

TIGERS 8TH GRADE

Penn State Showcase Tournament Recap

by William Russell
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Wilmington Tigers U-14 (Igo) were at the **Penn State Tournament** week ending July 9th. This team of rising freshmen played "up" a year, as the youngest age group at **Penn State** is rising sophs, so the *Tigers* faced some bigger, stronger teams but played competitively and held their own. Here's summary of how things played out in our end-of-season event.....

Tuesday: After the mandatory NCAA briefing on conduct, recruiting, and rules, we opened vs. a tough *Erie Saints* team, big in the middle and quick (and lefty) at the one guard. Courtney Wallace led the way with 6 points, in a 35-24 loss for the *Tigers*. Points and rebounds in the paint were nicely distributed between Emily Thiemann, Taylor Hazewski, and Alex Thomas. The 6 foul rule helped *Erie*, who had only 7 girls and used its size (and many of its fouls) to take a physical inside game to the *Tigers*. Highlight: late in the 2nd with the game within 5, *Erie's* 6 ft center got a "shorty" in the paint and demanded the ball, Lindsay Russell stuck an elbow in her back, held her from attacking the hoop, and blocked her attempt at the layup.

Wednesday: in the morning, we got to play *Fencor* in the main venue, the **Bryce Jordan Center** and home of the **Nittany Lions**. Claire Igo and Thiemann led the way for the *Tigers* with 6 pts each, in what proved to be a 46-33 loss for the *Tigers*. Three other players contributed 5, Hazewski, Thomas, and Wallace. Highlights: both 1) Thiemann's early work in the paint, with ever improving footwork, hitting several turnaround shots vs bigger players to keep it close early and 2) Igo's heads up cut to the basket on an in-bounds play under our basket, late into the 5 second count, she took Russell's delivery avoiding the turnover on count, and converted a nifty layup that made the *Fencor* team pay for its pressure.

The evening game (#3): a small gym floor (think St. John The Beloved) an opponent big on the inside and lightning quick at the guards, and physical at that....what do you get??? The *Tiger's* best performance thus far vs. its toughest opponent all season and 3 players lost to injury in the 1st half, a comeback from an early deficit, and a very "good" loss, 53-44 vs. a tough *NY Royals* team. Thomas led all *Tigers* with 10 pts, though as the *Tiger's* biggest "big", she gave up 4 inches and 30 lbs to the *Royals* very physical center. Thiemann, Russell, and Jordan Humes all sustained 1st half injuries as evidence of the physical play (at bedtime last night, all were healing nicely and all vowed to be ready to go on Thursday morning). Scoring was rounded out by Hazewski - 9, Meg Waltz - 8, and Megan Mallon - 7. Highlights: 1) the team's coming back from a 22-15 half time deficient to cut it to a 2 pt game with under 3 to go, 2) Wallace's tenacious drives to the hoop vs. the swarming *Royal's* bigs....they may have altered some of her shots, but none were blocked and they couldn't alter her "no fear" attitude, 3) Lexi Schofield's 2nd half highlights, coming off the bench for injured teammates to not-so-quietly deliver a 3 pointer, and back-to-back assists on consecutive trips down the court.

It's about 7:20 AM on Thursday and in a couple of hours we'll get 'em all up for another day and a half and 3 more games of basketball!!!

Thursday: new day, new venue, new attitude.....on the injury front, we got Humes & Russell up and dressed, though Thiemann was, ultimately, directed to x-ray and "booted" for the rest of the tournament (no break, but a week of mobility), and NOW Mallon is losing a thumb nail (what were you girls doing last night?). We opened in the Rec Center on the smallest basketball courts we'll ever see.....the 3-point arc ended at the out-of-bound line about 6 feet above the baseline, so you couldn't take a 3 from the wing.....I couldn't count on one hand the number of times *Tiger* girls actually called for and received the ball while standing out of bounds.....shame in an event of this caliber!!!! Anyway, we're matched up against another older, quicker, but in this case NOT taller opponent, the *Ravens* out of Baltimore, and we're feeling good about ourselves. In a tough game, played close much of the way, we lost to the *Baltimore Ravens* 50-28.

Thomas led the way for the *Tigers* with 10, and the theme of the day would be getting some new players into the scorebook as Thiemann sat and Mallon left early to get that thumbnail attended to. Lots of team contributions, but Meg Waltz had some nice success in the paint overcoming the *Ravens'* dominance with her height advantage. Highlight: sometimes, you just have to watch, admire, and applaud your opponent....the *Ravens'* #50, 5'6" center Zelor Massaquoi, was not the tallest girl on the floor, nor was she taller than 2-3 of our *Tigers*. She was just flat out the best girl on the floor, a rebounding machine that made us (and I suspect lots of other team) pay; offensive rebound = putback, defensive rebound = outlet pass, offensive rebound = redirect to the jumpshooter, defensive rebound, *Tiger* pressure, put the ball on the floor and dribble out of trouble.....you go Girl!!!!

The evening game (#5) and we're back in the Rec Center and as mentioned above, all the girls are involved and contributing.....we got points from the usual suspects, but important contributions from Caelyn Brabson, Brittany Walls, Russell, Humes, et al.....AND THE *TIGERS* GOT THE "W"!!!!!! (Hey, Summer basketball is not really about winning as it's more important to see kids work on skills, b-ball knowledge, and to improve for the upcoming HS season, but given that the *Tigers* entered an age group above our AAU slot and that there are no pansy teams here at Penn State, the "W" is a great reward for our kids' stick-to-it-iveness.....you go Girls!!!) The victory over the *WNBA Nicks* was 38-30; Thomas led all Tigers with 9, while Hazewski & Humes contributed 6 each. Highlight: Humes' scoring on three consecutive trips down the floor late in the 2nd half, to help restore the half time margin which had dwindled to none.

It's late (our evening game started an hour late, due to the OT game which preceded us), we've got a victory in hand, and a Team Dinner to attend....the kids, parents, and coaches are staying in a couple of rented houses, with parents sharing shopping, cooking, cleaning, and chaperoning duties. Coaches Igo, Thomas, and Mallon took this opportunity to recognize all of the girls, individually, for the investment of time & energy into the game of basketball, and their respective contributions to the *Tigers U-14 Team*.

Friday: at breakfast this morning, the weary looks on the girls' faces told you that the long week of basketball and communal living had taken its toll. There were some antics last night, and no one under 15 is talkin'.....hmm? Only Thiemann's still on the injured reserve list (and rooting hard from the bench), as Mallon has seen the trainer and is back from the thumb nail incident.....we've got 5 ½ players ready to go (the other 5 ½ are the same one's playing, but they look to have all lost about ½ their muster!).

Final game (#6) and we have to finish in the Rec Center, but by now we're used to the small court and are, for the most part, stayin' in-bounds! Both teams played and up & down game, the fatigue of four full days and 6 back-to-back games (and, perhaps, too much off the court revelry) showing itself. The *Tigers* lost a close one in overtime vs. the *Horsham Renegades* by the score of 36-33! Hazweski led all *Tiger* scorers with 9, including a perfect 6 of 6 from the charity stripe. Even the author is weary now, so onto the Highlight: Thomas executed a nifty pass to Humes in a critical 2nd half run, which Humes finished for 2 points, a momentum changer which was instrumental in our advancement to the overtime bracket.....any good coach will tell you "one assist is worth two buckets"!

Summary: We won one, lost five, with a scoring margin over 4 days/6 games of 250-200, all vs. rising sophomore competition at a very well attended College Showcase tournament event!!! Again, not the wins/losses that mattered most, but the opportunity to play, to watch & face tougher competition, and to elevate one's (i.e., the Team's) level of play. Also, to travel together, develop team camaraderie, and create some youthful memories. This tourney was by far a greater experience for the girls than those where we ran the table vs. lesser, local competition! The rising freshman, U-14 *Tigers* (Igo) had a great tournament and a fine season....thanks to Coaches Igo, Thomas, and Mallon, & Team Manager Mrs. Brabson.