

By Randy Whalen

Darien Jacobs sat on the Lockport Township bench as the clock started winding down in the fourth quarter.

With the Porters safely in the lead, Jacobs didn't allow himself to bask in the moment of his first varsity basketball victory. Instead, he just focused on coaching.

"Don't look at the score, just play," he instructed his team.

That's exactly what the Porters did and in the end, they had a 61-42 season-opening victory against Wheaton North on Tuesday, Nov. 15 in the first game for both teams at Lockport.

But after the game, Jacobs allowed himself to be happy that his first-ever varsity basketball game as a head coach was successful.

"It does feel good," said Jacobs, who was previously a successful head lacrosse coach at Belleville West for the past four years, leading the Maroons to a 19-2 record this past season. "Coming into it, a different sport, a different area, after having a very good lacrosse team, this is nice.

"I think the girls played hard. We only have four varsity players back with experience."

Patricija Tamasauskas had a team-high 15 points and fellow senior guard Kaya Osinski scored 13 points and had five rebounds to lead Lockport. Both were on the team last season but didn't play too much.

"I feel like this season we realize that we have to put in the work to get to the next level," Osinski said. "We're expecting good things for the season. We're definitely not to our full potential yet. But we have been getting better at just talking to each other."

Tamasauskas agreed that communication this season is key.

"He has a lot of positives," Tamasauskas said of Jacobs. "He brings us all together as one big family, as a unit. After the game, he told us the job isn't done. We just have to keep pushing on the gas and keep going."

As far as opening games go, it was obviously a special one for Jacobs. But it was really a good game for the Porters, who never trailed. Osinski opened the game by scoring on a driving layup. Wheaton North (3-3 through Nov. 26) tied the game at 2-2 but Tamasauskas scored four points as the Porters responded with an 8-0 run and led 14-8 after the first quarter.

The Falcons, who were 22-8 last season and lost 60-54 in overtime to St. Charles East in the Class 4A Bartlett Sectional, tied the game at 20-20. But a layup by Tamasauskas with 21 seconds left in the second quarter gave Lockport a 22-20 halftime lead and it led the rest of the way.

Ahead 24-22 in the opening minute of the third quarter, the Porters had five different players score in a 15-2 blitz in just less than six minutes en route to a 40-28 advantage after three quarters. Then, ahead 40-30 in the opening minute of the fourth quarter, six different players scored as Lockport went on a 16-2 burst to lead 56-32 with 3:28 to play in the game.

Sophomore forward Alaina Peetz scored eight points and had seven rebounds, while senior guards Addie Foster and Brooke Sartin each added six points for the Porters. Wheaton North sophomore guard Sara Abdul led all scorers with 26 points.

"We knew Wheaton North was a good team and we came in focused," Jacobs said. "We did a good job controlling things. Regardless if we win or lose, I want the other team to walk off the court saying that this was a tough game."

Unfortunately for the Porters, they ran into a buzzsaw of good competition and went winless at the Willowbrook Invite. That started on Thursday, Nov. 17 with a 77-59 loss to Plainfield East (2-2).

The next day, Lockport faced an even tougher opponent in Montini and lost 76-44. The Broncos (4-0) were the tournament champions and won every game there by at least 23 points.

On Saturday, Nov. 19 the Porters lost a tough one to East Aurora by a score of 58-56 as the Tomcats made some key free throws down the stretch. East Aurora (3-2, 3-1 in the tournament) finished second place in the tourney.

In the final tourney game, on Tuesday, Nov. 22, Lockport lost to the host Warriors 37-32. The Porters (1-4) had a great defensive effort, holding Willowbrook (1-3) to 34 percent field goal shooting and forcing 17 turnovers. But they can't overcome going 6-of-16 free throws.

Despite going winless in the tourney, Peetz and Tamasauskas were both named to the All-Tournament team.

The good news was the JV team won the tournament and improved to 5-0 on the season.

Then on Monday, November 28, Lockport hosted Lincoln-Way Central in a SouthWest Suburban Conference crossover. While it was unfortunately another loss for the Porters, they did make sure Lincoln-Way Central walked off the court knowing it had a tough game.

Behind 25 points from Indiana-Purdue at Indianapolis-bound senior guard Azyah Newson-Cole and 15 points and seven rebounds from junior guard Gracen Gehrke, the Knights defeated Lockport 55-47.

Lincoln-Way Central (5-1) led 45-22 entering the fourth quarter, but the Porters (1-5) refused to quit and pulled to within 51-42 with 48 seconds remaining. That was as close as they got, however, until Osinski (10 points) hit a 3-pointer with a few seconds to play to provide the final margin.

Lockport jumped out to an early lead as Newson-Cole was on the bench for the first four minutes. The Porters got five points from Sartin, including a 3-pointer, to take a 7-2 lead. Peetz (8 points, 5 rebounds) made a pair of free throws to put Lockport ahead 9-6 as Newson-Cole entered the game. She wasted no time in making her presence felt, driving and dishing to sophomore forward Brooke Baechtold for a basket before driving the lane herself for a bucket and a 10-9 lead, and the Knights never trailed again. It was the first of several drives into the lane for buckets for Newson-Cole.

The middle of the game was not good for the Porters, who finished with 17 turnovers and only scored 13 points in the second and third quarters combined.

But Lockport didn't quit and went on a 9-0 spurt early in the fourth quarter to tighten the score to 49-36. Junior guard Veronica Bafia scored six of her team-high 12 points in the run, and Osinski added three free throws. Bafia later added back-to-back buckets that drew the Porters to within 51-40 before Osinski's free throws in the final minute made it 51-42.

It will be a busy December for the Porters, who have four more nonconference games in the month and will also be at the Oak Lawn Spartan Holiday Tournament between Saturday, Dec. 10, and Saturday, Dec. 17. They will also be at the Perspectives Girls Holiday Hoops Classic between Dec. 26-29.