 2B QUARTERFINALS | NO. 5 FORT DEFIANCE 62, NO. 4 STUARTS DRAFT 61

Armendariz Cruz lifts Indians to comeback win

By CODY ELLIOTT Daily News-Record



Fort Defiance guard Gio Armendariz Cruz looks for a teammate between the Stuarts Draft defense during a Region 2B quarterfinal game on Tuesday.

STUARTS DRAFT — Gio Armendariz Cruz took one look at the bench, flashed a quick mean mug and let out a roar in excitement as his teammates and coaches surrounded him.

The Fort Defiance junior hit every big shot on Tuesday. But there was none bigger than his last.

“If I’m honest,” Armendariz Cruz said with a laugh, “I didn’t think that one was falling.”

The 6-foot standout guard’s pull-up 3-pointer in transition with 6.4 seconds remaining gave the fifth-seeded Indians their first lead since the opening quarter but it was all they needed to pull off a shocking 62-61 comeback win over fourth-seeded Stuarts Draft in the Region 2B quarterfinals at SDHS.

Fort trailed by 18 late in the third quarter and by 15 with six minutes remaining in the game.

"I was just bringing the ball up and I knew we were down two [points]," said Armendariz Cruz, who scored 10 of his team-high 21 points in the fourth quarter. "I've been working on my shot all summer, so I might as well pull it."

After a traditional three-point play from Derrick Moore with 5.6 seconds remaining in the third stretched the Cougars' lead to 18, Armendariz Cruz hit a deep trey at the third-quarter buzzer. That served as just the start of what turned into a magical final eight minutes for the Indians.

Armendariz Cruz and backcourt partner Bradley Hebb both hit 3s early in the fourth for Fort as it started to chip away at the lead. By the time Tripp Hanger hit one with 3:03 remaining, the visitors only trailed by three.

Although Fort didn't do anything particularly different defensively in the final frame, Draft struggled to adjust and turned it over on seven straight possessions at one point and eight out of the final nine.

"I think it was a combination of turnovers and layups," SDHS head coach Brad DeWitt said. "We knew they were going to pick up their defensive intensity and we just got sloppy with the ball. It allowed them to get easy baskets and then their confidence was rolling."

Hebb later got a steal and a layup with 2:05 remaining to cut the Indians' deficit to one.

Then, after both teams took turns coughing the ball up to each other on a trio of possessions, Rhylan Martin connected one of two free throws to even the score with 1:06 left.

"We talked about it on the bench and we know we're still in games even when we're down 15 or whatever," Hebb said. "We know we can do it. We stuck with the plan, and it paid off."

Out of a timeout, the Cougars managed to milk the clock down to under 30 seconds before Moore, who scored a game-high 22 points, got a driving bucket with 18 seconds remaining.

While the home crowd broke into a frenzy with excitement, Armendariz Cruz quickly raced down the floor before pulling up right in front of the Fort bench for the go-ahead 3-pointer.

"It was chaotic debating whether or not to call a timeout.," FDHS head coach Mike Gale said. "I kept going back and forth and was looking at my assistants. If we had missed the shot, I'd probably be second-guessing myself throughout the offseason. Those are things you work on, though. You play until the whistle blows and he hit an incredible shot."

Draft was called for a traveling violation on the ensuing play, sealing the Indians' win.

The ending left the SDHS home gym stunned and had Fort celebrating loudly in the hall outside the locker room, dousing water on teammates and screaming with joy.

"I knew we had another run in us, but I didn't know quite that much," said Gale, an FDHS alum who previously coached at Stuarts Draft. "I'm super proud of them. Draft is a quality ball club. This is all you can ask for — to come on the road and give yourself a chance."

The Indians are a team loaded with veteran talent, featuring five seniors and other underclassmen such as Armendariz Cruz and Hanger who have played a lot of varsity minutes.

As it continued to hang around on Tuesday, that experience ultimately paid off.

"You can tell when teams are fighting with each other or the body language [is bad]," Gale said. "I didn't see any of that. As a coach, to not see the poor body language when things look like they could be coming to an end, that's a credit to having a veteran squad."

Hebb added 14 points for the Indians (13-10) while Jasigh Ransome finished with six.

Martin, Evan Braun, Carter Berry and Augustus Gutshall scored four apiece for Fort.

"We've got experience," Hebb said. "Ever since I was a freshman on varsity, it's just helped me get in the flow of the game and not rush things. I feel like I'm a smart player."

In addition to Moore's big night, the Cougars were led by Landon Graber with 18 points while senior big man Donovan Jenkins finished with 11 and Christian Moats added five.

Moats, Jenkins, Graber and Ryan Ramsey are four seniors for Draft who will now depart the program, but DeWitt heaped praise on them afterward for the impact they've made.

"They've really kind of put the program on the map," DeWitt said. "They've played really good basketball for us. It's good for the underclassmen to see their work ethic because they do things the right way. They've been a big part of turning this program around."

The Cougars (14-9), after returning a majority of their roster from a team that reached the Region 2B tournament a season ago, entered this season with sky-high expectations.

While Draft had its moments, inconsistency plagued it at the worst times.

"In regional play, every team is pretty good," DeWitt said. "It comes down to who can handle adversity better. We didn't do a good job of that tonight and we always want to give credit. [Fort] definitely had an impact on how we played tonight. Hats off to them."

The Indians have battled their own fair share of consistency issues throughout the season.

Just last week, Fort lost to Waynesboro to close out the regular season — a setback that Hebb and Armendariz Cruz both said left the entire program motivated to right the ship.

“It shows us we can really persevere even when we’re down a lot,” Armendariz Cruz said.

It took three quarters — and then some — on Tuesday, for the Indians to finally get going.

Once they did, though, they left the Stuarts Draft gym in shock and set off a celebration in the visiting locker room that players and coaches alike couldn’t help but smile about.

“It’s one of those things where, when you have the lead, you want to milk the clock,” Gale said. “Everybody does it and we were just fortunate enough to get some critical turnovers and our guys anticipated and did their job. It really just all comes down to effort.”

Up next for Fort is a trip north to take on top-seeded Central in the regional semifinals.

The Falcons are the Bull Run District regular-season and tournament champions, have won eight straight games and crushed Riverheads by 40 in their regional quarterfinal.

But like Tuesday, this experienced Fort squad is going in with the belief that it can do the improbable.

“Once I get that groove going a bit,” Armendariz Cruz said, “I knew they couldn’t stop me.”

Fort Defiance 17 7 16 22 — 62

Stuarts Draft 20 14 21 6 — 61

FORT DEFIANCE (13-10) — Hebb 5 2-3 14, Ransome 1 3-4 6, Armendariz Cruz 7 4-5 21, Braun 2 0-4 4, Berry 2 0-0 4, Martin 1 1-2 4, Pultz 1 0-0 2, Hanger 1 0-0 3, Batten 0 0-0 0, Gutshall 2 0-0 4. Totals 22 10-18 62.

STUARTS DRAFT (14-9) — Kier-Brown 0 0-0 0, Moats 2 0-0 5, Hymes-Williams 0 0-0 0, J. Diggs 1 0-0 2, Ramsey 0 1-2 1, Graber 7 2-3 18, Moore 9 1-2 22, Veselinovic 0 0-0 0, Jenkins 5 1-3 11, D. Diggs 0 2-2 2. Totals 24 6-10 61.

3-Point Goals — Fort Defiance 6 (Armendariz Cruz 3, Hebb 2, Ransome), Stuarts Draft 4 (Graber 2, Moore 2).

The Staunton News Leader had this article:

Cruz buries 3 to get Fort Defiance one win away from a state tournament berth

PATRICK HITE Staunton News Leader

STUARTS DRAFT — Just before the buzzer sounded Tuesday night to end the third quarter, Gio Armendariz Cruz hit a half-court shot. Other than drawing some oohs and ahs from the crowd, it really didn't seem like a big deal, cutting Stuarts Draft's lead from 18 to 15.

Turned out to be a pretty big deal.

Cruz would go on to hit two more 3-pointers in the game, the final one coming with nine seconds left. That proved to be the game-winner, giving Fort Defiance an improbable rally to win 62-61 in the Region 2B quarterfinals.

The No. 5 seeded Indians (13-9) will now travel to top seed Central Woodstock (23-3) Thursday for the regional semifinals with a spot in the state tournament on the line. Central beat Riverheads 99-59 Tuesday to advance.

"I didn't completely think it was over in the fourth," Fort coach Mike Gale said. "I knew we had another run in us ... I didn't know quite that much. I am super proud of them."

Fort slowly whittled that 15-point Stuarts Draft lead to start the fourth down to nothing when Rhylan Martin hit a free throw with 1:06 left to tie the game at 59-59.

For a moment, it looked like Stuarts Draft's Derrick Moore would be the hero, weaving his way through the paint for a bucket — part of his game-high 22 points — with 19 seconds left, putting the Cougars on top 61-59.

Cruz had other ideas. He inbounded the ball to Bradley Hebb who got the ball back to Cruz at halfcourt. The junior then got to the left wing and, with nine seconds left, buried a 3.

"I've been working on my shot all summer," Cruz said. "Might as well just pull it. I hit that one buzzer beat to end the third and I was feeling it after that."

Gale thought about calling a timeout after Moore's bucket.

"Luckily for me I didn't call one," Gale said. "If we missed the shot I would have been second guessing myself throughout the offseason."

In the final 3:34 of the game, Stuarts Draft turned the ball over seven times, including on the final possession as they tried to set up an answer to Cruz's shot. Fort scored seven points off of those turnovers to tie the game.

"It's crucial," Gale said of his team's defense. "We were fortunate enough to get some critical turnovers. Guys anticipated and were doing their job."

It was a rough way to end the year for Stuarts Draft (14-9). The Cougars graduate four seniors, including Landon Graber who had 18 Tuesday and Donovan Jenkins who had 11.

Cruz finished the game with 21 points. Hebb had 14 for Fort.

"It feels great," Cruz said. "It shows us that we can really persevere even when we're down a lot."

Fort, which ended the regular season dropping its last two, now has new life after rallying for the win.

"This is all you can ask for," Gale said "Come on the road and give yourself a chance. It didn't look good there, but we gave ourself a chance."



Seniors and long-time teammates Gus and Carter enjoying their last days on the court

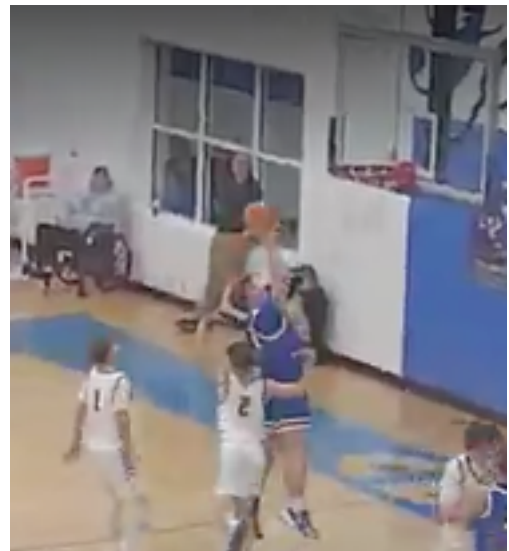
Game 24: Regional Semifinal Central 70, Fort Defiance 68

Central nips Fort, 70 - 68, in Region 2B Semifinals

by Joe Hill

Fort Defiance once again roared back from a big deficit but this time the Indians ended a little short as Central of Woodstock pulled out a 70 - 68 win in the Region 2B Semifinals played on February 27 in the Central gym. Fort was down by as many as 16 points but their comeback, and their season, ended just short. The Indians never led in this game, falling behind early by fourteen in the first quarter, before clawing back to make it a game in the end.

The officiating was undoubtedly the worst of the season. In particular, two calls made the difference in the game. First, Tripp Hanger was called for a charging foul with 0.1 seconds left in the first quarter which would have given the Falcons possession under Fort's basket with virtually no chance of scoring. But, several seconds after the whistle, the officials decided to call Tripp for a technical foul which enabled Central to send its best foul shooter to the line and make two free throws instead of taking the ball out of bounds 84 feet from the rim. Secondly, with Central ahead 55 - 39 in the third quarter, Bradley Hebb drove in the lane and fed an open Gus Gutshall who immediately put the ball in the basket and was fouled which should have given him a bonus free throw. But, the inept official said the foul occurred before the shot so the two points were nullified as was the free throw. A replay of this on NFHS, shown on the picture to the right, clearly shows he was fouled in the act of shooting and the basket should have counted. These are just two of many poor calls by the referees. There were a number of bad calls against Central, too, but Fort bore the brunt on most of the bad whistles. One would think that in a regional semifinal game on a Thursday night VHSL could have come up with competent officials. Clearly this did not happen.



Gus was fouled in the act of shooting

The first quarter looked like a blowout for the home team. Central made six three point shots in the quarter. Meanwhile, Fort turned the ball over eight times, allowing the Falcons to jump out to a 28 - 16 lead. Here's how this happened: Central's Haiden Click, who scored 19 points in this quarter alone, hit a three pointer to start the scoring. Click would hit four more three's in the first period. Bradley drove into the lane and was fouled. He made one of his two free throws to make it 3 - 1 but Central made the next two field goals to go up 7 - 1. Carter Berry got two in the lane to make it 7 - 3 before Click hit on another trey. Bradley drove in the lane for two and Central responded with a jumper to make it 12 - 5. Jasigh Ransome then fired in a three pointer for FDHS but Click responded with another one for the Falcons. Bradley again scored in the lane, making it 15 - 10 but Central scored the next five to go up 20 - 10 with 2:45 to go in the

period. Another Click triple extended the lead to 13 before Elijah Pultz got two for the visitors with 2:13 to go. Another three pointer extended the Falcons' lead to fourteen, 26 - 12. Gio Armendariz Cruz's two free throws improved Fort's standing to 26 - 14. Then, on an out-of-bounds play under the basket, Gus took a pass and used his left hand to softly bank in a jumper making it 26 - 16 with 41 seconds to go in the quarter. Central held the ball for a last shot but a three second call turned the ball back to the Indians with seven seconds left. Tripp took a pass from Gio and headed for the basket where the charging foul was called and, subsequently, the ill-fated technical foul. Central's two foul shots by Click from the technical with 0.1 seconds left gave them a comfortable 28 - 16 lead after one quarter.

Fort was able to get back to a four point deficit, 28 - 24, after Bradley and Gio each made one of two free throws then each scored on a drive into the lane. Another Central three pointer extended their lead to 31 - 24 before Bradley again made one of two free throws and Evan Braun scored in the lane, making it 31 - 27. The Falcons extended the lead to 36 - 27 before Rhylan Martin bombed in a three pointer for the Indians with 3:50 to go in the period. Five consecutive points by the home team ran their lead to 41 - 30. Jasigh then made his second three pointer of the contest. After a missed shot, Rhylan rebounded and got his follow-up to drop as time expired leaving the score at the half at Central 41, Fort Defiance 35.

In the first half, Fort was plagued with its usual four issues: bad three point shooting, poor shot selection in the lane, unsatisfactory foul shooting, and turnovers. The Indians committed twelve turnovers in the half all of which the large and rowdy home crowd celebrated.

Central opened the second half with another three pointer but Bradley followed up with a layup. Central extended the lead to 51 - 37 before Bradley again scored on a drive. Two more baskets by the Falcons made it 55 - 39 which set the stage for the bad call on Gus' basket. Fort did manage to score the next four points, two on Gio's free throws and one on basket by Elijah with an assist from Gio. Central went up 57 - 43 but Fort got the last five points of the quarter, three on another triple from Jasigh and two on a Gio layup. The score at the end of the third was 57 - 48 in favor of the home team.

Fort made its move in the fourth. Tripp started it with a three pointer. After a Central bucket, Gio scored on a drive with 6:40 left on the clock. Central traded baskets with Evan making the score 61 - 55. Two more Central field goals gave them a commanding 65 - 55 lead with 4:40 to go. Rhylan and Gio each hit three pointers to cut the lead to four, 65 - 61 with 3:09 left. A Central basket made it 67 - 61 but Gio hit another three pointer reducing the lead to just three, 67 - 64. Fort had chances to get even closer but bad shot selection down the stretch enabled Central to rebound and hold the ball. Two free throws by Maddox Davis gave them a 69 - 64 lead with 1:11 left. Again Fort fumbled away a chance to close the gap until Gio finally rebounded a miss by Tripp and scored, making it 69 - 66 with 24.6 seconds left. Click was fouled and he missed his first free throw but buried his second one giving the Falcons an insurmountable four point lead with just 11.3 seconds left. Gio's layup with three seconds left got Fort within two but Central did not have to inbound the ball as time expired giving them a narrow 70 - 68 win.

In addition to the two bad calls, Fort committed self-inflicted wounds by missing foul shots. For the game, FDHS was 8 for 13 from the foul line, which is better than their season average of under 50% but still those missed free throws contributed substantially to the loss. The Indians had seven more turnovers in the second half for a total of nineteen. Another contributing cause

for the loss was three point shooting. Central outshot Fort, making eleven three pointers while the Indians only made eight.

Click ended up with 25 points for the Falcons. Luke Williams added sixteen. For FDHS, Gio scored 23 points and Bradley had thirteen. Central's record improved to 24 - 3 while Fort's season ended at 13 - 11. It was an exciting game, much better than the last time these two teams met. On December 30, Central beat Fort 78 - 53. It was still a heartbreaker, especially for the five seniors who have now played their last game in a Fort Defiance uniform.



Grandfather's notes: This was a typical game for Gus--too little playing time, zero turnovers, several rebounds, perfect shooting from the field, and, as described above and viewable on video, was robbed of more points thanks to bad officiating. As I have stated over and over after watching him play more than one hundred games for FDHS in the past five years, he was underused and overlooked. Yet, he played hard, hustled, scored, rebounded, and tried his best. I've admired his attitude all season. His coaches may have, but I haven't overlooked his smart, unselfish play, good shot selection, and mistake-free minutes. I was blessed to have watched him and his team for his three years of JV ball and two years of Varsity. Lynn and I will sorely miss watching #40 on the court.

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	5	0	3-7	13
Jasigh Ransome	0	3	0-0	9
Gio Armendariz Cruz	6	2	5-6	23
Miguel Uribe	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	2	0	0-0	4
Carter Berry	1	0	0-0	2
Rhylan Martin	1	2	0-0	8
Elijah Pultz	2	0	0-0	4
Tripp Hanger	0	1	0-0	3
Connor Batten	0	0	0-0	0
Ayden Thornton	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	1	0	0-0	2
TOTAL	18	8	8-13	68

The Staunton News Leader had this article about the game:

Fort Defiance rally comes up short in loss to Central-Woodstock: Region 2B boys basketball

PATRICK HITE Staunton News Leader

WOODSTOCK — Fort Defiance came up three points short of a trip to the state tournament.

Like in their regional quarterfinal win Tuesday, the No. 5-seeded Indians made a furious rally, but it wasn't enough in falling to top seeded Central-Woodstock 70-68 Thursday in the Region 2B boys basketball semifinals.

Fort Defiance actually rallied twice. First, Fort found itself in a 14-point hole in the first quarter, but managed to get it to four with 6:10 left in the opening half. Fort trailed by six at the break.

Fort couldn't keep the momentum in the third quarter, falling behind by 16 with 1:59 left in the period. Central used a 14-4 run to open up the lead.

Much like the game against Stuarts Draft on Tuesday — in which Fort trailed by 18 late in the third quarter — the Indians cut the lead to three twice in the fourth.

Gio Armendariz Cruz hit a 3-pointer with 2:48 left to cut the Central lead to 67-64. Fort forced two empty possession by the Falcons the next two trips down the court, but couldn't capitalize on either. The third trip down Central got to the foul line, stretching its lead to five.

Once again Cruz got Fort within three on a putback with 39.6 seconds left. Central made one of two free throws and Fort got back down court to score inside, but time ran out on the comeback.

Fort finished the season 13-10.

Central will play No. 3 Luray in the regional championship Saturday, 8 p.m. at Shenandoah University. Luray upset No. 2 Buckingham 91-71. The girls Region 2B championship game will be played at 6 p.m. at Shenandoah. Those semifinals are set for Friday night.

2024-25 Box Score Season Statistics

Name	2Pt FG	3Pt FG	FTM	FTA	FT%	Points	Per Game
John Whetzel	1	2	0	0	0%	8	0.3
Bradley Hebb	75	11	22	84	26%	205	8.5
Jasigh Ransome	25	50	20	33	61%	220	9.2
Gio Armendariz Cruz	107	18	69	102	68%	337	14.0
Miguel Uribe	2	0	5	6	83%	9	0.4
Evan Braun	21	20	18	43	42%	120	5.0
Carter Berry	20	5	7	20	35%	62	2.6
Rhylan Martin	16	24	13	27	48%	117	4.9
Elijah Pultz	46	0	10	35	29%	102	4.3
Tripp Hanger	16	57	20	29	69%	223	9.3
Connor Batten	15	13	3	6	50%	72	3.0
Ayden Thornton	6	1	2	2	100%	17	0.7
Gus Gutshall	35	0	16	27	59%	86	3.6
FDHS	385	201	205	414	50%	1578	65.8
OPPONENT						1461	60.9
WINS	13						
LOSSES	11						



The fan turnout at many of Fort's games this year was disappointing.

2024 - 25 Season Statistics from Hudl.com

#	Athletes	Games Played	Value Point System	Field Goals Made	Field Goals Attempted	Field Goal %	2 Pt		2 Pt Field Goal %
							Field Goals Made	2 Pt Field Attempted	
		GP	VPS	FGM	FGA	FG%	2FGM	2FGA	2FGA%
1	<u>Johnny Whetzel</u>	9	1.04	3	11	27.3%	1	2	50.0%
2	Bradley Hebb	23	1.15	85	185	45.9%	73	153	47.7%
3	Jasigh Ransome	24	0.97	74	201	36.8%	24	47	51.1%
4	Gio Armendariz Cruz	23	0.95	128	347	36.9%	109	281	38.8%
10	Miguel Uribe	16	0.35	2	23	8.7%	2	15	13.3%
12	Evan Braun	24	0.89	41	128	32.0%	22	47	46.8%
14	Carter Berry	24	1.16	24	77	31.2%	20	52	38.5%
20	Rhylan Martin	21	0.77	41	150	27.3%	17	44	38.6%
22	Elijah Pultz	24	1.24	45	97	46.4%	45	95	47.4%
24	Tripp Hanger	24	0.79	73	251	29.1%	16	50	32.0%
31	Connor Batten	21	0.68	27	97	27.8%	14	30	46.7%
32	Ayden Thornton	14	1.66	7	13	53.8%	6	10	60.0%
40	Gus Gutshall	24	1.44	36	77	46.8%	36	77	46.8%
	SEASON	24	1.01	586	1657	35.4%	385	903	42.6%

#	Athletes	3 Pt Field Goals Made	3 Pt Field Goals Attempted	3 Pt Field Goal %	Free Throws Made	Free Throws Attempted	Free Throw %	Points	Points Per Game
		3FGM	3FGA	3FG%	FTM	FTA	FT%	PF	PPG
1	<u>Johnny Whetzel</u>	2	9	22.2%	0	0	0.0%	8	0.9
2	Bradley Hebb	12	32	37.5%	22	83	26.5%	204	8.9
3	Jasigh Ransome	50	154	32.5%	20	34	58.8%	218	9.1
4	Gio Armendariz Cruz	19	66	28.8%	69	105	65.7%	344	15.0
10	Miguel Uribe	0	8	0.0%	6	7	85.7%	10	0.6
12	Evan Braun	19	81	23.5%	18	46	39.1%	119	5.0
14	Carter Berry	4	25	16.0%	7	21	33.3%	59	2.5
20	Rhylan Martin	24	106	22.6%	13	25	52.0%	119	5.7
22	Elijah Pultz	0	2	0.0%	10	34	29.4%	100	4.2
24	Tripp Hanger	57	201	28.4%	20	30	66.7%	223	9.3
31	Connor Batten	13	67	19.4%	3	6	50.0%	70	3.3
32	Ayden Thornton	1	3	33.3%	2	2	100.0%	17	1.2
40	Gus Gutshall	0	0	0.0%	15	26	57.7%	87	3.6
	SEASON	201	754	26.7%	205	419	48.9%	1578	65.8

2024 - 25 Season Statistics from Hudl.com

#	Athletes	Offensive	Defensive	Total	Assists	Turn-	Assist to	Turnover
		Rebounds	Rebounds	Rebounds		overs	Turnover	Turnover
		OREB	DREB	REB	AST	TO	A/TO	TO%
1	<u>Johnny Whetzel</u>	1	6	7	1	4	0.3	26.7%
2	Bradley Hebb	50	47	97	72	52	1.4	18.8%
3	Jasigh Ransome	25	45	70	21	43	0.5	16.5%
4	Gio Armendariz Cruz	34	55	89	77	96	0.8	19.5%
10	Miguel Uribe	0	2	2	5	11	0.5	29.5%
12	Evan Braun	37	67	104	21	34	0.6	18.5%
14	Carter Berry	42	50	92	28	26	1.1	23.0%
20	Rhylan Martin	32	29	61	12	18	0.7	10.0%
22	Elijah Pultz	79	68	147	8	22	0.4	16.3%
24	Tripp Hanger	18	41	59	16	26	0.6	8.9%
31	Connor Batten	16	22	38	5	17	0.3	14.5%
32	Ayden Thornton	10	16	26	3	4	0.8	22.3%
40	Gus Gutshall	71	49	120	5	8	0.6	8.2%
	SEASON	415	497	912	274	361	0.6	17.9%

#	Athletes	Minutes	Deflections	Steals	Blocks	Charges	Fouls
		Played				Taken	
		MINS	DEFL	STL	BLK	CHG	FOUL
1	<u>Johnny Whetzel</u>	43	2	3	1	0	0
2	Bradley Hebb	510	37	43	1	0	51
3	Jasigh Ransome	433	42	31	0	0	28
4	Gio Armendariz Cruz	558	41	40	4	0	24
10	Miguel Uribe	64	4	2	0	0	5
12	Evan Braun	458	35	32	7	1	62
14	Carter Berry	410	23	32	3	0	36
20	Rhylan Martin	302	34	21	3	3	31
22	Elijah Pultz	379	42	43	8	0	61
24	Tripp Hanger	398	24	18	2	4	15
31	Connor Batten	167	6	9	0	0	12
32	Ayden Thornton	82	2	4	8	0	12
40	Gus Gutshall	273	14	6	3	0	27
	SEASON	4077	306	284	40	9	364

Final 2024-25 Shenandoah District Standings

Shenandoah District Winter 2024 - 25 Boys Varsity Basketball Standings		
Team	Conference Record	Overall Record
Staunton	12 - 0	22 - 3
Wilson Memorial	9 - 3	19 - 5
Stuarts Draft	8 - 5	14 - 9
Fort Defiance	7 - 6	13 - 11
Riverheads	4 - 8	11 - 13
Waynesboro	3 - 9	5 - 18
Buffalo Gap	0 - 12	5 - 14

Fort Defiance Boys Basketball	
2013 - 2025	
Year	Record
2013-14	22 - 3
2014-15	18 - 6
2015-16	12 - 11
2016-17	11 - 12
2017-18	11 - 16
2018-19	3 - 23
2019-20	6 - 17
2020-21	8 - 3
2021-22	10 - 12
2022-23	14 - 10
2023-24	11 - 12
2024-25	13 - 11



This was a position Gus played too often this season.

2024-25 All-District Players: Gio Armendariz Cruz, Tripp Hanger, Bradley Hebb

By Patrick Hite for the Staunton News Leader

Staunton's Joaquin Bell was named boys basketball player of the year in the Shenandoah District. The senior averaged 21.6 points a game in the regular season and put up a career-high 39 in Staunton's regional quarterfinal win over Heritage on Monday night.

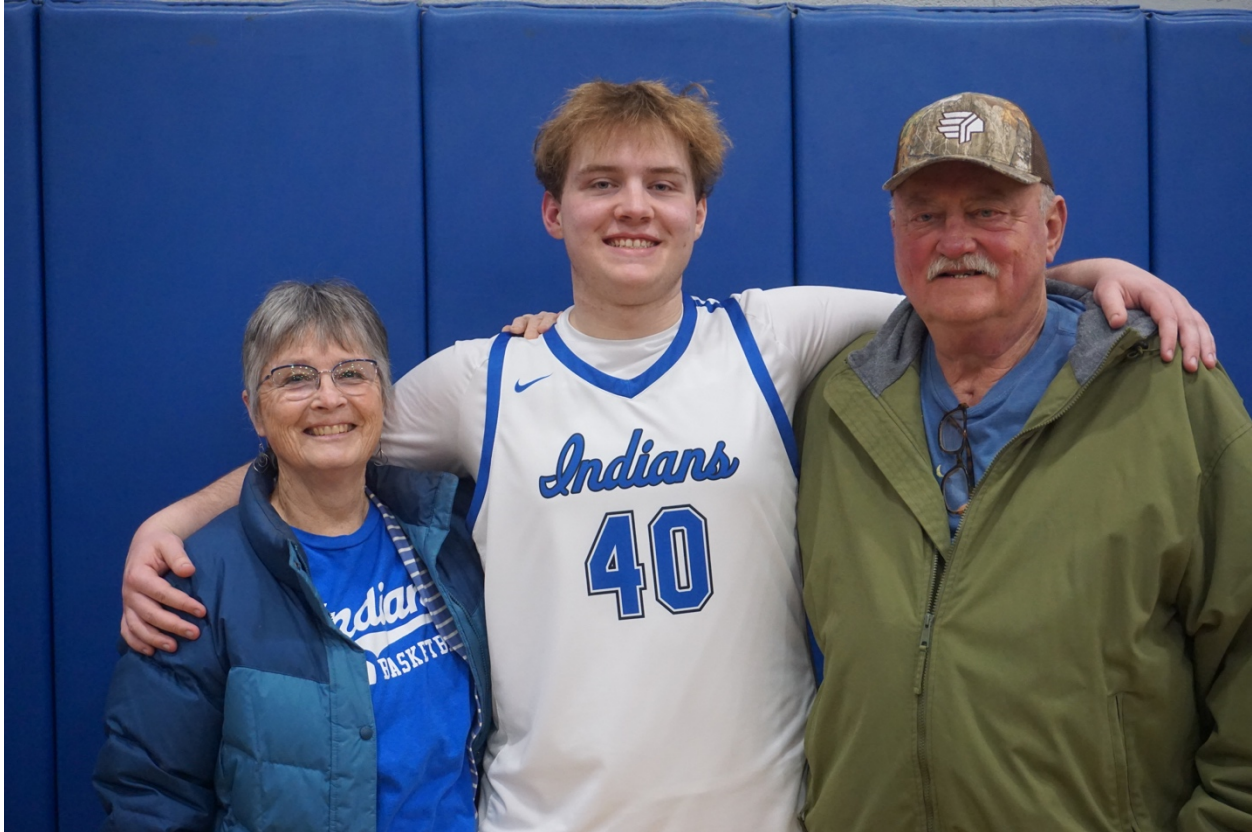
Staunton's Kevin Madden was named boys coach of the year and Stuarts Draft's Chad Seibert was named girls coach of the year. Madden led the Storm to a 21-2 regular season mark — and an undefeated record in the Shenandoah District — as Staunton won the regular-season district championship. Seibert led Stuarts Draft to a share of the district title and an 18-4 record overall.

Along with Bell, the rest of the boys all-district first team includes Fort Defiance's Gio Armendariz Cruz, Staunton's Ky'Ree Scott, Stuarts Draft's Derrick Moore and Landon Graber, Waynesboro's Haden Morris and Wilson Memorial's Chase Snyder and Mason McWhorter.

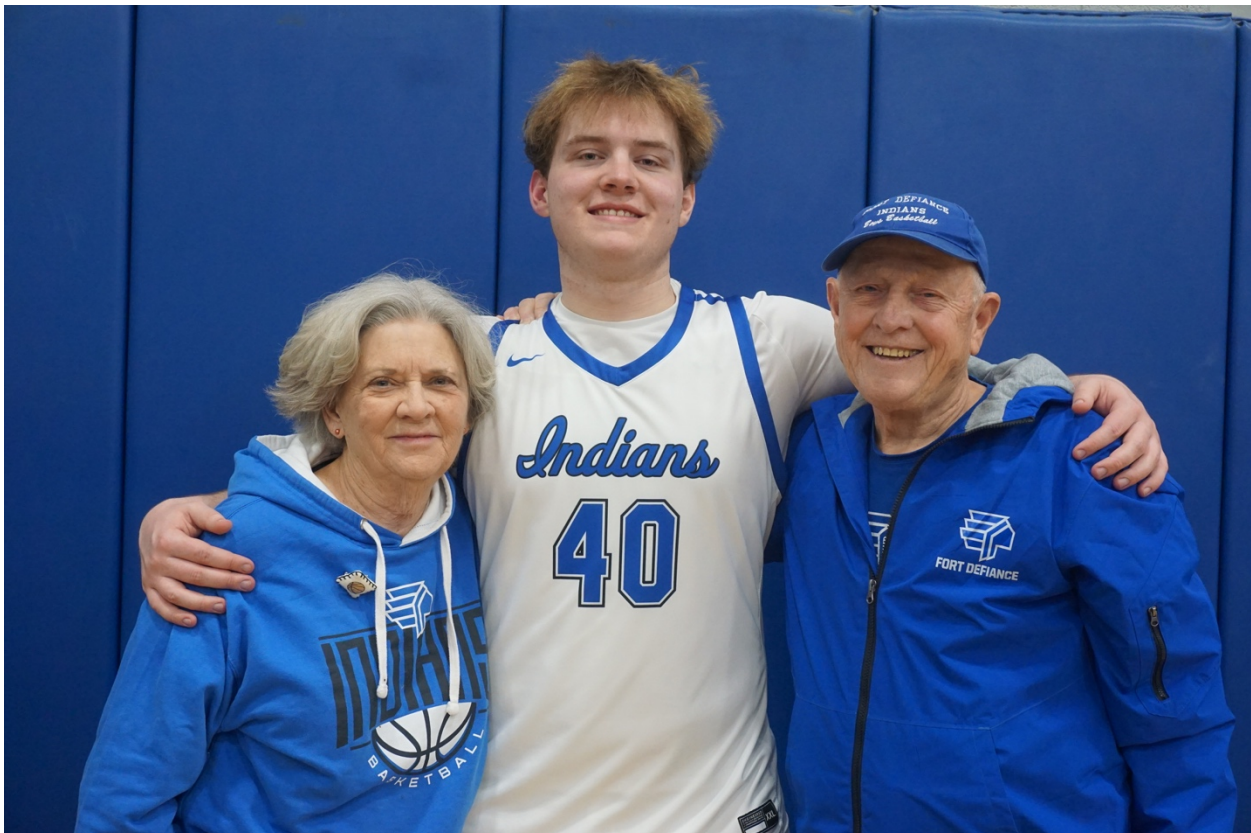
Second team for the boys was Buffalo Gap's Isaac Goff, Fort Defiance's Tripp Hanger and Bradley Hebb, Riverheads' Henley Dunlap and William Gardner, Staunton's Anthony Renne, Stuarts Draft's Donovan Jenkins and Wilson Memorial's Eli Irving and Keyvon Jones.



The next book will feature this Gutshall basketball player, Freddie



Gus with Grandparents Susan and Allen Gutshall



Gus with Grandparents Lynn and Joe Hill

THEN: JAN 5, 2019



NOW



SENIOR SUNDAY

Beth Metcalfe forwarded this cool picture

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 in this book 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 from Hudl.com:
 - Gus' playing time was 9th on the team. Some played twice as much as he did. He averaged playing 11 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

FORT DEFIANCE BASKETBALL 2024- 25



Gus had an army of fans at every game including this group of 14 family members on Senior Night

