

## Jan. 19 College Women's Basketball

### Steinert grad Collins hits her stride in helping improved Fordham program

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**Fish4Scores.com**

**Jan. 19:** It took a couple seasons, but Arielle Collins is a dangerous scoring threat once again – on a whole new level and a much bigger stage.

After two seasons of paying her dues, the Steinert High graduate is averaging 11.3 points through the Rams first 19 games this season. That puts Collins second on the team in scoring behind her former Colonial Valley Conference rival, Becky Peters of West Windsor-Plainsboro South (11.6).

“It’s nice to know that she is on my side,” Collins said. “We play well together and I’m glad we’re finally playing together.”

They played well enough to help Fordham to a 9-6 record prior to Atlantic 10 Conference play, which marked the Rams best non-conference mark since 2002-03. Fordham is 10-9 overall and 1-3 in the A-10.

Collins is doing more than just scoring in her role as point guard. She leads the team with 66 assists and 33 steals, and is also chipping in with 4.1 rebounds per game from the backcourt.

“She is growing nicely into her role as a point guard and leader,” said first-year Rams coach Stephanie Gaitley. “She is gaining confidence with each game. She has played a number of 40-minute games because we are a better team when she is on the court.”

It wasn’t always that way in the Bronx.

After scoring 1,792 points to become Steinert’s all-time leading scorer, Collins played one year as a post-graduate at Hun before enrolling at Fordham in the fall of 2009.

As a freshman, she averaged just 2.5 points and 8.7 minutes per game.

“It was definitely hard getting adjusted at first, but a lot of my freshmen teammates were going through the same thing,” Collins said. “The starting point guard during my freshman year took me under her wing and made the transition much easier. She was more excited than I was when I got playing time.”

It got slightly better last year, when Collins averaged 4.4 points, and 12.7 minutes while getting her first two collegiate starts. The season highlight came when she tabbed a career-high 20 points and added five steals against sixth-ranked Xavier.

But it was another in a long line of losing seasons for Fordham, which led to a coaching change. The Rams brought in Gaitley, who boasted a career record of 464-270 at Richmond, St. Joe’s, Long Island and Monmouth. She is the winningest women’s coach at Richmond and LIU and second winningest at St. Joe’s.

While some college players dread the arrival of a coach that did not recruit them, Collins welcomed it.

“I was really excited for a new beginning and a chance to be part of a program that is changing tradition,” she said.

After undergoing shoulder surgery last spring, Collins has gained a new lease on life under Gaitley. After making 34 3-point shots in her first two seasons combined, she has a team-high 34 this season.



*Arielle Collins paid her dues during her first two years at Fordham but has blossomed as a junior (Photo courtesy of Fordham Sports Information).*

“Now that I'm getting more playing time it definitely helps me get into a rhythm and build more confidence in my shot,” Collins said. “It allows me to let the game come to me and take a good shot at the right time.”

But as point guard, it's not all about scoring. One of Collins more unnoticed assets in high school was her passing ability, which is being utilized this year as she runs the show.

“I am still a little nervous because my role is so important to the team's success, but I feel I've been doing well so far,” Collins said. “I'm happiest with our team's emphasis on defense, we work as a unit and it's the reason we're doing so well this year.

“I would like to continue to work on my role for this team, continue to grow as a player and finish the season strong. I am more confident this year than I was the first two years and I have to credit my teammates and coaches for believing in me. I'm (Gaitley's) voice and eyes on the floor and we work well together.”

Arielle's success has led to team success, as half of Fordham's first six losses were by just one point.

“They were really heart-breaking losses, but we learned a lot from them and were able to grow as a team,” Collins said. “Coach Gaitley is a really great coach. She knows the game very well and we focus on defense, so when the shots aren't falling our defense makes up for it.”

Things have been good off the court as well. The girl from the Square is loving life as an Uptown Girl – “New York is one of the reasons I fell in love with Fordham.” – and is also excelling in the classroom.

“I'm excited to start taking more classes relative to my major,” she said.

Her major?

Communications of course.

What else would you expect from a point guard, whose whole game is predicated on communicating with teammates.

So far, she's getting good grades off the court, and on it.