

Lady Warriors steal title with tough defense at Monticello Hoopla

By Lenny Sementi

Every good team hangs their hat on something and Tuscola's girls' basketball squad has draped theirs on the defensive side of the floor. The old saying is defense wins championships, and that's just what the Lady Warriors did.

Coach Tim Kohlbecker was grinning ear to ear after his squad ran off four straight victories in three days at the Monticello Holiday Hoopla capping it off with a signature 44-38 win over a strong Ridgeview team in the title game.

Natalie Bates and Brynn Tabeling both cause more than their share of problems at the front of the Warriors two three zone, and last Thursday night it was no different as the duo forced 12 turnovers while swiping a combined seven steals. Two others that do some damage on the perimeter defensively are Grace Dietrich and Sophia Kremitzki who each added a pair of steals apiece. Lexie Russo gets better in the post night in and night out. The senior battled two Ridgeview players all night and ended up with three steals of her own.

Bates was tops in the scoring department checking in with 17 points on 6 of 12 from floor, including a pair of threes. Next in line was Russo who banged her way to 12 points in the paint on 3 of 6 from the field and 6 of 10 from the free throw line while also grabbing a team best six rebounds.

"What I am impressed with the most is the resiliency of this team. We played four games in three days at Arthur and then turn around a few days later and do it again at the Hoopla, that speaks volumes about this team's collective character," commented the coach. "We faced various schemes and styles of play and adapted well enough to win a championship. That will give us



Photo: Douglas Cottle

Warrior teammates Grace Voyles, Hannah Lemay, Ashton Smith, Marissa Russo, and Hope Dietrich react to Brynn Tabeling's steal and layup during Holiday Hoopla championship basketball action with the Ridgeview Mustangs. The Warriors defeated the Mustangs 44-38 for the championship.

momentum heading into the second half of the season. Coach (Lydia) Miller, Coach (Justin) Quick, and I are extremely happy for the girls, and very proud."

Both teams came out with defense on their minds, and it showed as the neither squad scored in the first three and a half minutes of the game. Ridgeview finally broke the ice at the 4:37 mark

in the first with an offensive put back and added another bucket before the Warriors lit up some lights on the scoreboard. Russo found her way to the line twice sinking 3 of 4 and then hit a short jumper before Tabeling drove to the hoop for a score as the Warriors ended the first down by one 8-7.

Bates then got into the act early in the second stanza

with a three and added two more buckets in a 9-2 run by the Warriors, netting Kohlbecker's crew a 17-10 advantage. Back came the Lady Mustangs climbing to within one of the lead at the break with a six-point run of their own. That lead changed five times in the third before the Warrior defense produced back-to-back layups off of steals and put Tuscola on top

for good. Both Tabeling and Kremitzki swiped balls and turned them into quick points. Russo hit an early runner in the fourth, and Bates drained three number two in the game forcing Ridgeview to foul in an attempt to get back in the game. Tuscola answered with an 8 for 12 effort at the charity stripe and received a big basket by Hope Dietrich

down low to wrap up the Hoopla Championship.

The Warriors won their fifth in a row moving to 13-5 overall on the year. Both Natalie Bates and Lexie Russo brought home some individual hardware as well securing a spot on the All Tournament Team.

Streak continues for Lady Warriors with two wins in the new year

By Lenny Sementi

Tuscola's girls' basketball team built on its success from their championship run at the Monticello Holiday Hoopla winning the first two games of the New Year by first beating a pesky Fisher squad 41-20 in a low scoring affair this past Thursday. Then, two days later, on Saturday used a big fourth frame to get past a strong Tolono Unity squad in a defensive battle 36-27.

It was the sixth and seventh straight victory for coach Tim Kohlbecker's group that started the run with a great win over Windsor in the third place game at the Arthur pre-Christmas Holiday Tournament and included a 4-0 effort at the Hoopla collecting Championship hardware.

Thursday, Jan. 3
Tuscola 41
Fisher 20

Natalie Bates and Brynn Tabeling harass opposing guards, forcing mistakes and last Thursday night it was no different as the duo swiped a combined nine steals. Bates corralled seven steals anticipating errant passes forced by traps out front due to Tabeling's quickness at the top of the zone.

"I feel we are improving week to week, and I believe we are nowhere near our ceiling," stated Kohlbecker. "I knew Fisher was better than their record. Our defense carried the day for us, and it again starts with the harassment and pressure supplied by our guards."

Two others that did some damage on the perimeter defensively were Grace Dietrich and Abbey Jacobs who each added two and three steals, respectively. Lexie Russo gets better in the post night in and night out. The senior battled two Lady Bunnies all night in the paint and came away with five steals. She was also strong on the boards grabbing a game high nine rebounds.



Photo: Douglas Cottle

Warrior Grace Dietrich dribbles towards the basket during Holiday Hoopla championship basketball action with the Ridgeview Mustangs. The Warriors defeated the Mustangs 44-38 for the championship.

sive stats as well by hitting 5 of 10 from the floor on her way to a game high 12 points. She also led all in assists dishing out five, three times finding Russo down low. Russo and her sister Marissa each donated seven points, while Tabeling and Dietrich combined for nine points.

Tuscola jumped out to a 13-2 lead after one and cruised from there allowing Coach K. to work on his bench depth throughout the second and fourth quarters. Tabeling and Bates both took steals coast to coast in the third and L. Russo was the recipient of passes to the low post from both that resulted in buckets. Hope Dietrich also found the younger Russo twice inside for buckets early in the fourth as the Warriors cruised to the victory.

Saturday, Jan. 5
Tuscola 37

Unity 26
The two area heavyweights squared off in the middle of the court and never gave an inch on the defensive end forcing each other to earn every point they put on the board. Tuscola scratched out a two-point

lead after one and stretched it to three points by the break in a battle of attrition as both coaches tried to find the hot hand. The Dietrichs were instrumental in the second game with Grace hitting one of her two treys in the frame, while Hope delivered a

basket of her own and solid minutes on the defensive end. The two combined for 14 points in the game with Grace hitting a pair of threes.

The family atmosphere continued after the break as the Russo sisters came up big for the Warriors. Lexie battled underneath controlling boards corralling a game, season, and career best 17 rebounds. Marissa was strong in the paint as well accounting for 10 points, four of which came in the pivotal fourth frame which saw the Warriors erase a slim one-point lead and post an eight-point run that ultimately doomed the Lady Rockets.

The Warriors moved to 15-5 overall on the season with the victory.

Tuscola's JV came out on top also winning a thriller 37-32 behind H. Dietrich's game high 14 points. Next up were Lainey Cummings and Maddie Stahler who both ended the night with five points.

Coach Lydia Miller's team never allowed more than five points in any one quarter a few days earlier versus Fisher to collect a 25-14 victory. Dietrich was king of the hill again checking in with eight points as did Stahler, while Hannah Lemay donated five points to the cause.

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