

BOYS BASKETBALL

Fort Defiance boys basketball team takes down district unbeaten Wilson Memorial

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FORT DEFIANCE — No one will be going undefeated in Shenandoah District boys basketball this season.

Red-hot Fort Defiance took care of that Friday night after the surging Indians dealt the Wilson Memorial Green Hornets their first district blemish 57-45.

Wilson had been the last one standing after the Hornets knocked off Buffalo Gap on Tuesday in their battle of two district unbeaten.

The Indians rolled out a perfect game plan Friday and executed it to perfection to upend the Hornets. Fort wanted to slow the tempo against a team that loves to get up and down the court.

“I have never been more proud of a team as I am right now,” Fort head coach Brandon Fulk said. “We executed our game plan to perfection. As a coach, I can give the kids the game plan and instruct them how to execute it, but it only matters if the kids buy in and go out and execute it.

“We had the game at our tempo and pace the whole night,” said Fulk, whose team held the Hornets to a season-low in points.

Fulk, who held Wilson to 50 points in a 50-45 loss in the season’s first meeting, threw a new wrinkle at the Hornets. Besides an active 1-2-2 zone, the Indians went to a three-quarter-court press to slow the pace even more.

“We really weren’t looking to create the turnover with the press, but just to slow down Wilson’s offense,” Fulk said. “This was the best win since I’ve been here from an execution standpoint.”

Fort made the most of forcing a half-court game on the offensive end. “Our goal is to score one point per possession, and tonight we had 55 possessions for 57 points. That is outstanding efficiency,” Fulk said.

The game featured a pair of Region 3C teams that were on winning streaks. Wilson (12-4, 6-1) had its run stopped at six, while the Indians raced to their fourth

consecutive triumph. Fort's resurgence has come on the heels of a five-game slide when the Indians fell to 4-8 and were sinking fast.

"At 4-8 it wasn't looking great, but the guys stayed together and now that togetherness is paying off," Fulk said.

Wilson came in No. 2 in the latest Region 3C power ratings, just ahead of Valley District rival Spotswood. Fort (8-8, 4-3) was sitting No. 11, which is one spot from making the 10-team regional tournament that starts in two weeks. Ironically rival Staunton is clinging to the final playoff berth, but Fort's wins over Class 5 Harrisonburg and now Wilson most certainly moved the Indians ahead of the Storm. The Indians and Storm still have both games to play against each other.

With the game tied at 20-all to begin the second half, the Indians scored the first six points of the third quarter, capped by Tyreek Veney's 3-pointer at the 4:57 mark, and Fort was never tied or trailed again.

Wilson fell behind 34-25, but outscored the Indians 7-2, including the last four points in the final 4.7 seconds when Ethan Briseno couldn't finish a three-point play, but Josh Johnson ripped away the offensive rebound and scored to give the Hornets momentum, trailing 36-32.

Then came what both head coaches called the pivotal sequence of the game. Wilson had possession to start the final quarter. The Hornets ran a perfect backdoor, but the pass was behind the cutter and sailed out-of-bounds. Fort's Henry Gutshall was fouled at the other end and converted the one-and-one. Wilson never regrouped.

"We had the momentum by the way we ended the third quarter," Wilson head coach Jeremy Hartman said. "We had the backdoor layup and threw the ball away. If we had gotten it down to two, it was anyone's game."

"That was a big swing right there," Fulk said.

Wilson got the deficit back to 38-34, but the Indians broke the game open by scoring the next nine points to lead 47-34 with 2:20 left.

The Dan Landes Gymnasium has been a chamber for horrors for Hartman over the years.

"This was a very difficult place to play with its hostile environment," Hartman said.



“It goes back to my days coaching at (Robert E.) Lee. The year we won the state title our only district loss came right here in the final game of the regular season. “I tried to warn the guys what was coming tonight. I told them Fort was going to slow the tempo and we had to keep attacking. If we didn’t attack that was playing right into their hands,” he said. “Brandon came up with a great game plan and the Indians executed it.”

Both teams had to deal with foul trouble to their leading offensive weapons. Fort’s Veney and Wilson’s Finn Irving both got two fouls in the first quarter. Veney spent a lot of time being subbed for offense-defense situations, but had a huge second half, scoring 16 of his game-high 20 points.

“That might have been Tyreek’s best game played, especially dealing with the foul trouble,” Fulk said.

Irving wasn’t as fortunate as he never did find an offensive rhythm, finishing with

only 11 points.

“Finn has to learn how to play through adversity,” Hartman said. “We need his offense on the floor.”

Besides Veney’s output, Gutshall finished with 12 points, including 6-of-6 at the foul line in the fourth quarter.

Johnson led the Hornets with 15 and Briseno added 12.

Friday’s contest started a hectic stretch of four games in five days for Wilson. The Hornets have a quick turnaround for a 12:30 p.m. Saturday tip at Waynesboro in a rescheduled game before starting the new week Monday at Buffalo Gap in a makeup showdown at Buffalo Gap in a rematch from Tuesday, again with sole possession of first place on the line. Wilson wraps up the busy period Tuesday at home against Riverheads.

“We still have our goals in front of us to win the district and earn the No. 2 seed in the region,” Hartman said. “We don’t have time to dwell on what happened tonight.”

Unlike Wilson, the Indians are idle until Tuesday when they travel to Waynesboro before the first showdown of the season at Staunton on Wednesday.

Fort also captured the jayvee game 37-28. Isaac Marshall paced the Indians with 14 points. Gabriel Heinrich topped the Hornets with eight.

FORT DEFIANCE 57, WILSON MEMORIAL 45

WILSON MEMORIAL 11 9 12 13 — 45

FORT DEFIANCE 12 8 16 21 — 57

WILSON (45) — Johnson 5 2-5 15, Mundie 1 0-0 2, Briseno 5 0-1 12, F.Irving 4 0-0 11, Schatz 2 1-3 5, Vess, Podgorski, Armstrong, E.Irving, Wright, TOTALS 17 3-9 45.

FORT DEFIANCE (57) — Simmons 2 0-0 4, Johnson 2 2-2 7, Jones 2 1-4 5, Garber 2 2-4 7, Veney 8 3-3 20, Liskey 0 2-2 2, Gutshall 3 6-6 12, Smith, Patterson, Hebb, TOTALS 19 16-21 57.