Reish in a Rush

Jack Reish Dribbles Past Midcourt in Briarcliff’s Win Over Tappan Zee at the Annual Booster Club Tourney
Foxes Crush Arlington for Their First Win of the Season

By Andy Jacobs

Not even five seconds after the opening tip last Tuesday evening, Fox Lane forward Alex Olsen stole the ball in the backcourt and, with no one in his way, began a length-of-the-floor dash to the basket. When he arrived in the lane, he brought the ball behind his head with two hands as he elevated and proceeded to slam it through the rim.

Olsen’s emphatic dunk not only gave the Foxes a lead they would never relinquish at Arlington High School, it set the tone for the entire game. The host Admirals managed to stay competitive for one quarter, but by halftime they trailed by 19 points and wound up losing to Fox Lane 58-43.

“It helps, it definitely helps,” said Foxes coach Mike Tomassi afterwards about the intimidation a dunk such as Olsen’s can provide. “Definitely a big momentum boost and an energy boost for us. You know, it doesn’t happen much that early into the game. So any time that it does, I think it definitely helped us for the positive and pumped us up a little more than we probably were at that time.”

The Foxes, rebounding from a season-opening lopsided loss to talented Baldwin down on Long Island a few days earlier, jumped all over the overmatched Admirals. Olsen’s dunk was quickly followed by baskets from Emmett Robin and Matt Redhead that gave Fox Lane a 6-0 lead less than two minutes in.

When Arlington finally got on the board with a Tom Duffy 17-foot jumper, the Foxes answered with their second 6-0 run, capped off by another impressive two-handed dunk, this time by Redhead on a feed from Sean New.

“We’ve got some real athletic guys on the team this year that can dunk,” said Tomassi. “We try and tell the guys that it doesn’t always happen here at Fox Lane. But you’re gonna start to see a lot of it, hopefully, this year. It’s definitely a big boost when you have that intimidating factor. But it’s still only worth two points in the end and we’ve got to do a lot of other things to win some games.”

Despite the early aerial display by Olsen and Redhead, Arlington managed to score the final seven points of the first quarter and only trailed 12-9 after the first eight minutes, much to the dismay of Tomassi.

“We’re always trying to work on finishing what we start and, this year’s team, one of our goals is to keep teams down when we have them down. We don’t want to give teams confidence and let them back in. Our focus is to have the pedal to the metal and when a team is down to keep pouring it on because other teams’ll do that to us.”

A short jumper by the Admirals’ burly center, Shane Walczyk, to start the second quarter cut the Fox Lane lead to just one point. But the Foxes’ Robin, who finished with a game-high 16 points, connected on a trio of 3-pointers from the top of the key in the midst of a 15-3 spurt that turned the game into a rout.

After another basket by Walczyk with 1:50 to go before halftime cut Fox Lane’s lead to 11 points, the Foxes erupted for eight unanswered points in the final 54 seconds, four of them by New, to build a 35-16 halftime advantage. The final two points came when Olsen improbable grabbed a long inbounds pass and scored on a layup as the buzzer sounded.

While Olsen and Redhead supplied the first-half thunder, it was the point guard, Robin, with his long-range shooting, who delivered the biggest blows to Arlington’s chances of winning its season opener.

“Yes, Emmett can really shoot,” said Tomassi. “He’s a great pass-first point guard. I think he’s shown that, but he hasn’t really shown how good of a shooter he is. So hopefully they keep falling for us and for him because he’s a big piece to this offense. You know, when he’s passing the ball and getting other guys involved, then if he can start knocking down shots that would be fantastic and really help us out.”

Robin added one more 3-pointer, again from the top of the key, in the third quarter as the Foxes outscored Arlington 20-14 to stretch their lead to 25 points. Redhead, who finished with 13 points along with New, had three baskets in the period. By the time the fourth quarter began, all the Fox starters were watching from the bench and most of the Arlington student cheering section had vacated the gymnasium.

The Fox Lane reserves struggled offensively and didn’t put any points on the board until there were just 24 seconds left in the game when Aaron Winkler managed to make the second of two free throws. Barry Carmody added a pair of foul shots with six seconds remaining for the Foxes, who were outscored 13-3 in the final quarter.

“We had 58 points and 43 of them came from four guys,” said Tomassi. “That’s great and hopefully that continues, but we’ve got to get some other points from the reserves. I have confidence in them. You know, it was the second game of the year. We’ve got some guys that weren’t on the team last year, a couple of juniors that are new to the rotation. I’m not worried about that, but that’s definitely one of the things we’ve got to work on. People have got to step up. When it’s their time to step on the floor, earn those minutes.”

The Foxes closed their week with a 59-41 home win over Lourdes on Friday as New scored a game-high 19 points and Olsen added 16 despite early foul trouble. Tomassi can only hope that the victories over the two Dutchess County schools are the first dividends from the lessons learned in the humbling loss to Baldwin.

“We think we’re pretty good and we’re working hard to achieve some of our goals this year,” he said. “But to take the next step as a program, we’ve got to play teams that are better than us. Find those learning experiences and no matter if it’s a 30-point win or a 30-point loss, every game has a teachable moment. Hopefully we’ll take positives and negatives from each game and improve and get better every day.”
By Justin Thomas

It was back and forth all game between the Briarcliff Bears and the Tappan Zee Dutchmen in the Briarcliff Booster Club Tournament championship game on Saturday night, with the two teams separated by just two points with under 45 seconds left to play. But with strong defense and clutch free throws at the end, the Bears were able to outlast Tappan Zee to win the tournament title 55-47.

"I think we grew up tonight," Briarcliff coach Cody Moffett said shortly after the game. "These guys put all the hard work into the scout, and we came out and executed the game plan and played well."

Briarcliff started the game strong, scoring on its first two possessions with methodical ball movement and passing. But then Tappan Zee star guard Rob McWilliams took over, hitting his first three shots. The Bears went on a run to answer at the end of the first quarter, tying the game at 13-all, but McWilliams wanted to put his stamp on the quarter.

Falling away from the basket, McWilliams hit a heavily contested 3-pointer at the buzzer to give the Dutchmen a 16-13 lead at the end of the first quarter. McWilliams' shooting was sharp as can be in the first quarter, so the Bears knew they had to step it up on defense.

"The kid that they have, Rob, he's a tough scorer," Moffett said of McWilliams. "He hit some tough shots. So what we told them was, 'don't get discouraged when he hits the tough shot. Just make him work for every point he gets.' And Josiah Cobbs did an excellent job with that."

It would've been easy to get discouraged after Tappan Zee started the second quarter on a 5-0 run, widening the gap to eight points. But Briarcliff saw the deficit as a challenge to play harder, a challenge that was answered by starters Cobbs, Jack Reish and Sean Crowley.

The trio forced some big turnovers and led the Bears on an 8-0 run to take a 22-21 lead before Tappan Zee center Victor Clervil hit two free throws right before the half to give the Dutchmen a one-point lead at intermission.

As soon as the third quarter started, both teams came out like they were shot out of a cannon. It was a back-and-forth, up-tempo game that didn't seem to have a single dull possession the rest of the way.

The Bears and Dutchmen were trading blows, drawing fouls, forcing turnovers and hitting big shots as the intensity seemed to ramp up with every possession. At the end of the third quarter, it really was anyone's game, with the teams tied up at 39 apiece.

"I'll be honest with you," Moffett said. "There was a point in the huddle where I said, 'an experienced team needs to execute,' because a couple of times we were just freelancing offensively. So in the huddle I said, 'if you execute, you'll have an opportunity to win this game,' and that's what championship teams do down the stretch. They execute. And I felt like we executed tonight."

The Bears answered the call from their coach, and executed down the stretch in more ways than can be seen on a stat sheet. Cobbs shut down McWilliams, allowing him to score just nine points in the final three quarters, and Reish forced a number of turnovers and bad passes from the Dutchmen to sway the game in his team's favor.

The battle down low between the two centers, Crowley and Clervil, was a treat to watch all night. Crowley, who finished with nine points and five rebounds, knew it was going to be a tough offensive matchup for him all night, so he made sure his presence was felt on the defensive end.

"They're big and they're tough on the inside," Crowley said. "So I knew we were going to try to stop me on the inside. That's what they've tried to do the past few years that we've played them. So I knew if I was going to affect the game, it was going to be on defense. So I was stepping up, taking charges, blocking shots, double-teaming McWilliams, which was tough."

The game started to turn in Briarcliff's favor when Crowley drew a couple of big charges and turnovers inside against Tappan Zee, and when Reish and Cobbs got hot offensively to help close the game out.

Briarcliff clinched the game late in the fourth quarter on a block inside by Crowley that turned into a fast-break bucket by Cobbs to give the Bears a 48-44 lead. Tappan Zee had a chance to tie it up with just under 45 seconds left after Dutchmen guard Kieran Gibson drew a huge charge. But Cobbs and Crowley didn't give the Dutchmen any passing lanes, and the ball sailed out of bounds for a turnover that would end the T Z chances after some clutch free throw shooting by Reish.

"That was a great team effort," Moffett said. "It all started with Josiah Cobbs being the spearhead, and Sean Crowley being a force down low, and Jack Reish picking his points, and all five of those guys...and the guys that came in off the bench. Even Taijon Tribble, the freshman, he gave us good, solid minutes. It was a total team effort."

Reish, Crowley and Cobbs were named to the all-tournament team from the Briarcliff side, with McWilliams and Gibson being honored from the Tappan Zee side. Cobbs was also named the tournament's MVP. The Bears will look to use this tournament win as energy going forward.

"It's just one win," Moffett said. "Now, is it against a really, really good team? Of course. But at the end of the day, it's just one win, and if you don't use that as a springboard to try to get better going on during the season, then it can come back and hurt you. So we can't get too high, too low...and hopefully keep this momentum going."
A Dominant Second Half Lifts Greeley Over the Patriots

By Andy Jacobs

There were eight lead changes and six ties in the first half of Friday night’s game, but eventually the Horace Greeley boys’ basketball team took command against visiting John Jay.

Five quick points by junior forward Jack Baron in the final minute of the second quarter gave the Quakers the lead for good and they went on to a lopsided 64-44 victory over the Patriots. Jeff Merchant scored a game-high 18 points as Greeley bounced back from a drubbing at Roy C. Ketcham earlier in the week and evened its record at 2-2.

“Yeah, I thought we played really well in the second half, defensively,” said Quakers coach Dave Fernandes following the impressive win by his team. “And then we started hitting some shots in the second half, too, kind of get out in front. But it’s a work in progress with us, a work in progress.”

Sophomore guard Ryan Flanagan came off the Greeley bench to score 10 second-half points and the Quakers took advantage of 21 turnovers by John Jay to turn the game into a rout. A 3-pointer by Flanagan from the left corner with two minutes remaining gave the Quakers their largest lead of the evening, 25 points.

Merchant had nine of his points in the opening quarter when the lead was changing hands half a dozen times and the Quakers built a 17-15 advantage. A pair of three-pointers by Kevin Turi 30 seconds apart and the inside presence of rugged forward Ryan Schumacher enabled John Jay to stay close over the first eight minutes.

Schumacher was part of an imposing Patriot frontline that included lanky center Logan O’Donnell and caused the Panthers’ Fernandes some pregame concern.

“Well, yeah,” he said. “Schumacher, we played him last year, a tough kid. And the other boy, I mean, he’s 6-foot-10, six-foot-9, something like that. So we made sure we had a body on him at every time. And the kids on the zone played really well and I thought we rebounded really well.”

Still, it was a couple of put-back baskets at the start of the second quarter that gave the Patriots their final lead of the game, 19-17. Merchant ended a nearly three-and-a-half-minute scoreless span for the Quakers with a turnaround jumper in the lane, then scored another bucket on a fast break a minute later.

A jump shot by the Patriots’ Ray Kupetz, his only basket of the night, tied the game for the final time. The first-half scoring ended with Greeley’s Baron hitting a 3-pointer from the right elbow with a minute to go, then making a steal and dribbling coast to coast for a layup with 20 seconds left on the clock. The Quakers held a 26-21 halftime lead and John Jay never got any closer than three points in the second half.

Greeley outscored the Patriots 23-14 in the third quarter, led by Brandon Spiegel, who erupted for seven points after missing three layups in the first half. Despite the earlier struggles, Fernandes didn’t hesitate to get Spiegel back on the court in the third quarter.

“I wanted him to get his confidence and he came back because he’s very critical of himself,” said Fernandes. “He wants to make sure he plays well, and that’s the type of kid he is. Again, to his tribute, second half, he came out, got a couple of steals, a couple of big baskets. Did a nice job.”

The Patriots were still within six points following a Schumacher basket midway through the third quarter when Greeley exploded for eight straight points in less than 40 seconds to open up a 41-27 advantage. The spurt began with a Brian Unger trey and then Spiegel made a steal, went in for a layup and was fouled. He added the free throw, then scored on another layup just 20 seconds later off a feed from Ben Wolfensohn.

The Quakers’ lead grew to 49-32 when Flanagan drilled a 3-pointer from the right wing with a minute to go. As the fourth quarter got under way, John Jay found itself trailing by 14 points. Any chance of a Patriot comeback disappeared as Greeley scored the next four baskets of the period — a jumper by Baron, a layup by Unger cutting to the basket, a short jump shot by Merchant and a layup by Flanagan — and kept John Jay off the scoreboard for the first four minutes and 15 seconds.

With another home game, against Ossining, looming just 24 hours away, Fernandes was able to rest his starters for most of the fourth quarter.

“Well, you know, they’ll be ready to play,” he said. “The kids’ll bounce back. I’m not worried about that. When the snow comes, we’ve got to play back to back and stuff. So they’ll be OK like that.”

As it turned out, Fernandes was right. The Quakers made the quick return to the court and defeated Ossining 65-60 on Saturday evening as Spiegel scored 19 points, Unger 17 and Merchant 15.

“It’s all about being a team, and that’s what we’re trying to get to,” said Fernandes following the Quakers’ win over John Jay in their home debut. “You know, coming together. Like I said, a work in progress. Every game will be a challenge and we’ll get better as we go. And that’s a good thing.”
Youth is Served as Briarcliff Wins Its Annual Booster Club Tourney

By Andy Jacobs

The curtain had just risen on the brand new season when the Briarcliff girls’ basketball team was jolted by a devastating turn of events. Speedy star guard Carly Fanelli injured her right knee in the team’s opening game.

“Honestly, when she went down, it affected us for three games. It really did,” Bears coach Don Hamlin was saying Saturday evening. “The confidence that they were playing with was, they stopped playing. We were lucky we didn’t play this week. Spent the whole week trying to build them up and telling ‘em they can and that they’re still good.”

Apparently Hamlin’s message to his young, shattered team that includes three ninth-graders and two eighth-graders finally sank in. The Bears rebounded from the grim start to their 2015-16 season with a pair of impressive victories in the 16th annual Briarcliff Booster Club Basketball Tournament, capturing the championship by defeating Pelham 58-48 late Saturday afternoon.

Sparked in both games by a pair of players from the precocious quintet that makes the Bears among the youngest and most intriguing teams in all of Section One, Briarcliff collected its first two wins of the season and served notice that its playoff hopes didn’t end with Fanelli’s ACL misfortune.

Eighth-grader Alana Lombardi earned the tournament’s most valuable player award after pouring in 31 points in Friday’s 69-34 rout of Mamaroneck in the opening round, then following it up with 17 more just a day later as the Bears withstood a second-half comeback bid by Pelham. Freshman point guard KC Hamlin wound up with 44 points in the two wins and was named to the all-tourney team.

“They’re talented,” said coach Hamlin after witnessing the tournament exploits of his two emerging guards. “They can make plays out of nothing. I tell ‘em players make plays. And they’ve been making plays the last two nights.”

Lombardi, a sweet-shooting southpaw still in middle school, made an astounding seven 3-pointers in Friday evening’s demolition of Mamaroneck and piled up 24 of her points in the middle two quarters when the Bears outscored the Tigers by a 45-17 margin. Hamlin, daughter of the Bears’ coach, added four more 3-pointers and finished the game with 25 points.

“We shot the ball so well last night,” said coach Hamlin, looking back 24 hours on the opening-round romp over Mamaroneck. “If we shoot like that, I mean, it’ll be very difficult to beat us when we’re shooting the ball that well.”

For a while on Saturday, the Bears continued to shoot the ball well. Lombardi and Hamlin each had a pair of 3-pointers in the first half as Briarcliff opened up a 35-21 lead at intermission. Pelham, which had defeated Nanuet in the tournament’s first round, held its only lead of the game when Julia Doucette scored on a put-back that gave the Pelicans an early 4-3 edge.

The Bears never trailed again after the first two minutes. By the end of the first quarter, junior Jackie Contento, who was named to the all-tournament team, had nine of her eventual 16 points and Briarcliff had built a 21-10 cushion. Early in the second period, the Bears used a 7-0 spurt that started with a Lombardi trey and ended with a Hamlin drive through the lane for a left-handed layup to open up their largest lead of the contest, 17 points.

Even though Briarcliff’s advantage was still 14 points at halftime, the game was far from over. Pelham scored the first nine points of the third quarter, moving within 35-30 on a Jordan Amorelli 3-pointer with 5:39 left in the period. When the Bears extended their lead back up to double figures again, the Pelicans closed the quarter with a pair of put-back baskets to trail by only six points.

“Yeah, we didn’t handle the beginning of the second half very well,” said Hamlin, whose team was held scoreless for the first three and a half minutes. “But that happens when you have eighth and ninth graders (on the court) all the time. We went one on one a little bit too long. It’ll give us something else to work on.”

The fourth quarter began with Contento connecting on a 3-pointer, then Lombardi following with a 15-foot jumper that stretched the Briarcliff lead to 49-38. But Pelham answered with a right-corner trey by Lauren Kuster and a put-back basket from Samantha Volpe to slice its deficit back to just six points with 4:24 remaining.

But the Pelicans’ comeback bid was suddenly thwarted by an unlikely Briarcliff hero. Hamlin, Lombardi and Contento wound up combining for 52 of the Bears’ 58 points, yet it was Kelly O’Donnell, a freshman forward who had only one point up until then, who stepped up and provided perhaps the game’s two biggest baskets.

With just under four minutes to go, O’Donnell made a 10-foot jumper from just beyond the right side of the lane. Only 19 seconds later, following a Pelham turnover, O’Donnell drilled another short jumper, this time in the lane, to provide the Bears with some breathing room.

“It was huge,” said Hamlin of the late lift his team got from O’Donnell. “We were really struggling. I think they got the lead down to six and we had two possessions in a row where she made huge baskets.”

The resilient Pelicans whittled the Briarcliff lead to just 53-48 with 45 seconds left, but then Contento made a pair of free throws after a technical foul was called on Pelham to all but clinch the victory with 26 seconds on the clock.

Despite the two impressive tourney wins, Hamlin knows his task this year has been made much more difficult with the early loss of Fanelli, especially “because she was playing so well.” But he’ll soon get some reinforcements as eighth grader Maddie Plank and senior Kelly Monaghan return from injury to provide some much-needed rebounding help.

And even though he’s being forced to rely on much younger players this season, Hamlin is not looking for sympathy.

“It’s easier than you think,” he said, “because they all want to learn and they all want to get better, and their attitude is tremendous.”

That attitude figures to be even better now that his team got its first taste of victory this past weekend.

“It’s huge,” said Hamlin about the effect a few wins can have on young players. “The first one’s always the hardest, and we got that last night. I think they’re feeling a lot bit better about themselves.”
Above: Byram Hills guard Skylar Sinon dribbles up the court in Thursday’s Bobcat win over Yorktown.

Right: Briarcliff’s Josiah Cobbs rises for a short jump shot in the first half of Saturday’s tournament victory over Tappan Zee.

Above left: Fox Lane’s Matt Redhead is about to dunk the ball in last Tuesday’s victory over host Arlington.

Left: Greeley’s Jeff Merchant shoots the ball in the Quaker win over the visiting John Jay Patriots.

Above: Jared Friedberg of Byram Hills glides to the basket in the second half of Thursday’s game vs. Yorktown.

Above left: Fox Lane’s Matt Redhead is about to dunk the ball in last Tuesday’s victory over host Arlington.

Left: Greeley’s Jeff Merchant shoots the ball in the Quaker win over the visiting John Jay Patriots.

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Jimmer Fredette Makes His Debut for the Westchester Knicks

By Andy Jacobs

There's no telling how long it will last, but the highly anticipated and slightly delayed Jimmer Fredette Show finally made its debut at the Westchester County Center.

Fredette, the onetime schoolboy scoring star from just north of New York State's capital region and national college player of the year after averaging 29 points a game his senior season at Brigham Young University, was recently selected by the Westchester Knicks with the second pick in the NBA D-League's annual draft.

But his arrival in White Plains was delayed when the injury-ravaged New Orleans Pelicans signed him to provide some emergency backcourt depth. He wound up playing just 14 minutes for them before being released by the struggling NBA team and rejoined the D-League's Knicks the last week of November.

"Well, I thought I was gonna get more playing time, to be honest with you," said Fredette about his abbreviated second stint in New Orleans. "We thought we were gonna get an opportunity to play, and that's kind of what they indicated. But it didn't happen that way, so it's nothing you can do about it. You go back to the drawing board and continue to work."

After the disappointment with the Pelicans, Fredette made his initial appearance at the County Center on the last day of November and wasted no time showing local basketball fans why he was an NBA lottery pick in 2011. Facing Grand Rapids, he scored the first two baskets of the game in a Westchester Knick uniform before being released by the struggling NBA team and rejoined the D-League's Knicks the last week of November.

"I didn't play as well as I wanted to the second game," he admitted. "I'm still trying to get my legs under me. But we had a chance to win at the end, just didn't make a play. Sometimes that happens, and move on to the next one."

Fredette has now played seven games for the Knicks and is averaging 24.4 points, fourth in the league. He's also providing Westchester with nearly five assists a game and two and a half steals. Knicks head coach Mike Miller couldn't be happier to have Fredette around to replace the offense the team lost when leading scorer DaJuan Summers ruptured his Achilles earlier in the season.

"I think he adds a lot to the team," said Miller. "He does a lot of things. He's a true professional. Certainly he handles his business, he does his work, he's prepared. He's got a good feel for the game. He's got a great demeanor that allows him to probably play a lot of different roles because he's pretty steady. In terms of his demeanor, he's not gonna get too high or too low. That's part of his makeup and probably the lessons he's learned over a career as a college player and a pro player."

Fredette, undersized as an NBA shooting guard, is just the latest of countless tweeners to join the NBA's D-League. How long he remains there is anyone's guess, but local fans, for the time being, have a star attraction playing practically in their backyards.

"They've got a great setup here for the Westchester Knicks," said Fredette, still hopeful he can earn a roster spot on an NBA team and become a rotation player. "It wasn't a hard transition at all. I'm focused on one thing and that's trying to get better and to help this team. Whatever happens is gonna happen."
Eighth-Grader Alana Lombardi and Freshman KC Hamlin
Lead the Bears to the 2015 Booster Club Tournament Title
With Victories Over Mamaroneck and the Pelham Pelicans