

By Randy Whalen

Progress is not always measured in wins and losses.

Take the Lockport Township girl's basketball team.

The Porters struggled down the stretch and finished with a losing record. That was only their second losing campaign since 2016-17.

But, although Lockport lost 46-31 on Tuesday, Jan. 31 at home to Lincoln-Way East, the Porter's progress was observed by their opponent. Hayven Smith, a 6-foot-5 junior post player scored a game-high 20 points and added 10 rebounds for the Griffins in that SouthWest Suburban Conference, Blue division matchup. But they knew they were up against an improving team.

"Lincoln-Way East is a good team, has good people, and I have a lot of respect for them," Lockport first-year coach Darien Jacobs said. "Hayven Smith's dad came up to me after the game and told me how much better we have become.

"We just have to keep playing, keep fighting, have mental toughness, and good things will happen."

Good things will happen for the Lockport girl's hoops program. They already have as Jacobs was hired last summer and brought in a new enthusiasm that should only grow more in the next few years.

"We will have more of an offseason," Jacobs said of this coming year. "We are laying down the bricks to become the team we want to be. This is where it begins, the start of the journey.

"It was tough at times this season. But I've got a lot of pride in this school. I want them to have pride in wearing that jersey."

There were a lot of good moments this season. Lockport traveled to Chicago and captured the title of the Perspectives Tournament which took place between Monday, Dec. 26, and Thursday, Dec. 29. The Porters were coming off a second-place finish at the Oak Lawn Invite/ Spartan Holiday Tournament. They won 10 of 11 games during a stretch in December.

So the seven Lockport seniors, Hannah Brannigan, Addison Foster, Kaya Osinski, Brooke Sartin, Layla Sweiss, Pat Tamasauskas, and Caliya Tate, saw the ups and downs this year.

"We got in our heads a lot," Brannigan said following Lockport's 63-48 SWSC Blue loss at home to a top team, Bolingbrook (25-3, 7-1), on Thursday, Feb. 2. "We were too focused on the past. We just need to toughen up and overcome our failures. We put in some new plays (at that time) and we should have some better communication.

"But I will remember the family we've had the last four years. Just the chemistry between us and all the coaches."

Foster, who is a star softball player in the middle infield for the Porters, missed a lot of the season. But she was glad to be back at the end.

"I was sick with mono and the flu earlier in the season," Foster said. "There were times we didn't play up to the level we needed to play at. We just had to be locked in and focused.

"It's nice to switch it up between basketball and softball. I've played basketball since third grade. So I'm just going to remember going out strong. Basketball is different than softball so I just wanted to go out hard and tough."

Sophomore forward, Alaina Peetz led Lockport against The 'Brook with 12 points. Junior guard Veronica Bafia added eight points and Osinski chipped in with seven points.

The final regular season game, on Tuesday, Feb. 7 was played at "The Pit" which is the old gym at Lockport Central. But the Porters offense still struggled in the different environment and lost 50-29 to Homewood-Flossmoor (18-6, 7-1), which was the SWSC Blue co-champion along with Bolingbrook.

Sophomore guard Julie Sass paced the Porters in that game with nine points, all on three-pointers, off the bench. Foster (7 points), and Osinski (6 points) also contributed.

The postseason opened on Monday, Feb. 13 with Lockport once again taking on Lincoln-Way East. This time it was in a Class 4A semifinal at the Lincoln-Way Central Regional.

The Porters battled and led throughout. But ultimately they lost 45-37. Lockport led 13-9 after the first quarter, 22-18 at halftime, and 28-27 after three. But the Griffins, which lost to Lincoln-Way Central 59-44 on Thursday, Feb. 16 in the regional title game, turned it up in the fourth quarter and got the victory. Smith, however, fractured her left foot in practice the week before and missed the postseason for Lincoln-Way East (21-11).

Osinski led the way with 13 points and Bafia contributed 10 points.

"The game was rough, Tamasauskas said. "We had the lead most of the game and then lost it right after the end of the third. In the beginning, we played like a team and knocked down shots but Lincoln-Way East started knocking down their shots when it was most needed.

"We also didn't have a full bench. The week before our team suffered a bunch of injuries. I injured my knee, Veronica (Bafia) injured her back, Brooke (Sartin) injured her shoulder and Alaina (Peetz) rolled her ankle. So when we played East we weren't at 100 percent. It was a good game and I wish it could've ended differently."

Unfortunately, it didn't and for the second straight season, the Griffins knocked Lockport out of the playoffs in the first game. Last year's score was 42-34 on Monday, Feb. 14 in the second semifinal of the Class 4A Lincoln-Way East Regional.

"It was a tough loss but I can promise that the future for the Lockport girl's basketball team is bright," Jacobs said. "Thank you to the players, families, and Lockport community for a great first season!"

This seasons ending loss was the 11th in a row for Lockport (13-19, 0-8 in the SWSC Blue).

"I thought we came out with the right mindset going into Monday's regional game but we fell short of keeping up our lead toward the end," Osinski said. "I'm still so proud of how we fought to the very end and I cannot wait to see what the underclassmen accomplish when we seniors are gone. Learning from past mistakes and evolving is going to be key for next season.

"I will always cherish the family created by this team. I'm sad to see it end this way, but I'm happy I got the chance to play with these girls for four years. Thank you Lockport basketball!"