

## Fort Defiance gets revenge on Stuarts Draft, 67 - 65

Tripp Hanger turned a one point deficit into a two point lead with 29.3 seconds to go with a long three point bomb to give the Fort Indians a 67 – 65 lead which they were able to hang onto in an important Shenandoah District game against Stuarts Draft on February 12 on the Cougars home court. With the win, Fort moved into second place in the district with a 8 – 3 record (11 – 10 overall) while Draft fell to 8 – 4 (15 – 7 overall). The game will likely have importance in the upcoming Region 2 tournament as both teams are in the region.

Gio Armandariz Cruz, who led the Indians with 22 points, tied the game at 63 – 63 with a floater in the lane with 2 minutes left. Sam Garber, who had an off night shooting, made one of two free throws to give Fort a 64 – 63 lead with 1:19 to go. After a Gio turnover, Draft went up 65 – 64 with 35 seconds left, setting up the stage for Tripp to bang home his winning three pointer. Both teams played in the last minute like neither wanted to win with multiple turnovers and missed shots. After a Stuarts Draft turnover with 17 seconds left, Fort promptly turned the ball back to Draft who had a chance to win it with a three pointer with 10 seconds to go but Harley Frame's shot rimmed out. Fort rebounded and was fouled but it was only the 4<sup>th</sup> foul on Draft in the quarter so Fort got the ball out of bounds again with 4.9 seconds to go and the Indians were able to hang on for the win.

Gio got the first two of the game on a drive. Gus Gutshall then hit one of two free throws. Meanwhile, Draft scored twice to go up 4 – 3. After the Cougars went up 6 – 3, Gio made another driving shot. Carter Fink scored a basket on a pass from Gio to pull the Indians within one at 8 – 7. Sam's driving layup gave Fort a brief 9 – 8 lead. Stuarts Draft scored the next four points before Gio got a three pointer to drop, tying the score at 12's with 2:12 to go in the quarter. From there, Gus took over, grabbing two offensive rebounds and putting the ball back in the basket each time. The five point quarter was one of the best of the season for Gus. After one, SDHS led 18 – 16.

After Draft went up 20 – 16 to start the second quarter, Sam made a three to get the Indians within one. Bradley Hebb drove for two and the Indians took a 21 – 20 lead. Gio's two free throws made it 23 – 20 with 4:32 to go. Draft came back with two free throws and a jumper to go up 24 – 23 with 2:52 to go. Sam's second three of the quarter made the see-saw game 26 – 24 in favor of Fort. After Draft tied the score, Jasigh Ransome hit one of two free throws. Sam followed that with his third three pointer of the quarter, giving FDHS a 30 – 26 lead. Draft scored to close to 30 – 28 then Rhylan Martin swished a long three pointer to make it 33 – 28. After Draft made a free throw, Fort had the ball and a four point lead with 28 seconds to go but failed to hold for the last shot of the half. It came back to bite the Indians as their missed shot turned into a SDHS rebound then a FDHS foul with 2.6 seconds which allowed the home team to make two free throws to close to 33 – 31 at the half.

Del Ray Jones' trey opened a 36 – 31 lead for Fort in the third. Stuarts Draft scored the next three points before Carter Fink turned an offensive rebound into two points. SDHS scored but Gio answered with another drive in the lane then he made one of two free throws with 4:25 to go giving the visitors a 41 – 36 lead. Stuarts Draft clawed back to 41 – 40 then Sam scored in the lane on a put back to make it 43 – 40 with 1:24 to go in the quarter. The Cougars answered to

make it 43 – 42 then Gio got a floater to drop in the lane making it 45 – 42. Again the Cougars answered to come within one but Rhylan Martin helped Fort’s cause with a three pointer at the end of the third giving the Indians a 48 – 44 lead.

The close game continued in the fourth. To be honest, neither team played well with Draft turning the ball over and missing easy shots while Fort’s guards had multiple turnovers and Sam couldn’t buy a shot in the second half. Both teams looked more like squads playing their first game of the year instead of one near the end of the season. In a word, the game was sloppy. One exception to this was the fine hustle and good defensive play by Del Ray.

Gio’s drive with 6:28 to go gave Fort a 50 – 46 lead. Draft closed with a foul shot and jumper to make it 50 – 49 with 6:05 to go. Jalen Alexander managed to get two in the paint for the Indians then Gio scored again on a drive to make it 54 – 49. Draft came back with a field goal with 4:55 to go but Tripp extended Fort’s lead to 57 – 51 with the first of his three pointers of the quarter. Fort went ice cold for the next three minutes as Draft rallied to tie the score with 3:37 to go then went up 60 – 57. Gio’s drive made it 60 – 59 then Carter Fink again scored on a put back to give Fort a 61 – 60 lead with 2:22 to go. Draft’s Frame then made his second three pointer of the quarter to give Draft a 63 – 61 lead with 2:22 to go. That’s when Gio and Sam got Fort within one and set the stage for Tripp to hit his game winning three pointer with 29.3 seconds left.

Gio led Fort with 22 points. Sam scored 14, nine of which came in the second quarter. Tripp, Rhylan, and Carter F. each had six and Gus had five for the Indians. Donovan Jenkins had 17 and Derrick Moore 16 for the Cougars.

Fort closes the regular season with a trip to Wilson Memorial on Wednesday night. Wilson’s District record is 7 – 4 which makes it important for Fort to earn another win to finish as the runner-up to Staunton. A Wilson win would leave three teams (Fort Defiance, Stuarts Draft, and Wilson) with identical 8 – 4 records. A Fort win would guarantee the Indians 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the District.

Grandfather’s note: Despite having such a good first quarter, Gus played his usual couple of minutes or so in each quarter except the fourth when he was only in for 43 seconds. It was good to see him make a vital contribution to the team’s important win, though, and he seemed happy after the game. He hustled a lot on the court and was visibly tired as he should be when he plays.

### **Fort’s Box Score:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>2 Pt Goals</b>	<b>3 Pt Goals</b>	<b>Free Throws</b>	<b>Total</b>
Gio Armendariz Cruz	8	1	3-4	22
Bradley Hebb	1	0	0-0	2
Jasigh Ransome	0	0	1-2	1
Carter Fink	3	0	0-2	6
Trey Miller	0	0	0-0	0
Sam Garber	2	3	1-2	14
Austin Metz	0	0	0-0	0
Evan Braun	0	0	0-0	0

Rhylan Martin	0	2	0-0	6
Del Ray Jones	0	1	0-0	3
Tripp Hanger	0	2	0-0	6
Jalen Alexander	1	0	0-0	2
Gus Gutshall	2	0	1-2	5
Carter Berry	0	0	0-0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6-12</b>	<b>67</b>

The following article appeared in the Daily News Record:

High School Boys Basketball

## Indians Earn Big Road Win At Draft

By CODY ELLIOTT Daily News-Record

Feb 13, 2024

Fort Defiance picked up its third win in four games, earning a big 67-65 Shenandoah District boys basketball road victory over Augusta County opponent Stuarts Draft on Monday.

Sophomore guard Gio Armendariz Cruz scored 13 of his game-high 22 points for the Indians after the half, continuing his strong season.

Senior forward Sam Garber also hit double digits for Fort with 14 points, while senior Carter Fink, junior Rhylan Martin and sophomore Tripp Hanger added six points apiece.

Junior forward Donovan Jenkins led the Cougars with 17 points.

Derrick Moore, a sophomore guard, added 16 points for Draft, while senior big man Izaiyah Ale Bell scored 13 and senior wing Harley Frame finished with 10.

The Indians (11-10, 8-3 Shenandoah) will travel to Wilson Memorial (14-8, 7-4 Shenandoah) for their regular-season finale on Wednesday, while Draft (15-7, 8-4 Shenandoah), which ended the year on a four-game skid, will turn its attention toward next week's Region 2B tournament.

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**Cody Elliott**

Sports Editor