

Dec. 29 J. Michael Tucker Boys Basketball



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Nottingham junior Zach Mesday scored eight points and hit two clutch free throws to seal Nottingham's win over Hamilton in Bordentown today (Photo by Dennis Symons Jr./purchase photos at www.dennissymons.com).

'Stars hold off furious Hornets charge to emerge with consolation win

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Dec. 29: Jason Malloy could take satisfaction in the way his team played for about four minutes, but he would rather have the winning satisfaction felt by "Irish" Mike Walsh.

Walsh's Nottingham High boys' basketball team held off a furious late charge by Malloy's Hamilton West squad this morning, and emerged with a 49-44 victory in the consolation game of the J. Michael Tucker Tournament at Bordentown High School.

Nottingham built a 33-12 lead at the start of the third quarter and maintained a 46-26 advantage with 4:01 remaining.

And then it happened.

Hamilton scored 15 straight and 18 of the next 19 to pull within 47-44 with 8.3 seconds. Joshua Giddens, who had seven points in the run, fouled Zach Mesday on the inbounds with 6.9 seconds left and the junior stepped to the line for the biggest free throws of his brief varsity career.

He calmly buried both to seal it for the relieved Northstars.

"They were huge, they meant the game," Walsh said. "Hamilton was out of timeouts, so all he needed to do was make one and we had it. He did a great job there."

It should not have come down to those shots, but the Hornets rally is part of the growing pains Nottingham will endure this year with just one senior in the regular rotation.

"The reason why we lost the Princeton and Bordentown games and the reason we struggled in the second half of the fourth quarter today is youth and inexperience," Walsh said. "You can't simulate experience in practice. Today we just learned how not to handle end-of-the-game situations.

"We were a deer in headlights at the end. I thought we played as close to a perfect game as we could have for 3-1/2 quarters. But there's no way to simulate what happens at the end, you just have to play."

Sophomore point guard Shaquan Worthy, who had 13 points, six rebounds and four steals, feels the 'Stars need to relax.

"We just have to slow down and execute better," he said. "I think we get a little too excited to win."

While Walsh was lauding his team's play over the first 28 minutes, Malloy was trying everything possible to urge his team to shake out of the doldrums.

Nothing seemed to work until Giddens hit two seemingly insignificant foul shots to make it 46-28 with 3:49 left. Nottingham proceeded to commit 10 turnovers in the final quarter and a 3-pointer by Lenwood Squire (11 points) made it a one possession game before Mesday hit his foul shots.

Malloy looked for a silver lining, but saw more of a cloud.

"It's better to at least end the game the way we played, with a little bit of positive going on as we go into next week," he said. "But we gotta find a way to be ready to play at the start of the games.

"It was the same thing yesterday (against Florence), I don't know if it's the early starting time (10 a.m.) that the kids weren't used to or what."

Malloy said the Hornets went for broke in their comeback.

"We just opened it up," he said. "They were switching on all our screens. I just told them to go basically five out, just look to dribble penetrate, pass and cut. They started to pick up the intensity there but it was too little too late."

One of the keys to the comeback was the play of Dan Garcia off the bench. The sophomore guard had eight points and two steals and hit some big buckets to keep the Hornets alive.

“He’s been playing four quarters of JV so it’s been hard to get him some time,” Malloy said. “He obviously helped out a little bit. He’s probably gonna earn some more minutes as the season goes on.”

Walsh already knows several of his sophomores will earn a lot of minutes this year, not the least of which is Worthy.

“He’s got a lot on his shoulders,” the Irish One said. “He did as a freshman and now as a sophomore. I have to remember that as a coach. He makes mistakes too but as a sophomore point guard, he’s kind of the leader on the team, that’s a lot to handle.”

Walsh felt a great moment in the game came when Nottingham was scrambling and Worthy dribbled out of trouble, called a play and set it up.

“It’s those little moments you look for with younger players,” the coach said. “He took charge at that moment, it’s nice to see.”

Worthy said he is trying to be a leader after working on his game at the AAU National Showcase in Florida last summer.

He had help today, as Jamir Jenkins and Gerald Alexis each had 10 points and Mesday chipped in with eight.

“It feels good to get this win against a rival,” Worthy said. “We wanted to get this one, we might see them three or four more times.”

And much to Walsh’s joy, they will be even more experienced by then.