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O'Fallon girls split in opening weekend

By Steve Oliver - Progress Sports Writer

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The first two roundball contests for the O'Fallon High girls' basketball squad resulted in a split as the Panthers' dropped their season-opener in overtime to the Hillsboro Hiltoppers and rebounded with a six point victory over the Lincoln Railsplitters in the first weekend of the Taylorville Round Robin tournament.

Kicking off their 2010-11 campaign last Friday evening, Coach Ryan Massey's team suffered some of the same problems that ended in a 15-15 record last winter — sporadic offensive play and horrendous free throw shooting. The two negatives helped erase a four point first quarter lead and a one point advantage at halftime. In quarter number one, the local girls were able to forge into a 12-8 lead against the Hiltoppers but were unable to build any momentum in the second stanza. Hillsboro took advantage of the situation, out-scoring O'Fallon by three points to slice the Panther lead to 24-23 at intermission.

Neither team accomplished much after halftime with Hillsboro knotting the score at 31-31 entering the fourth period. Kaitlin Kendall, Taylor Klingelhoefner and Katie Roustio all managed to hit double digits in scoring with several baskets in the final stanza to add 14 points to O'Fallon's total. Hillsboro, however, behind a 21-point performance from Courtney Gabeau, which included several buckets from beyond the arc, matched O'Fallon basket for basket, forcing the game into overtime.

In the extra period, the Hiltoppers scratched out six points — two more than the cold-shooting Panthers were able to muster — to secure a 51-49 victory. During the game, O'Fallon shot an abysmal 3-for-13 from the free throw line and committed 18 fouls.

Facing Lincoln in the second round on Saturday, O'Fallon's offensive woes continued through the first three quarters. Katie Roustio's inside presence helped the Panthers stay within striking distance as they trailed Lincoln 18-14 at halftime.

Behind baskets by Klingelhoefner and Kendall Butler, O'Fallon was able to score in double digits in the third period, but Lincoln was three points better, extending their lead to 32-25 with only one period remaining in regulation play. Faced with the prospect of starting the year at 0-2, the O'Fallon girls finally snapped out of their scoring doldrums, erupting for 22 points in the final eight minutes to claim the victory 47-41.

In a complete reversal of form, the Panthers were decisive at the charity stripe down the stretch, finishing the game converting on ten of their twelve free throws. O'Fallon needed them all in out-scoring the Railsplitters 22-9 during the frame to even their tourney record at 1-1 entering this weekend's action in Taylorville.

Despite the lethargic start to the season, O'Fallon's post player Katie Roustio averaged 13 points per game and collected 19 rebounds to give the Panther girls a bit of momentum — something they carried with them in the final minutes of their comeback against Lincoln.

"Last year, we rolled through this tournament, but obviously this year that's not going to happen," Massey said. "We still have an opportunity to come out of the tournament with some positives. That's what our girls will focus on during these two games this week. The Hillsboro game was particularly disappointing, but after they squeezed past us, they dismantled Belleville East, so maybe our loss to them was not as much of a surprise as some thought it was."

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