

Jan. 13 Girls Basketball



Nottingham's Imani Alston (12) tussles with Allentown's Erin Primich in an attempt to grab a rebound during tonight's game. Anne Lee looks on for the Redbirds (Photo by Wes "The Media Mogul" Kirkpatrick)

Northstars lose again, but now it's about growth rather than wins

By Rich Fisher

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Jan. 13: Dalia Lopez admits the goals have changed.

“In the beginning of the year, it was about trying to win games,” said the lone remaining senior on the Nottingham High girls’ basketball roster. “At this point we’re just setting little goals to get to that point where we want to win games.”

That’s what happens when a team undergoes a complete overhaul three weeks into the season.

When Leo Mahon dismissed two of Nottingham’s best players and then resigned due to occurrences in the aftermath, it pretty much left a freshman coach guiding a mostly JV team against varsity competition.

And so, the goals lower and there are growing pains, like tonight’s 66-41 loss to visiting Allentown.

But even in defeat, Nottingham (1-8) had little victories. It won the third quarter after scoring just one first-quarter point and trailing 28-7 at halftime.

Lopez had 11 points and 11 rebounds, Imani Alston had 15 second-half points, Kelsey Ignace showed a nice shooting touch en route to eight points and Annisa Holman had seven rebounds.

This has become a season to be measured by growth, not results.

“We had the girls give us a sheet of paper for individual goals they want to reach by the end of the season,” said coach Lauren Kelly, who was promoted from the freshman team last Friday. “They’re short term goals they’d like to improve on individually and take it day by day.



Lauren Kelly tries to get her point across during a timeout in tonight's game with Allentown. Kelly had a little more time to prepare for tonight's game than she did a week ago (Photo by Wes "The Media Mogul" Kirkpatrick).

“It’s not even game by game. It’s practice by practice, day by day. It’s all how you define success. Maybe our win column doesn’t show it, but we find the little successes.”

One thing is certain, tonight was less frenzied than last Friday, when Kelly had about six hours to prepare for her varsity coaching debut.

“It was crazy, it was so unexpected,” Lopez said. “It’s hard to get a new coach and learn a new system. But Ms. Kelly knows what she’s talking about. It’s just definitely different.”

In watching the team on the court tonight, they played with spirit and intensity. They are just young and inexperienced.

Still, the Northstars ran their offense well enough to get some makeable shots early in the game. They just didn’t make them.

“I think that offensively we were in the right spots, we just made silly mistakes,” Kelly said. “Fundamental mistakes, not catching the ball, not making any shots, not making lay-ups, not making foul shots.

“Early on, if you do those things they don’t get ahead by as much and that changes the entire tone of the game. The longer you stay in the game, the more of a chance you have of being in the game in the fourth quarter.”

Although the Northstars were never in the game after the first quarter, one girl who remained high-intensity throughout was JV call-up Saysha McRae, who was all over the court on offense and defense.

“She is aggressive, she plays tough and you can’t teach that in practice,” Kelly said. “That’s either innate or you don’t have it. She makes stuff happen.”

Allentown coach Linda Weise was impressed with several of the Northstars, and the veteran mentor passed along some sagely advice to the rookie coach after the game.

“I told her just to hang in there, it’s a long season,” Weise said. “She’s got three pretty nice

players there she can work with and build with.

“You have to develop the young kids. You keep playing, hopefully things will turn around and the girls will just get better. She’s not even halfway into her season, there’s a lot more games left to play.”

Like Kelly, Weise was a top-flight high school player at McCorristin and knows the adjustments that have to be made when making the transition to coaching.

“It’s not an easy job,” she said with a laugh. “She was a great player, a multi-sport athlete. She knows what it takes as a player. As a coach it’s different. You grow as well as your players as the season goes on.”

Kelly, who displays a savvy maturity for such a young coach, is content to just plug away with her young players.

“I think they enjoy us,” she said. “We were in high spirits even in the fourth quarter. They didn’t give up until it was over. They work hard, it’s all you can really ask. And you hope the outcomes will start to change.

“We’ll get there. It’s just a work in progress.”

Steinert suffers excruciating loss as Ewing hits buzzer beater to win it

You wouldn’t think a game could hurt more than Steinert’s loss to West Windsor-Plainsboro-South Tuesday, when the Spartans lost an 18-point lead.

But tonight might have been as bad, if not worse, as Jasmine Murrill hit the game-winning bucket as time expired to give visiting Ewing a 46-44 win over the Spartans.

Trailing 29-25 entering the fourth quarter Steinert (5-4) battled back to tie it before Murrill thrust in the dagger for the vastly improved Blue Devils (6-3).

Gabi Bennett led the Spartans with 11 points, while Lindsay Usarzewicz chipped in with 10. Ewing’s Candace Scott-Mason led all scorers with 23.

Steinert has little time to mope, as it has a 10 a.m. home game with talented South Brunswick Saturday.

Still missing Johnson, Hamilton falls to West Windsor-Plainsboro-South

Hamilton West dropped its ninth straight game to West Windsor-Plainsboro South tonight, 57-37, at the Hornets Nest.

The Hornets played their fourth straight game without leading scorer Alexis Johnson. Erin Septer had 14 for Hamilton (1-9) while Courtney Adams added 13.