

Stuarts Draft mauls Fort Defiance 84 – 68

In an important Shenandoah District game, the Stuarts Draft Cougars dominated the Fort Defiance Indians 84 – 68 on February 1 in the Don Landes Gym. The Cougars came into the Fort gym riding an 11 game winning streak and were tied with Staunton for first place in the Shenandoah District. The win improved their record to 15 – 3 overall, 8 – 0 in the District. Fort's record fell to 8 – 9, 5 – 2. The Cougars jumped out to a 10 – 0 lead and the home team never caught up. Fort was clearly outplayed and outcoached in a game marred by the Indians' poor shooting, poor shot selection, incredibly selfish play, and little defense.

The Cougars had Fort pinned down in the start of the game, blowing out to a 10 – 0 lead before Carter Fink got a basket in the lane with 4:30 to go. Del Ray Jones hit a three and Tripp Hanger followed with the first of his four three pointers to get the Indians within four at 12 – 8. After a SDHS goal, Sam Garber hit one of two free throws but Draft increased the lead to 16 – 9 before Carter Berry's hook in the lane fell to make it SDHS 16, FDHS 11 after one period.

Draft hit two free throws to go up 18 – 11 then Gio scored on a drive for Fort. He then was fouled on two drives in the lane and hit all four free throws but Draft still maintained its lead at 25 – 17. Carter Fink's dunk got the home crowd up, and Sam's three pointer gave hope to the home team with the score Draft 25, Fort 22. The Cougars scored the next four points, however, until Tripp hit another three. Draft took a ten point lead, 35 – 25, before Evan Braun popped in a triple with just under three minutes to go in the half. Draft scored again to take a 37 – 28 lead. Fort finally got things going in the last minute as Carter F. made a free throw, then got a three point play the old fashioned way. Sam hit two more free throws so the Stuarts Draft lead at halftime was only 3, 37 – 34.

The first half was not a pretty one for Fort. Gio had many, many drives in which he missed a wild shot or turned it over. Sam's shooting was miserable; he had only one field goal in the half but he did have two good defensive blocks on Draft shots. But at least Fort stayed in striking distance and hopes were that the second half would go the Indians' way.

It did not. Stuarts Draft quickly turned the lead to nine points by scoring the first six points of the second half. Gio finally got a drive to drop but those were the only points Fort would score in the first three minutes of the half. He scored again to make the score 47 – 38 and hit two foul shots as Fort crept closer at 48 – 40. Draft responded a bucket to push their lead to ten before Tripp hit his third three pointer on a nice kick-out from Gus Gutshall. Gio got a drive and a free throw, Sam added a free throw, and Jasigh Ransome scored on a drive in the lane but Draft still held a 58 – 49 lead after three periods.

Draft held a 61 – 51 lead with 5:51 left in the game after Sam hit his last basket of the game. Draft's lead swelled to 63 – 51 before Gio again scored. Carter Fink banked in a three pointer to make it 65 – 56 but Draft kept up the pace, going up 67 – 56. Tripp's final trey made it 67 – 59 with three minutes to go.

Draft went up 71 – 64 after Gio had a field goal and a three pointer with 2:28 to go. Down the stretch, Draft held the ball well and Fort was forced to foul. The only remaining points for Fort

were two free throws by Gio and a drive by Jasigh. Meanwhile, Draft hit its free throws in route to a 84 – 68 victory.

Gio led Fort with 24 points but he actually had a very poor game. He shot time after time and had not only fans yelling at him to pass but even a teammate was heard doing the same. It seemed like it was one versus nine on the court many times. Sam’s shooting was off for the third game in a row; he finished with only nine points. Tripp had a decent night shooting, hitting four three’s, and Carter Fink pitched in 11. Unlike previous games, only seven players scored for FDHS.

Draft had four players in double digits led by D. Jenkins with 25. Fort’s defense frequently has their big players away from the goal and Jenkins had his way in the lane against Fort’s guards.

Fort is back in action tomorrow night against Waynesboro.

Grandfather’s note: I don’t know what I can say that I haven’t said previously because nothing has changed. Gus played ten seconds in the fourth quarter. TEN SECONDS! He played an average of two minutes in each of the other quarters despite the fact that neither Bradley nor Rhylan Martin were on the bench. The coaches seem willing to put up with players who shoot every time they touch the ball, whether it is a good shot or not. Turnovers go unpunished and frequently their defense has three players chasing the ball leaving the opponent with easy opportunities to score.

I’ve complained before about the Fort warm-up routine. Tonight I counted. As a team they shot 196 three point shots prior to the game and only 5 free throws (only two players even attempted foul shots). This is a team that is making only 55% of its free throws for the year. Is it any wonder? And the 196 practice attempts apparently didn’t improve their accuracy as they missed shot after shot during the game from beyond the arc.

I think that what bothers me most about this year’s Fort team is that they all wear the same uniforms but are not a team. Players on a good team look for each other. They have the attitude “How can we best score?” not “How can I get up a shot?” They play a cohesive defense and adjust their offense and defense depending on the opponent. They keep their eyes on the clock and the score. They highly value assists, and know that turnovers, bad shots, or negligent defense will earn them a place on the bench. Unfortunately, none of these characteristics have I noticed on the 2023 – 24 FDHS team. I’ve played and watched basketball for over sixty years now; this year has been perhaps the hardest team for me to enjoy watching. I will continue to support Gus in every way I can and feel terrible that he has to play in such a helter skelter, selfish system. I’m really proud of him for keeping his head up and trying hard.

Fort’s Box Score:

Name	2 Pt Goals	3 Pt Goals	Free Throws	Total
Gio Armendariz Cruz	6	1	9-11	24
Bradley Hebb	0	0	0-0	0
Jasigh Ransome	2	0	0-0	4

Carter Fink	3	1	2-5	11
Trey Miller	0	0	0-0	0
Sam Garber	1	1	4-5	9
Austin Metz	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	1	0-0	3
Rhylan Martin	0	0	0-0	0
Del Ray Jones	0	1	0-0	3
Tripp Hanger	0	4	0-0	12
Jalen Alexander	0	0	0-0	0
Gus Gutshall	0	0	0-0	0
Carter Berry	1	0	0-0	2
TOTAL	13	9	15-21	68

The following article appeared in the Harrisonburg Daily News Record:

High School Boys Basketball

Cougars Pick Up 12th Consecutive Win

By CODY ELLIOTT Daily News-Record
Feb 2, 2024

Stuarts Draft slowly pulled away in the second half, gradually increasing the lead before eventually sealing the deal on an 84-68 Shenandoah District boys basketball victory over Fort Defiance inside Don Landes Gymnasium on Thursday.

The victory marked the 12th straight for the Cougars and was the program's first game against longtime former head coach Mike Gale, who is now in his first season coaching the Indians after previous stints as the FDHS girls coach and the Rockbridge County boys coach over the years.

The game also set up Friday's massive showdown between Draft and Staunton, which both entered that meeting with unbeaten district records.

Once again leading the way for the Cougars was 6-foot-4 junior big man Donovan Jenkins, who scored a game-high 25 points for the visitors.

Sophomore guard Derrick Moore also hit double digits in the scoring column for Draft with 15 points, while junior guard Landon Graber finished with 14 and senior center Izaiyah Ale Bell chipped in with 10.

Harley Frame, a senior wing, added eight points in the victory for the Cougars, while freshman guard Ja'Saun Kier-Brown finished with six.

Meanwhile for Fort, sophomore guard Gio Armendariz Cruz continued his strong play of late pouring in a team-high 24 points.

Sophomore guard Tripp Hanger hit four 3-pointers to finish with 12 points for the Indians, while senior forward Carter Fink hit double digits with 11.

Sam Garber, the leading scorer this season for Fort, finished with nine.

Both teams returned to action Friday with the Indians (8-9, 5-2 Shenandoah) hosting Waynesboro (2-16, 1-8 Shenandoah), while Draft (15-3, 8-0 Shenandoah) took on Staunton (11-6, 7-0 Shenandoah) at home.

Stuarts Draft 16 21 21 26 — 84

Fort Defiance 11 23 15 19 — 68

STUARTS DRAFT (15-3) — D. Diggs 0 0-0 0, J. Kier-Brown 1 4-4 6, J. Diggs 0 0-0 0, H. Frame 4 0-0 8, T. Cote 1 0-0 2, R. Ramsey 0 4-4 4, L. Graber 6 2-2 14, D. Moore 4 7-8 15, D. Jenkins 10 5-9 25, I. Ale Bell 5 0-1 10. Totals 22-28 84.

FORT DEFIANCE (8-9) — G. Armendariz Cruz 7 9-11 24, J. Ransome 2 0-0 4, C. Fink 4 2-3 11, T. Miller 0 0-0 0, S. Garber 2 4-6 9, A. Metz 0 0-0 0, E. Braun 1 0-0 3, D. Jones 1 0-0 3, T. Hanger 4 0-0 12, J. Alexander 0 0-0 0, G. Gutshall 0 0-0 0, C. Berry 1 0-0 2. Totals 22 15-20 68.

3-Point Goals — Fort Defiance 9 (T. Hanger 4, G. Armendariz Cruz, C. Fink, S. Garber, E. Braun, D. Jones).

Cody Elliott

Sports Editor