

BOYS BASKETBALL

Buffalo Gap boys basketball team finishes strong to survive Fort Defiance

HUBERT F. GRIM III For The News Virginian
Feb 12, 2022

FORT DEFIANCE — Buffalo Gap overcame a miserable third quarter Friday night with a solid final eight minutes as the Bison secured a bruising 39-34 rock-fight victory over the Fort Defiance Indians in a Shenandoah District boys basketball game that at times resembled more football.

It was a bizarre game to say the least. Fort scored only nine first-half points after a 12-minute drought bridging the first and second quarters left the Indians trailing 19-9 at halftime. Then the Bison turned around and managed only three free throws in the third period in hacking up their 10-point lead to trail by one. Gap scored the first six points of the final quarter, helped by a costly technical foul, to reestablish control.

The Bison, who were playing their fourth game in five days and third straight, showed their fatigue, especially in the first three quarters before getting a second wind when it counted the most.

“The legs are always the first to go and then the decision-making because you are tired,” Buffalo Gap head coach Chad Ward said. “All that was evident for stretches.”

The victory puts Gap (17-4, 9-2) on the cusp of locking up the No. 1 seed for the Region 1B tournament, which would give the Bison home-court advantage for regional play, a first-round bye and only needing a victory in the semifinals to qualify for the Class 1 state tournament.

The Bison wrap up the regular season Tuesday at home against fellow region rival Riverheads in a game that could determine if the Gladiators make the postseason or packing up the equipment.

On the other side, Fort (9-10, 5-5) is suddenly in another tailspin following its second straight loss after a five-game surge had propelled the Indians into the 10-team Region 3C playoff picture at No. 9 in the latest power ratings. Now suddenly the playoff hopes are murky for the Indians with Turner Ashby, which is No. 8 in Region 3C and travel to Fort for a 1:30 p.m. Saturday matinee, Stuarts Draft and a rematch with Staunton, which walloped Fort 57-28 on Wednesday and is No. 11 in

the ratings, left on the schedule.

The Indians led 5-4 before their extended drought, which Gap took advantage by scoring 15 unanswered points. Fort finally found the basket again with 1:08 left in the half when Tyreek Veney scored after a Gap turnover. He then used another Bison mistake for two free throws, enabling the Indians to fortunately trail 19-9. “We were lucky to be down 10 as bad as we were in the first half,” Fort head coach Brandon Fulk said. “We didn’t make anything around the basket. Out of 34 firsthalf possessions, we only got points on five.”

Ironically the same basket that kept denying Fort rejected the Bison in the third quarter. Gap’s three free throws kept it ahead 22-14 before the tide turned over the final 2:52. Kaden Johnson had two twisting baskets in the paint, while Samuel Garber and Henry Gutshall connected to out-of-nowhere give the Indians a 23-22 lead.

“I told the kids at halftime to see if we could get the game tied by the fourth quarter, and we actually had the lead,” Fulk said. “We had all the momentum at that point.”

The momentum, however, was fleeting. Jamie Hewitt got the Bison’s first second half basket at the 6:42 mark. Then came the technical foul when Joshua Jones was called for a stray elbow during a rebound battle. Bennett Bowers made both free throws, and 49 seconds later, Micah Canterbury scored off an offensive rebound, growing the lead to 28-23 with 4:58 left.

“The momentum shifted on that technical,” Fulk said.

Fort missed four straight free throws with the deficit at five points, and the Bison maintained the upper hand the rest of the way. The Indians did get back to a one possession game with 10.4 seconds on a pair of Veney freebies, but Bowers closed the deal with two of his own.

“We felt good at halftime by holding Fort under 10 points,” Ward said. “We wanted to win the first four minutes of the third, but that obviously didn’t happen. This team has been in multiple tight games in the fourth quarter, and they are comfortable in making the plays to win games.”

The Bison shot fewer 3-pointers than usual, making only one, but that was by design.

“I thought we had been shooting too many lately (20 on Thursday),” Ward said. “I wanted them to depend on their offensive movement for higher-percentage baskets. Pulling the trigger is an easier thing than working for a good shot.”

Fort held Bowers to three field goals and 13 points, but Canterbury picked up the slack with a monster double-double of 16 points and 18 rebounds.

“Micah is a man in the paint,” Ward said. “He plays much bigger than 6-foot-1.” Fulk liked his team’s defensive effort.

“We played good enough on the defensive end to win the game,” he said. “But we didn’t deserve to win with the way we executed offensively. Gap made the winning plays when it counted.”

Fort dominated the jayvee game 44-17. Gio Armendariz Cruz led the Indians with 15 points, while Carter Fink added 12. Dalton Coffey topped the Bison with nine.

BUFFALO GAP 39, FORT DEFIANCE 34

BUFFALO GAP 10 9 3 17 — 39
FORT DEFIANCE 5 4 14 11 — 34

BUFFALO GAP (39) — Bowers 3 6-6 13, Hewitt 2 0-0 4, Ingram 1 2-2 4, Canterbury 7 2-4 16, LaPorte 1 0-0 2, Lowe, Hohenstein, TOTALS 14 10-12 39.

FORT DEFIANCE (34) — Simmons 0 3-4 3, Johnson 3 1-2 8, Jones 1 1-2 3, Garber 1 0-1 2, Veney 4 6-11 14, Gutshall 2 0-0 4, Smith, Hebb, Liskey, TOTALS 11 11-20 34.