

Fort Defiance outslugs listless Rockbridge 81 - 48

The Fort Defiance Indians improved their season record to 3 – 6 with an easy 81 – 48 victory over the Rockbridge Wildcats on January 2 in the Don Landes Gym at FDHS. Rockbridge saw their season record drop to 1 – 10. Gio Armendariz Cruz led the Indians with 22 points followed by Sam Garber with 19 and Tripp Hanger with 10. Ten FDHS players got on the scoreboard as Fort led all the way before a sparse crowd. The game was tied only once, 3 – 3. Fort took a ten point lead at the end of the first quarter and coasted the rest of the game.

Sam opened the scoring with a three pointer from the top of the key. After RCHS tied it at the 6:37 mark, Tripp bomberd in a three, Gio scored on a drive, and Sam hit his second three with an assist from Gus Gutshall to give Fort an 11 – 3 lead. Sam later hit a free throw to make it 12 – 3 before Rockbridge scored the next five points. Gio’s drive pushed the lead to 14 – 8, then Bradley Hebb took a pass from Jalen Alexander and scored in the paint to make it 16 – 8. Sam found Jalen open underneath for an easy two and Bradley scored again on a drive to make it 20 – 8 before Rockbridge scored at the end of the quarter with Fort leading, 20 – 10.

The second quarter started the same way the first did—Sam hit a three pointer. Sam then hit one of two free throws to extend Fort’s lead to 24 – 12. Gio bombed in a three pointer at the 3:38 mark to make it 27 – 12 then he followed that with a drive to extend the home team’s lead to 29 – 12. After a RCHS score, Tripp hit one of two free throws. Rockbridge then hit three of four free throws to make it 30 – 17 with 1:41 to go in the half. Evan Braun drilled home a trey and Jalen hit one of two free throws to extend Fort’s lead to 34 – 17. The half ended 37 – 20 as Gio was able to get his three pointer off just before the buzzer.

Sam opened the scoring in the second half with a driving layup after a steal. Rockbridge closed the score to 39 - 23 before Gio hit two free throws then turned an offensive rebound into two points. Jalen likewise was able to score on a put-back to give FDHS a comfortable 45 – 23 lead with 4:21 to go in the quarter. After a Rockbridge three pointer, Sam hit a trey and Evan followed with his second three pointer of the night making the score FDHS 51, RCPS 30. Rockbridge hit another three pointer but again Gio was able to score just as time ran out to give FDHS a 55 – 33 lead after three periods.

Gus opened the scoring in the fourth quarter with a deuce in the paint on a putback. Gio’s drive made the score 59 – 35. Rockbridge scored the next four points before Jasigh Ransome hit one of two free throws to make the score 60 – 39. Carter Fink made one of two free throws, Tripp hit another three pointer, and Del Ray Jones scored on an out-of-bounds play to give Fort a 66 – 41 lead with 4:02 to go. Sam’s three pointer made it 69 – 43 then Rockbridge scored three to make it 69 – 46. Gio hit a floater in the lane then Carter Fink went to work, scoring one of two free throws then two consecutive baskets in the paint pushing the lead to 79 – 48 with just over a minute to go. Jalen’s two free throws ended the scoring as Fort took an 81 – 48 win for their third win of the season.

Despite the easy win, it was not Fort's best game of the season. Two of Fort's three wins this season have come against Rockbridge which has a very weak team this year. Fort's shooting was far from decent and, once again, players rarely looked for the open man.

Grandfather's note: Gus played some in every quarter. He got one bucket and picked up a couple of rebounds.

Fort's Box Score:

Name	2 Pt Goals	3 Pt Goals	Free Throws	Total
Gio Armendariz Cruz	7	2	2-2	22
Bradley Hebb	2	0	0-1	4
Jasigh Ransome	0	0	1-2	1
Carter Fink	3	0	2-4	8
Trey Miller	0	0	0-0	0
Sam Garber	1	5	2-5	19
Austin Metz	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	2	0-0	6
Rhylan Martin	0	0	0-0	0
Del Ray Jones	1	0	0-0	2
Tripp Hanger	0	3	1-2	10
Jalen Alexander	2	0	3-4	7
Gus Gutshall	1	0	0-0	2
Carter Berry	0	0	0-0	0
TOTAL	17	12	11-20	81

The following short article appeared in the Staunton News Leader:

FORT DEFIANCE — Sophomore Gio Armendariz Cruz scored 22 points to help lead Fort Defiance to an 81-48 win over Rockbridge County in nondistrict boys basketball Tuesday night.

Returning from the holiday break — Fort hadn't played since Dec. 22 — Armendariz Cruz and his teammates jumped out to a 17-point halftime lead and stretched it to 22 heading to the fourth quarter. The win lifts Fort to 3-6 on the season. Fort plays its first Shenandoah District game Friday, hosting Riverheads in the start of seven district matchups in eight games to finish out January.

Sam Garber added 19 points, including five 3-pointers, in the win while Fort's Tripp Hanger finished with 10 points.

And the following article appeared in the Harrisonburg Daily News Record:

High School Boys Basketball

Indians Roll Past Wildcats

By CODY ELLIOTT Daily News-Record
Jan 3, 2024

Sophomore guard Gio Armendariz Cruz erupted for a season-high 22 points as Fort Defiance earned an 81-48 non-district win over Rockbridge County on Tuesday.

Senior forward Sam Garber added 19 points for the Indians in the home victory, while sophomore guard Tripp Hanger scored 10 and senior forward Carter Fink added eight.

The Wildcats were led by senior guard Henry Lambert with 15 points in the loss, while senior center Milo Mulitalo scored 12, and junior forward Sam Ballstaedt chipped in with six.

Fort (3-6) is back in action Friday at home against Riverheads (4-6) in a Shenandoah District matchup, while Rockbridge (1-10) will host unbeaten Spotswood (10-0) in a Valley contest.

Cody Elliott

Sports Editor