

By Randy Whalen

When the Lockport Township girls' basketball team opened the season by scoring under 30 points in its first game, it was a frustrating way to start the season.

So the Porters went back to work.

The result? They won three of their next four games and scored nearly 70 points in the last two of them. En route to that, they finished second at the 27th Annual Willowbrook Warriors Girls Basketball Thanksgiving Invite.

That was a nice turnaround for a team that opened the season on Tuesday, Nov. 14 with a 37-29 loss to host Wheaton North. In that game, the offense stalled in the fourth quarter. But Freshman Evelyn Ingram led the team in scoring in her first career varsity game with nine points

Senior Veronica Bafia added six points, while junior Chelsea Brooks and Laura sophomore Arstikaitis added three points.

"One of the biggest questions we needed to answer for this season was 'where are our points going to come from?'" Lockport girls basketball coach Darien Jacobs said. "The majority of our points last season came from our senior class and Alaina Peetz.

"With the seniors gone and Alaina out for the season (with an injury), we knew our offense was going to look different and we would have to find different ways to score."

That's what Lockport did in its next game, on Thursday, Nov. 16 in the opener of the round-robin Willowbrook Tournament, That was a 51-28 victory over the host Warriors. Bafia led the way with 11 points. Junior Lucy Hynes had 10 points and sophomore Armante Dambrauskas deposited nine points.

"I think each game so far the team has grown and we start to realize what each player's best spots are on the court," Bafia said. "I think this season will go well, but we have to make sure that each game we keep progressing and make the best choices on the court."

The next day, Friday, Nov. 17, Lockport lost 59-47 to Montini. But that was the closest game of the tournament for the champion Broncos (5-0 through Nov. 25). Arstikaitis led the way with 15 points. Bafia brought 10 points while sophomore Addison Way and Ingram each contributed six points.

Then the Porters offense exploded in the final two games of the tourney. Those were a 69-55 win over Plainfield East on Saturday, Nov. 18 behind 12 points from Bafia and 11 points from Arstikaitis, and a 68-24 victory over Morgan Park on Tuesday, Nov. 21. In the Morgan Park win, Way poured in 17 points, Bafia had 11 and Ingram added 10 points.

Arstikas and Bafia both made the All-Tournament team.

"I was very excited to make the All-Tournament team," Bafia said. "My teammates helped me out by looking for my openings on the court and helped me out when I needed to guard some very talented players. I am very glad to have been recognized during my last season!"

So was Arstikaitis, who knows the team is still looking for improvement.

"Our team started pretty rough in the first game scoring barely 20 points," Arstikaitis said. "The next couple of games we improved our performance by hitting open teammates and improving our defense. Although our offense could use more work, our defense this season is what is keeping our performance high.

"We have a 3-2 record I believe right now and are looking to get a few more wins before we play Lincoln-Way East (at home on Thursday, Dec. 7 in the SouthWest Suburban Conference Blue Division opener). We are focusing on breaking down other team's defenses and limiting our turnovers throughout the season."

Bafia is the only senior on this season's squad. So the Porters are looking to give many players experience for not only this season but the ones to come.

"After our struggles in our first game, I think we are starting to put the pieces together offensively," said Jacobs, who is in his second season as head coach. "We are a young team with a lot of room to grow but hopefully, this season will give us an idea of how we will be for the next few years and beyond!"