

The Living Room Times

Girls Basketball Special

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Basketball Special"

Indians show their stuff

Home win over New Britain is best game of year so far

The last time Newington's girls basketball team played a game in their home gym, it was December 21, 1996, the third game of the season, and the Indians lost by 11 points to nationally-ranked Christ the King. And although they were not terribly upset by the loss—in fact, the mood among Newington players was generally upbeat after the close game—there were undercurrents of disappointment about the team's lackluster offensive performance.

Since that defeat, and a subsequent loss to state power Masuk, the Indians have been revising and refining their strategy, improving their offense, and racking up five consecutive victories—all in away games.

In short, they've been getting better and better.

So when these Newington Indians returned home Friday night to play the New Britain Hurricanes, it was showtime.

And by the time they were done showing what they could do, the Indians had knocked the wind of the Hurricanes and taken the fans' breath away.

In only their second home game of the season, Newington played 32 minutes of inspired basketball and routed an excellent New Britain team, 58-41. Ela Lapciuk led the way on offense with 21 points, and Jen Bolduc anchored

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Below left: Ela Lapciuk (game-high 21 points) shoots over New Britain's Christee Cittino.

Below right: New Britain's Lisa Fox rams into the tough defense of Newington's Jen Bolduc.

Far Below: Sandy Ramos, Kathleen Burdelski, and Veronique Fort celebrate as the buzzer



sounds on the JV team's one-point, comeback win over New Britain.

JV team comes from behind for remarkable win

In an amazing comeback that generated as much excitement as any varsity game, the Newington junior varsity team went on a 16-0 run after trailing 16-4 early in the third quarter Friday, then held off a New Britain comeback in the final minute and pulled out a 20-19 win.

"It was the best game ever!" said Veronique Fort, who scored several key baskets in the comeback, including the one that tied the game at 16.

"In the first half, we weren't playing together, but in the second half, we pulled it together, and we played so good," Fort continued.

"It's very inspiring," said JV coach Jan Langwieser. "It's a good lesson to learn: that you never give up."

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Tonight at the NHS gym:

#3 Bristol Eastern (8-1) vs. #8 Newington (8-2)

Freshmen at 3:30; JV at 5:45; Varsity at 7:15

Indians (8-2) at the top of their game in win over New Britain

Delight home crowd with impressive performance

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the Indians' excellent defensive performance.

"They executed. They did what we were trying to do, and they did it well," Newington Coach Sandy Pilz said of the Indians. "And in the first half, I thought New Britain played fabulous. It's just that our level of play never sank. And I think that was the difference."

"That was the most dynamic varsity performance I've ever seen," said JV head coach/varsity assistant coach Jan Langweiser. "We're always talking to them about playing for 32 minutes, and this was, I think, the first time that they played a complete game."

Right after Friday's game, varsity head coach Pilz was asked by *Living Room Times* editor Brendan Loy how he thought the team's performance on Friday compared to their other impressive wins this season. He replied, "Oh, I thought this was our best game so far. Don't you?"

"Yeah," Loy responded.

"It was the first time we beat a real good opponent," Pilz added. "So I'm happy."

Pilz was surprised that Newington was able to open up such a big lead and win by such a big margin against a team as good as New Britain. "I never expected us to win by that much," he said. The Indians outscored the Hurricanes in the third quarter by a count of 17-4.

"Every starter did things that really impressed me, and the bench played fabulous," Pilz stated. He said that one specific player whose play made him particularly happy was guard Jen Bolduc. "I think the one who surprised me the most was Jen Bolduc on defense," said Pilz. She just does things to surprise me every single day."

Asked how she felt about Pilz's statements, Bolduc responded, "Uh, good."



Above: Jen Bolduc

As for the game as a whole, Bolduc stated, "It was fun and exciting, and I think we played the best that we've ever played."

Times editor Loy asked Jenn Castelhana, one of the "square roots of Jen squared," about the performance of the "other square root," Jen Bolduc.

"Jen's great. I've never seen her play better in my life," Castelhana said. "She's my other half, so, you know, I just love her!"

"Without her, I'm nothing," Bolduc countered, referring to Castelhana. "She's the wind beneath my wings."

"Jen Squared is the bomb," someone else stated.

Bolduc was one of many players whose efforts led to a superb overall defensive performance by the Indians.

"The offense was good last night, but it was the defense that won the game," said Coach Pilz. "The defense was exceptional."

Asked what, specifically, impressed him about the defense, Pilz replied, "Courage." He explained, "We've always had the capability of coming out after talented people and trapping them, but I think that sometimes [we] can back off a little bit too much....If you're going to attack, you have to go all-out and go for it, because if you 'kind of' attack, but you're afraid of what's in front of you and you're afraid of what's behind you, you end up doing nothing. In the past, sometimes when we've tried to come out after a team, we've just had a little bit of resistance. And last night, I saw less of that resistance, of more of that, like, 'Let's not be afraid of what happens. Let's just do it, darn it.' And I was pleased."

On the offensive side, behind Ela Lapciuk's 21 points were 13 points from Katie Strong and 6 apiece from Kim Milardo, Leslie Carlson, and Kathleen Burdelski.

After the game, Lapciuk and Milardo looked like professional athletes as they signed autographs for a large group of young fans.

Lapciuk explained that she and Milardo referee games at Anna Reynolds Elementary School for those kids. "We do clinics at Anna Reynolds, and....we always ask [those kids] to come to our games. It was really nice. It made my day to sign all their autographs. It was cute."

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Right:
Ela Lapciuk signs her autograph for a group of young fans—kids who play games at Anna Reynolds refereed by Lapciuk and teammate Kim Milardo. Milardo was also signing autographs nearby.



Indians rout conference rival Hurricanes

Newington beats New Britain in impressive fashion

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As for Friday's win, Lapciuk said: "This is the best game we've played all season. I'm very proud....This is the first game that everybody played well. I'm proud of everybody."

Dave Milardo, NHS assistant principal and commentator for Channel 14's Newington basketball coverage—as well as the father of NHS graduate Theresa Milardo and junior Kim Milardo—gave this postgame analysis: "New Britain played us tough in the first quarter, and in the second quarter when [Newington] started putting pressure on the ball, that's when we started doing much better. We started getting more turnovers. And in the third quarter, we just absolutely blitzed them out of the gym. That was the key quarter."

"So a good job by Newington," Mr. Milardo added. "Give credit to their guards, because they really forced turnovers. And Leslie [Carlson] did a nice job, because the big girl [Kenitra Johnson] only scored two points in the second half for New Britain."

In addition to being praised by Mr. Milardo, Carlson was named Player of the Week for the varsity team from January 12-18 by Coach Pilz.

"I thought the turning point in the New Britain game was, on three consecutive possessions, [Leslie] popped away from the basket, got the ball, spun, and threw beautiful assist passes to Ela," said Pilz. That sequence of consecutive plays—all ending in Lapciuk layups—expanded Newington's lead from 29-22 to 35-22 early in the third quarter. The Indians never looked back.

"That little sequence was so important in breaking the game open, and I was so proud of her."



Above: Varsity Player of the Week Leslie Carlson hits a layup Friday.

"Her ability to see the whole floor this year is just so much better than it was last year," Pilz said of Carlson. "And her assist totals are up so much. Her steals are up, her times she dives to the floor for loose balls are up—all the little things that maybe don't make it into the newspaper scoring column; all the intangibles.

She's such a team player now, and she's just so focused." Pilz added that Carlson's ability to hold the ball away from the basket in a delay game has improved from last year as well.

With the New Britain game behind them, the Indians have passed the first of six major challenges on their conference schedule. The second will be tonight, when the Bristol Eastern Lancers visit Newington High School at 7:15. Eastern was ranked #3 in Connecticut by *The Hartford Courant* in last week's poll, although they have since lost their first game of the season. That loss, however, came at the hands of the state's #1 team, Southington, which will present the Indians with their third major conference challenge on February 3.

But back to the matter at hand, Bristol Eastern. Coach Pilz said Saturday that the Lancers should be "thought of in the same breath as" Southington and defending state champion Norwich Free Academy.

So Eastern will definitely present a formidable challenge for the #8 Indians. Pilz said he expects a "very exciting game, very emotional game, very intense game."

But despite the strength of this opponent, and others down the road, Pilz stated that Newington's players should focus on themselves. "It really doesn't matter what the other team feels or does if we try our hardest and play our best."

"If we try our hardest and play our best, we are so hard to beat," Pilz continued. "So when push comes to shove, we've got to focus on Newington. Not on Eastern, or Southington or anybody else, just on what we can do.

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Above left: A Kim Milardo layup. Above right: A Kate Strong 3.

It's a game to remember for JV team

Bounce back from 16-4 deficit to earn 20-19 win

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Newington fell behind 8-0 in the first quarter, but, said Coach Langweiser, “that was part of the strategy of the game.” She said that early on, the JV team played at an extremely fast pace in order to tire out the New Britain JV players who would also play in the varsity game later on. “Everything in the first half was just rush, rush, rush, because we were trying to go fast, and we couldn’t score points.” The score at halftime was 14-4.

New Britain scored the first basket of the second half, expanding their lead to 16-4. As it turned out, except for three free throws in the final minute, that would be the Hurricanes’ only hoop of the half.

Newington then went on a 16-0 run—which, *LR Times* editor Brendan Loy observed, “is the slowest-developing 16-0 run I’ve ever seen.” It lasted from the opening moments of the third quarter all the way until the closing minute of the fourth quarter. But it was very effective. With the game nearly over, Newington led, 20-16.

It was then that New Britain hit their three second-half free throws to cut the lead to 20-19. And thanks to a Newington turnover with 12 seconds left, New Britain had the ball, and a chance to win the game. But they couldn’t knock a shot down, and Newington held on.

Newington’s leading scorers were Veronique Fort and Raeann Boutilier, who scored six points each.

“Sandy [Ramos] played awesome. That was her best game ever,” said Fort.



Above: Newington JV “Player of the Week” Sandy Ramos tries to wrestle a rebound away from two New Britain players on Friday.

Coach Langweiser apparently agreed, naming Ramos as the JV Player of the Week from January 12 to 18.

“I thought the keys to the game were how well Sandy Ramos rebounded the ball, and how well Ryan Vicino boxed out their 6-foot-3 player, [Sylvia Przychodzen].

She did not score at all,” said Langweiser. “So Ryan did a really terrific job. [Przychodzen] did not get offensive rebounds. And the reason for that is that Ryan boxed her out, and kind of sacrificed herself from getting defensive rebounds. And Sandy really took care of the boards for us; she had a lot of big rebounds. And Veronique and Kathleen were tremendous on defense, and Raeann really carried the load handling the ball.”

Another possible key to the game was Nipper, the stuffed dog who has become Newington’s unofficial mascot and good-luck charm. Brendan Loy, who owns Nipper, initially forgot to bring the ‘lucky RCA dog’ to the game. But Brendan’s father, Joe, brought Nipper at halftime. And as soon as Nipper was placed on the scorer’s table—his traditional spot—Newington’s comeback began.

Asked if she thought the dog had a big role in the Indians’ victory, Veronique Fort said, “Yup. The dog. Bring it to every game!”



Regardless of how important the lucky dog’s arrival was, there is no doubt that halftime was the turning point of the game. “Once we were able to settle down a little bit in the second half, we were okay,” Langweiser said.

“Being behind 8-0 turned out not to be such a bad thing. Because it showed in the second half that maybe we just wore them down in the first half,” she said. “In the second half, it was basically all us.”

And, ‘Coach L’ said, the fast pace of the early JV game also helped the varsity team. “Two girls from the New Britain [JV] team who usually go right into the varsity game, right at the beginning of the game, did not. And it was a factor in the varsity game, because they were a little bit worn down.”

“That was the first real high school game for Ryan and Sandy and Veronique. The first time they’ve ever really played high school basketball at that kind of a level,” said Coach L.

“Sandy and Veronique could not get the smiles off of their faces. That’s how excited they were.”

More pictures, next page



From left: Veronique Fort in the JV game; JV players celebrate; Ela Lapciuk hits a layup; Lapciuk, Leslie Carlson go for a rebound; Kathleen Burdelski hits a shot; As cheerleaders look on, Ela Lapciuk makes a save, which was pictured from another angle in The Herald.

Bristol Eastern at Newington tonight

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Because we're very good."

Asked what his strategy will be against Eastern, Pilz said on Saturday that he hadn't quite figured it out yet. But he did list a few of his hopes for Newington: "I hope we can break their press—I think we can—I hope we do it consistently. I hope we can run our half-court offense against their pressure. I hope we can get the ball inside. I hope we can beat them on the boards. And I hope we can stop Ernestine Austin—or slow down Ernestine Austin."

Pilz predicted "scoring in spurts" because "The pace of the game, I think, will be altered quite a bit."

Asked if he was afraid that the Indians' success against New Britain will make them overconfident, Pilz replied, "Nope. Not at all. Friday's game only helps us."

"They're going to try to do to us what we did to New Britain," Pilz said of Eastern. "Against New Britain, we came out and attacked, to try to prevent them from

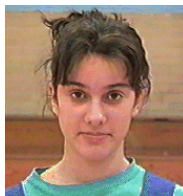
getting it inside. And that's exactly what Bristol Eastern is going to try to do to us. They're going to try to attack and not let us get it inside. This'll be a great test for us, [testing whether or not] our guards can overcome being pressured and get the ball inside. If [they] can, we'll win. If [they] can't, we'll lose."

Pilz said Eastern's biggest weakness is predictability. "There's no secrets. They're going to come out, and they're going to man-to-man press us....Their thought pattern is 'We're going to do this and you can't stop us.' My thought pattern is 'But if we *can*, you're not going to make adjustments because that's all you practice.'"

Pilz said that it's very important for Newington to get a lead early. "If we have to come out after them and spread the floor—we were able to do it last year, but they didn't have Ernestine Austin last year—so if we have to come out after them and spread the floor, they could really, really score a lot of points really fast. [So] it's very important that we have a good first quarter."



Varsity Player of the Week: Jan. 12-18
Leslie Carlson



JV Player of the Week: Jan. 12-18
Sandy Ramos