

East Rockingham beats the new Fort Defiance Indians 92 - 73 in season-opening scrimmage

Things are new at Fort Defiance High School for 2023-24: new team, new coach, and new offensive and defensive systems. The team features return players Gio Armendariz Cruz, Bradley Hebb, Carter Fink, Del Ray Jones, Austin Metz, Jalen Alexander, and All-District player Sam Garber. Newcomers to the team are Jasigh Ransome, Trey Miller, Evan Braun, Rhyland Martin, Tripp Hanger, Gus Gutshall, and Carter Berry. Mike Gale has taken over as coach, replacing Brandon Fulk. And with a new coach, there comes a new system of basketball which the boys are trying to adjust to.

Coach Gale's system includes rapid platooning of players, usually five at a time, after only a couple of minutes of play. In the opening scrimmage, all fourteen players had seen action in the first 1:30 of play in the first quarter against East Rockingham. Gale's strategy includes full court pressing on defense and rapidly launching of three point shots on offense.

It is fair to say that this system of play did not work well in the first scrimmage of the year. Many, many times East Rockingham beat the Fort press and got easy buckets from the resulting 3-on-1 or 2-on-1 matchups. Not only was the defense unable to get points off the press, it resulted in many fouls called against the struggling Indians. Fort's shooting of three pointers was abysmal. In the second and third quarters, Sam was the only Indian to connect on a triple. The misfires were often and spread among a variety of players.

Gio opened play with a deuce from a drive on the basket, giving the Indians a 2 - 0 lead. After a series of misses by FDHS, East Rockingham evened the score at 2 before Tripp Hanger bombed in a three pointer. ERHS quickly tied the game at 5's on a three point play then added a two pointer to go up 7 - 5. Rylan hit his first three pointer to give FDHS the lead at 8 - 7. FDHS then missed several more three point attempts but ERHS did not and took the lead 10 - 8. Jasigh evened things on a nice drive but ERHS responded with a triple to go up 13 - 10 with 3:25 to go in the quarter. Carter Fink then picked up two consecutive baskets in the lane to give FD a 14 - 13 lead. Bradley scored on a drive before ERHS added a free throw to make the score 16 - 14. ERHS added another free throw before Sam banged in a three pointer to give FDHS a 19 - 15 lead. ERHS was shooting one-and-one free throws before the end of the quarter due to excessive Fort fouls. They hit two to make the score 19 - 17. Gio made one of two free throws to give FDHS its last lead of the quarter at 20 - 17. In the last minute, ERHS hit a three pointer and a field goal to give them the 22 - 20 advantage at the quarter. During the last few seconds of the quarter FDHS again missed multiple three point attempts. Throughout the quarter, Gale substituted 5 new players approximately every minute of action.

Since this was a scrimmage, the score clock was reset each quarter. The second quarter was disastrous for FDHS. ERHS repeatedly beat the Fort press for easy buckets. Meanwhile, Fort's shooting remained poor. Sam finally got a three pointer at the buzzer but it was the only trey of the quarter for FDHS. Bradley scored on two consecutive drives early in the quarter. Gio had two of four three throws, Rhyland made a field goal, and Sam added a field goal before his

buzzer-beating three. But these 13 points were pale in comparison to the 30 ERHS put up. The platoon system was again used unsuccessfully.

The third quarter was somewhat better for Fort. They ended up winning it, 22 - 21. Baskets were made by Jalen, Sam, and Del Ray early on. Austin got two on a put-back and Gio scored on a drive. Fort fell behind 16 - 10 with 2:29 to go but Sam got a three pointer to fall then added a dunk to make it 18 - 15. Bradley scored on a drive then hit three of four three throws. Jalen added a field goal as Fort eked out the 22 - 21 quarter advantage.

The fourth quarter was evenly matched. Carter B. made one of two free throws to open Fort's scoring. Rhylan hit a three pointer and Bradley got a layup. Sam hammered home another three pointer as did Gio. Carter Fink scored in close and Del Ray hit both of his free throws to give FDHS a 16 - 14 advantage. After ERHS scored five consecutive points, Gio was fouled shooting a three pointer as time expired. He hit his first two but missed the third, making the score ERHS 19, Fort 18 for this quarter.

A fifth quarter was played. Gus, who had not played since early in the second quarter, got back in and scored two after an offensive rebound. Tripp added two field goals before Austin got a three to go, tying the score at 9 - 9. Fort fell behind 15 - 9 before Carter Fink scored on a three pointer with three minutes to go. Rhylan then ended the day with two consecutive three pointers. For the quarter, despite the platooning of players, ERHS was able to score at will and won the quarter 22 - 18.

The score for the first four quarters was East Rockingham 92, Fort Defiance 73. Sam led the Indians with 18 points in the five quarters. Rhylan scored 14, Bradley 13, and Gio 12.

Fort's Box Score (five quarters):

| Name | 2 Pt Goals | 3 Pt Goals | Free Throws | Total |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Gio Armendariz Cruz | 2 | 1 | 5-9 | 12 |
| Bradley Hebb | 5 | 0 | 3-4 | 13 |
| Jasigh Ransome | 1 | 0 | 0-0 | 2 |
| Carter Fink | 3 | 1 | 0-0 | 9 |
| Trey Miller | 0 | 0 | 0-0 | 0 |
| Sam Garber | 3 | 4 | 0-0 | 18 |
| Austin Metz | 1 | 1 | 0-0 | 5 |
| Evan Braun | 0 | 0 | 0-0 | 0 |
| Rhylan Martin | 1 | 4 | 0-0 | 14 |
| Del Ray Jones | 1 | 0 | 2-2 | 4 |
| Tripp Hanger | 2 | 1 | 0-0 | 7 |
| Jalen Alexander | 2 | 0 | 0-0 | 4 |
| Gus Gutshall | 1 | 0 | 0-0 | 2 |
| Carter Berry | 0 | 0 | 1-2 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 22 | 12 | 11-17 | 91 |

