

BRANDON REPORTER

Sports

OV girl's basketball drops opener

BY ANDY KIRKALDY

MIDDLEBURY — In a hard-fought season opening game in which the teams traded game-changing runs, the host Middlebury Union girls' basketball team put together the decisive surge to outlast Otter Valley, 35-28.

The teams traded haymakers in the second half. The Otters closed the third quarter with a 13-3 surge to take a 20-19 lead. Seniors Alice Keith and Brittany Jackson and junior Emily Peduto combined for 12 of those points to spark OV's rally from a 16-7 deficit.

The Tigers answered in the final quarter by clamping down on defense and scoring in transition and on the offensive glass.

Tiger senior forward Hannah Turner scored all eight of her points in the period, and junior forward Ele Sellers tossed in four of her 16 as the Tigers went on 14-4 binge that salted the game away.

Both coaches found positives in their teams' gritty play and defense — and they and their players enjoyed the support of fans in a somewhat crowded MUHS gym after this past winter's empty bleachers.

"Both teams were scrapping and competing. It was a great atmosphere," said OV's Ray Counter. "It was a good start. I'd rather have a win, but we know we have things to work on. We'll get back at it."

The Tigers' Chris Altemose enjoyed the noise and praised the athletes.

"We were back in the gym

with fans. There was a crowd, and we had music, and we were pumped and energetic, and both teams played super hard," Altemose said. "We were back and forth with each other."

Critically, the Tigers out-rebounded the Otters, 15-8, in the decisive fourth quarter, and overall by 49-37, including team rebounds. Turner and Sellers did much of that damage, with help from guards Ivy Doran and Cady Pitner and forward Alex Bonavita.

OV held its own on the boards in the two quarters in which it outscored MUHS, with Keith, Jackson and Peduto faring the best. But the taller Tigers earned rebounding margins in the second and fourth quarters.

"That was the very thing we talked about," Counter said. "It's our Achilles' heel. We know it. We have moments, but it's something we have to get better at."

Both coaches also know their teams must take better care of the ball, although the first quarter can probably be explained by first-game jitters as well as the team's aggressive player-to-player defenses. The teams combined for three points and an evenly split 17 turnovers that quarter.

The Otters scored those three points, an Elena Politano free throw and Anna Lee's late layup. The Tigers compounded their offensive woes by missing four free throws and a few good looks.

Keith hit two free throws to open the second quarter, and it was 5-0. Finally, at 7:05 Sell-

ers sank a three-pointer, and her two free throws at 3:45 tied the game.

OV kept misfiring and the Tigers kept rebounding (a 14-7 edge in the period), and when Tiger senior guard Viviana Hammond drilled a three-pointer to make it 8-5, Counter called for time at 3:20.

It didn't slow the Tigers: Senior Sophie Larocue and Pitner tossed in threes, and the Tiger lead grew to 14-5. Peduto sank a late jumper to make it 14-7 at the break.

Sellers and Lee traded hoops in the first three minutes of the third period, and the Tigers seemed in control, 19-11, especially when Lee left with an injury at 4:49 just after scoring.

Instead, Keith sparked a rally. After Lee's hoop, Ryleigh LaPorte hit a free throw, and Keith went coast-to-coast with a rebound to make it 19-14. At 2:21 Keith stole the ball in the Tiger end, was fouled while hitting a layup and completed the three-point play: 19-17.

OV completed the quarter with a Peduto jumper and LaPorte free throw. The Otters had retaken the lead, 20-19.

Then it was the Tigers' turn. Turner grabbed an offensive board to open the fourth and fed Sellers, who was fouled and hit two free throws at 6:50. MUHS never trailed again.

Fifteen seconds later Turner hit a layup from Pitner in transition, and at 5:49 Turner stole the ball and scored in transition. The Tigers led, 25-20.

Turner said the Tigers believed



OTTER JUNIOR GUARD Elena Politano drives on Tiger junior guard Cady Pitner during Friday's game at MUHS. The Tigers prevailed, 35-28, in what was the opener for both girls' basketball teams.

Reporter photo/John S. McCright

in their game plan entering the period and kept their focus.

"We knew we had to stick with the game and work hard," Turner said. "We kept our composure, and we found the opportunities to push it up the court."

Peduto hit a jumper at 4:30 to give OV hope, but the Tigers' dominance on the boards paid off with putbacks by Turner and Sellers. At 3:00 OV called time down by 29-22. But after an OV turnover, Sellers hit two more free throws.

Down the stretch OV got four Keith free throws and a JoAnna Ray, but another Turner hoop

and two Pitner free throws offset those points.

Keith scored 11 to lead OV, followed by Jackson with eight and Peduto with six.

OV played without injured senior Riley Keith, and LaPorte and Alice Keith missed recent practices with injuries.

Counter said he was confident his team would improve, especially with better health.

"I couldn't be happier with the girls' effort," Counter said. "We've got some learning to go, but the girls are hungry, and they'll come in and we'll see what they can bring."

OV wrestling has good showing

ELLENBURG DEPOT, N.Y. — Several members of the Otter Valley wrestling team fared well in a Saturday tournament hosted by Northern Adirondack High School, including junior Caleb Whitney, who won the 138-pound weight class.

Whitney went 5-0 in the round robin tournament, pinning his first four opponents in the first round and defeating his Essex opponent, 7-2, in his fifth and final match. It was his first tournament championship.

Senior Sam Martin went 4-1 with four pins at 215, but fell in his final match and settled for second place.

Freshman Kingston Cotter also earned second place in a lightly

populated 120-pound class after splitting two matches, winning by pin in his victory.

Freshman Isaac Whitney at 189 had the next best result. Whitney finished in a three-way tie for first with a 4-1 record with four pins, but had to settle for third on a mat-time tiebreaker.

also had a fantastic day.

Sophomore Simon Martin also earned a third-place result at 215, as did junior Malachi Sheldrick at 152.

Tucker Babcock at 160 and Derek Li at heavyweight also competed for the OV varsity squad at the tournament.



CALEB WHITNEY, 138-POUND weight class champion.



OV SENIOR ALICE Keith works to get a shot off under the basket as Tiger senior Ivy Doran defends during Friday's opening game between their teams. The host Tigers surged in the fourth quarter to pull out the win despite Keith's team-high 11 points.

Reporter photo/John S. McCright