



David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
TALL OBSTACLE TO OVERCOME...Blue Devil Diana Venezia, right, has to overcome the height advantage of 6'0" Lioness center Kelly Loughney, No. 31, in the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 4 game.

HANDZA PUMPS IN 20 POINTS, PONCE 8, VENEZIA 6

Lady Lions Edge Blue Devils In Section Basketball, 45-40

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Unlike the 23-point thrashing they experienced last December from the Lady Lions, the sixth-seeded Westfield High School girls gave the third-seeded North Hunterdon girls basketball team all it could handle in the first round of the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 4 Tournament in Annandale on March 4.

The 21-4 Lady Lions overcame a seesaw battle for dominance with the 15-10 Blue Devils in the first half, then carried a nine-point lead into the fourth quarter but had to struggle to pull out a 45-40 victory.

Lion forward/center Kelly Loughney, who was very dominant in the first meeting of the two teams, was still quite impressive underneath the boards but the Blue Devil defense held its own and limited her to 14 points, while Blue Devil point guard Tara Handza pumped in a game-high 20 points, including four 3-pointers.

"She dominated last time so she was definitely on our radar. Our forwards did a good job of rebounding against her and playing defense against her," said Handza, who finished with eight rebounds, four assists and two steals. "We switched to man (defense) after playing zone for

a really long time in the season. I think it was a really good change. We played really well."

"First game of the season, they beat us by 23. Our girls were out here to make a point tonight. We did a nice job overall. We shut their offense down. It could have gone either way, a foul shot here, a basket there. It was a good game," Blue Devil Head Coach Joe Marino said.

After Lion Jessica Pellechio (14 points) opened the game with a 3-pointer, Blue Devil Keri Pringle (8 points, 3 assists, steal) answered with the first of her two 3-pointers and Diana Venezia (6 points, 4 rebounds, steal) followed with a 2-pointer. The first quarter ended, 14-14, then the Blue Devils jumped to a 23-17 lead midway through the second quarter but the Lions roared back with eight unanswered points to grab a 25-23 lead at the half.

Venezia got into foul trouble early in the third quarter and the Lions began to take control of the boards and the score to win the quarter, 16-9, and to carry a 41-32 lead into the fourth quarter.

"We started to lose it in the third quarter when Diana got into foul trouble. It turned it (the tide of the game) because we lost the boards a

little," coach Marino said.

Interestingly, the Blue Devils got very stingy defensively and whittled away at the Lions' lead. Handza hit a 3-pointer and Katie Ponce (4 points, 3 steals, 2 assists) hit for two points. With less than 30 seconds remaining, Handza hit her fourth 3-pointer to make the score, 43-40, but the Blue Devils were soon forced to foul to spare time on the clock. Pellechio went to the line with three seconds on the clock and hit both free throws to finalize the scoring.

"If you are going to lose a game, lose it playing hard and we fought hard. I'm proud of the team and proud of the way we finished," Handza said. "We lost to them earlier by about 23. To lose to them by five, leading by five early in the game and giving them a good game was good to see. A couple of shots could have gone our way, a couple could have gone their way so it was anyone's game."

"Our girls worked hard all week in practice and their objective was to come out here and put it all on the floor," coach Marino said. "We wanted to outplay our opponents and they pretty much played them evenly. We came to work hard and we did it."

Westfield	14	9	9	8	40
N. Hunterdon	14	11	16	4	45

Raider Cagers Sting Mendham in Section, 53-48

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

make a run and we had big shots towards the end," Solomon added.

The 24-3 Minutemen spent the entire game trying to funnel the ball into their very agile and big, 6'8" center Mark Cisco, who finished with 22 points and 10 rebounds. Even though he was injured for a while in the first quarter, Cisco, who will play at Columbia University next year, managed to roll in his 1,000th career point late in the third quarter and finished with 1,010. However, Raiders Ishmil Raymond (10 points, 7 rebounds, blocked shot) and Marcus Green did make matters difficult for him.

"He's a very tough player. He dropped a lot of buckets. We played great 'D' on him but he managed to score. Even though he got injured, he kept playing. I admire him," Raymond said.

"Mendham is a great program! We knew it was going to be tough, especially guarding a guy like Cisco. We don't really face a kid like that in our conference. It was a little bit of a different look. I thought Ishmil and Marcus Green did a great job of just making the kid work, really kind of wearing him down by the end of the night," coach Martinez said.

Green, who finished with 10 rebounds and will play football next fall at Temple University, grabbed most of the Raiders' offensive rebounds and scored most of his eight points on putbacks.

"Marcus Green played his heart out. He's a football player. He has the most strength on the team. He goes for every ball. He does what he has to do to win. He gets that from football. Everybody (contributed), the bench, everybody! I got hurt. The bench got out and they just kept playing," Raymond said.

"That's one thing about Marcus. He's really a football player playing basketball. He did a great job of attacking the offensive glass. That's what he does well. He had a lot of putbacks that really got us going," coach Martinez said.

Both teams exercised a degree of caution in the first quarter and both teams' defenses limited their opponent to eight points. Raider Kevin

Maroney (4 rebounds) sank four of his nine points in the quarter. Minute-man Rob Berish, who will attend

and later Solomon added his pair of 3-pointers to knot the score, 47-47, with 1:35 left. The Raiders crept to a



David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
MINUTEMEN'S BIGGEST NIGHTMARE...Raider Reggie Solomon, No. 10, hit a pair of 3-pointers, made a key steal and added a rebound that spelled "demise" for the Mendham Minutemen. See SPFF/Shabazz game next week!

Harvard University in the fall, hit seven of his nine points in the second quarter as Mendham took a 20-14 lead at the half.

With Maroney and Raymond each sinking five points, the Raiders won the third quarter, 18-13, to cut the Minutemen's lead to 33-32.

Mendham clung to a 40-38 lead with 5:18 remaining but Raider Pat Dougher (9 points) sank a 3-pointer

50-48 lead. Solomon made his steal then his struggle for a rebound gave the Raiders possession, which enabled Marvin Hanciles (5 points, 3 rebounds, assist) to roll in a lay-up, draw a foul and sink the free throw.

"All in all, the kids just fought. We found a way to win tonight," coach Martinez said.

Sc. Pl.-Fanwood	8	6	18	21	53
Westfield	8	12	13	15	48

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