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NEWS - O'FALLON PROGRESS - O'FALLON SPORTS

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Second half rally not enough for Panther girls

By Steve Oliver - Progress Sports Writer

An inspired fourth quarter rally was not enough to overcome a double-digit halftime deficit as the OTHS girls' basketball team dropped their second consecutive game of the week on Tuesday.

Hosting the Nerinx Hall Markers, a Missouri state semi-finalist last year, O'Fallon dug themselves into a 26-14 hole by intermission and eventually lost 51-45 to the 9-7 Markers. The defeat came on the heels of a 49-40 conference loss to East St. Louis, dropping the Panthers' overall record to 13-7.

After a first period that saw the two squads battle on even terms, Nerinx Hall turned up the volume defensively with full court pressure, and the Panthers appeared unprepared for the sudden change in tempo. Flying around the court, Nerinx Hall seemed to pick up every loose ball and every rebound during a six minutes stretch that ended with the Missourians outscoring O'Fallon 14-2.



Lady Panther guard Taylor Klingelhoef drives towards the basket.

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"We were outplayed in the second quarter," said OTHS coach Ryan Massey. "We didn't match their intensity. The came at us with man-to-man pressure and hit the boards very hard. We didn't respond well in either area."

Nerinx Hall held a 22-12 rebounding advantage during the first two periods, 10 of those coming on the offensive end. This stat, coupled with double digit O'Fallon turnovers, did not spell good news for the local cagers.

"At halftime, I had to challenge our girls to show more resolve and determination rather than trying to 'fix' anything that we were doing offensively or defensively. Sometimes, it's just a matter of commitment," Massey explained. "Our players responded well, but it was just too little too late."

O'Fallon used a 10-2 run midway in the third period and through the first minute of the fourth to cut the lead to 34-26. Taylor Klingelhoef, returning to action after being sidelined with a concussion, and Michelle Lay helped sustain the rally with steals and layup baskets. Four consecutive free throws by the Panthers trimmed the Nerinx Hall advantage to less than 10 one more time at the midway point of the fourth quarter, but it was as close as the Panthers could get.

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Prior to their faceoff against Nerinx Hall, the O'Fallon girls squared off against the East St. Louis Flyerettes. Playing without the services of two of their main scoring threats — Taylor Klingelhofer (concussion) and Stephanie Copelin (sprained ankle), the Panthers found themselves at a definite disadvantage against the 12-2 Flyerettes, but a solid team effort on O'Fallon's part kept the game close until the final minutes of the fourth quarter.

Despite committing 17 first half turnovers, O'Fallon managed to stay close, trailing only 9-6 at the end of the first stanza, and outscoring their hosts 13-11 in the second period to pull within one (20-19) at halftime.

Senior reserve Michelle Lay stepped up big for O'Fallon in the third quarter to give the surprising Panthers a lead with less than two minutes remaining in the third quarter. Lay hit four consecutive jumpers during the frame to help propel O'Fallon into a lead. Freshman Katie Roustio also helped pick up the slack, leading O'Fallon with 14 points on the night.

"For our girls to play East St. Louis on their home court without our full complement of players and basically play them to just five points was a tremendous effort on our kids' part," said Massey. "Michelle Lay really gave us an offensive boost with her best game of the year, and Katie Roustio helped keep us competitive in the paint for the entire game."

The lethargic Flyerettes, when faced with the OTHS third quarter run, turned to 6'1" sophomore Joymesia Howard to put some distance between themselves and the pesky Panthers. Howard responded with three consecutive jump shots and three free throws in succession to help the Flyers score eight of the final ten points of the third period and regain a 34-31 lead.

Six straight East St. Louis free throws in the final 90 seconds of the fourth quarter sealed the deal for the Flyerettes and dropped O'Fallon's SWC record to 5-4.

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