

By Randy Whalen

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That number is universally considered to be a positive one that brings good fortune.

It was for the Lockport Township boys basketball team.

Behind a career-high 30 points from Jalen Falcon, the Porters defeated Homewood-Flossmoor 65-59 in a SouthWest Suburban Conference Blue Division matchup on Tuesday, Feb. 14 at Lockport.

Not only did the victory close out the regular season on a good note for the Porters, but it was also their first win over H-F since Feb. 3, 2012.

A span of 11 years and 11 days.

Before Tuesday, the previous Lockport victory over the Vikings was 52-50 on Feb. 3, 2012, in Flossmoor. The Porters (17-12, 3-5) had dropped 21 straight to H-F (17-13, 3-5) since then, including a 70-69 four-overtime thriller on Feb. 26, 2021, at Lockport, and 51-46 on Friday, Jan. 27 of this season in Flossmoor.

"I looked it up and in the previous 10 years, before this season, H-F was 104-20 in SWSC games," Lockport coach Brett Hespell said. "But they were 7-13 against Bolingbrook and 97-7 against the rest of the league. So it's huge to beat them."

Since the SWSC Blue formed for the 2005-06 season, Bolingbrook has won or shared 10 league titles, including this season. H-F has captured 14 conference crowns, 10 in the Blue and four in the Red Division.

"We wanted the game," Lockport senior guard Quinton Hunter said. "We were hungry to win, it was great. We had a focal point to play four good quarters in a row and we did. When we got back in the locker room we were all jumping around."

Hunter finished with 11 points, five assists, four rebounds, and three steals. He had seven points in the first quarter to help the Porters to a 7-0 advantage in the opening minute and they led the whole way. The lead grew to 9-0 and 18-4 before Lockport settled on a 23-14 lead after one. The pace slowed a bit in the second quarter but the lead grew to 38-26 at halftime.

"We felt we should have beat Bolingbrook," said Hunter of the Porters 55-49 loss to the host Raiders on Friday, Feb. 10. "I think this is the best we played in the four years I've been here."

The Porters maintained the double-digit advantage, which grew to 46-29 midway through the third quarter, It was 52-40 after three. H-F battled and got the lead under double digits in the final 2:49. But the Vikings, who received 21 points from sophomore guard Jayden Tyler and 17 points from junior guard Carson Brownfield, never got closer than the final six-point margin.

An alley-oop layup by Falcon with exactly one minute to play gave him 30 points and put the Porters ahead 63-53. Sophomore guard Bryce Turner (7 points) hit a pair of free throws with 28.1 seconds to play for a 65-57 lead. Senior guard Adam Labuda (12 points, 8 rebounds, 4 assists) and senior forward Caden Schoolcraft also contributed with five points.

"Quinton gave me that pass, he's my lob man," said Falcon for the play that gave him 30 points. "We were just in it right away and we came out and ran with them. Against the 'Brook we couldn't quite get all four quarters. But we did (against H-F) and I feel like we can keep doing that."

So does Hespell.

"I was impressed with our maturity," Hespell said. "We controlled the game from the start and led by double digits most of the way. We want to be playing our best at the end of the year and I thought we did."

The win broke a two-game skid for the Porters. On Friday, Feb. 3, they defeated Sandburg 61-44 in an SWSC Blue game in Orland Park. Labuda (20 points, 7 rebounds, 5 steals), Hunter (18 points, 4 rebounds, 3 assists), Schoolcraft (12 points, 2 blocks), and Falcon (9 points, 5 rebounds) contributed. The Eagles (10-21, 0-8) led 26-25 at halftime but Lockport got it going in the second half.

But the Porters fell to a very good Lincoln-Way East team 66-49 in a SWSC Blue game on Tuesday, Feb. 7. Hunter (7 points) got a rebound basket 27 seconds into the game for Lockport's only lead. Lincoln-Way East then went on a 16-0 run and led 36-21 at halftime. A bright spot was the play of Labuda, who had a game-high 24 points, along with six rebounds, and three steals.

The Griffins (23-5, 6-2), who have tied their school record for most wins in a season, were led by freshman guard BJ Powell (20 points) and senior forward George Bellevue added 15 points.

On Friday, Feb. 10, the Porters traveled to Bolingbrook for another SWSC Blue tussle and had a rollercoaster of a game. They trailed 25-10 before closing within 30-21 at halftime. Lockport then went on a 17-4 burst and led 38-34 after three quarters. But the Raiders (23-7, 8-0) went on 10-1 run to open the fourth quarter. Hunter and Labuda led the way with 13 points each, while Falcon contributed 12 points.

Lockport will host its own Class 4A Regional as part of the Bolingbrook Sectional. The semifinal games will be on Wednesday, Feb. 22 with No. 3 seeded Oswego East taking on No. 14 seeded Lincoln-Way West at 6 PM and the No. 7 seeded Porters will play No. 11 seed, West Aurora at approximately 7:30.

The sectional championship game is slated for Friday, Feb. 24 at 7 PM.

"This was just a great win to end the regular season," Labuda said of the H-F victory. "I like that it gives us the momentum. We have to bring that same mindset to the West Aurora game and keep that fire."