

Dec. 29 ESCIT Girls Basketball



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Steinert's Lauren Matrisciano flips a pass to a teammate while in between two Conwell Egan defenders during today's ESCIT game (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Hamilton drops heart-breaker as Johnson's buzzer beater just misses

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Dec. 29: The Hamilton West girls' basketball team is off to a rough start, but today's game may have been the toughest one yet.

The Hornets tried to use a late comeback and fell short when Alexis Johnson's 3-pointer went off the back iron as time ran out, leaving West on the short end of a 48-47 loss to Rutgers Prep in the ESCIT's Renee Keister Flight's first round.

RP is rebuilding and came in at 0-3, and this was definitely a winnable game for the Hornets (1-3), who dropped their third straight.

"We should have won this," said Johnson, who had 29 points, 10 rebounds and six blocked shots. "We've been working hard. We didn't plan on losing. We wanted to win."

The plus side of this one is that Hamilton mounted two impressive rallies. The down side is, after the first run put the Hornets in control, they let it get away and the second run came up just short.

"This just motivates me to work harder, keep going and lead my team better," said Johnson, who again drew intense double team with the game on the line.

Hamilton trailed 14-7 after one quarter, 23-18 after two and 29-20 with five minutes left in the third. Johnson's lay-up and 3-pointer sparked a 17-3 run, however, as Hamilton roared to a 37-32 advantage.

But Ryaan Tucker hit two free throws for Rutgers Prep to end the quarter, and it started the Somerset County team on a 12-0 run that opened a 44-37 advantage.

RP bumped the advantage to 48-39 with 2:55 remaining but the Hornets battled back again with eight straight points. Johnson hit a jumper, Erin Septer nailed a 3-pointer, Johnson made a foul shot and Courtney Adams drove the baseline for a layup to make it 48-47 with 48 seconds left.

Hamilton then had three straight chances to go ahead, but Adams had a shot blocked, Johnson missed a floater and then missed the final 3-pointer. Hamilton inbounded with 5.2 seconds left (with Septer getting it past 6-foot-11 Marvadene Anderson, no easy task), and Johnson got the ball.

She took two dribbles and launched a little left of the lane beyond the arc. The ball was on target, but went hard off the iron.

"I thought it was good," said Johnson, who was not alone.

It spoiled what could have been a momentum-building comeback for the Hornets.

"We just had to keep our composure and keep playing hard," Johnson said of the rally. "It just didn't work out the way we planned. We'll just go after it the next game, keep working together and playing as a team."

That next game comes at noon tomorrow when the Hornets meet Steinert in what could be the start of a lot of meetings between the two.

"That doesn't bother me," Johnson said of frequent match-ups with the Spartans. "I like it."

Usarzewicz puts her toughness on display in loss to Conwell-Egan

If you ever want to win a wager, take Adrienne Boucher's forehead over Lindsay Usarzewicz's nose in a fight.

The two met in the fourth quarter of Steinert's 45-37 loss to Conwell-Egan in the today's ESCIT game, the schnozz lost out to the temple. Usarzewicz's nose exploded with blood as she was helped

into the lockerroom with a towel over her face with 5:50 remaining.

What looked to be the end of the day was only an interruption, as Usarzewicz returned with 3:45 left.

“You’re gonna get everything she has, that’s the bottom line,” coach Bryan Rogers said.

There seemed to be some disagreement between Boucher and Usarzewicz as to who ran into who (Boosh emerged unscathed), but in all seriousness it was an unfortunate time for it to happen.

After three quarters in which Steinert, and particularly Usarzewicz, couldn’t make a shot, the senior guard suddenly got hot. The Spartans (2-2), who trailed 23-7 at halftime, got within 35-29 when Usarzewicz sandwiched two 3-pointers around a jumper to start the final quarter.

After a 3-pointer by Morgan Pepito stopped the run, the collision occurred. The timing was particularly frustrating for Usarzewicz, a classic streak shooter who was on a hot streak when she went down.

“My dad (Steve) came in the lockerroom and said ‘You’re fine,’ and I said ‘I want to play, I want to play,’” Usarzewicz said. “The trainer was like ‘Wait, I have to clean you up,’ and I said ‘No, I just want to play!’”

By the time she returned, however, Steinert had gone cold again and scored just six points in the final four minutes.

But it was still an impressive display of toughness by Usarzewicz, who prides herself on it.

“I was a tom boy when I was little, I was the one playing football and soccer with the guys,” she said. “So yeah, I learned how to be tough.”

Unfortunately for the Spartans, there was little toughness in the first half when they shot just 2-for-24 in falling behind by 16.

“We just dug ourselves too deep of a hole in the first half,” said Rogers, who got 11 points from both Usarzewicz and Gabi Bennett. “If we limit the damage in the first half, it becomes a one- or two-possession game in the fourth quarter.”

Steinert missed open shots and a lot of layups in the half.

“We can’t let that happen, or this is what’s gonna happen,” said Usarzewicz, who is not going for X-rays tonight and hopes to play against Hamilton tomorrow. “We’re gonna be down by a lot and it will be too much to come back from.”

It didn’t help that Steinert (as well as the other township teams) had just three hours of practice this week due to restrictions of gym use.

“At the beginning of the season, especially with new girls on the team, you’d like to get an opportunity to practice and continue to improve,” Rogers said. “But with the time we have, you’re really limited to some degree with what you can do.”

The second half-comeback was little more than the Spartans starting to connect on their shots.

“Pretty much,” Rogers said. “Lindsay missed a lot in the first half and knocks down three straight in the second. We got some steals and actually made some lay-ups. Making shots is contagious, it’s like hitting in baseball. One guy hits and everybody hits.”

Or in this case, one nose hits and one forehead hits.

Rogers just hopes that’s not contagious too.

Nottingham drops consolation game to PDS, goes 0-2 in tournament

Nottingham dropped two straight in the Princeton Day School Holiday Invitational, losing to host PDS 34-18.

Playing without star forward Jalliet Taylor, Nottingham had a 13-10 halftime lead but was outscored 24-5 after intermission. Imani Alston had six points to lead the 'Stars.

Nottingham fell 48-38 to Pinelands in Wednesday's first round game. The Northstars have lost four straight since an opening-day win at Princeton.