

By Randy Whalen

Dave Wilson has already won and lost numerous games as a head basketball coach.

While his first victory last week as Lockport Township boys basketball coach was special, Wilson preferred to look at the big picture.

"I don't really look at my coaching career with a win/loss perspective," Wilson said. "I look at it more as like chunks or buckets of accomplishments.

"The first bucket is working towards building a healthy, competitive culture. The second bucket is streamlining and offering year-round basketball opportunities for all players, from grade school to high school to improve their skill set. Lastly, taking the first two buckets and pouring them together to build consistency in the program to complete at a high level."

On the court, Lockport's buckets certainly got better last week as they split their first four games of the season at the 27th WJOL Thanksgiving Classic Tournament at the University of St. Francis. The Porters eventually finished fifth.

That was a marked improvement from the opening game, on Monday, Nov. 20, which was a 65-40 loss to Romeoville.

"It (was) our first game, and there is still work to be done," Wilson said following the Romeoville game. "We are still trying to figure things out. Romeoville brought a lot of physicality on defense, and that's not something we are used to. We got swallowed up and overwhelmed on the offensive end early on."

Romeoville, which opened its doors in 1963 as Lockport West and was in the Lockport district until 1971, ended up placing second in the tournament. The Spartans lost 63-60 to Joliet Central in overtime on Saturday, Nov. 25 in the title game.

But against the Porters, Romeoville forced 10 turnovers in the first quarter, jumping out to a lead of 8-0 in the first three minutes before senior Drew Gallagher hit a three-pointer to get Lockport on the board. Still, the Spartans led 18-5 before settling on an 18-9 lead after one quarter.

Junior point guard Bryce Turner, who had a team-high nine points, drew Lockport back within 31-22 on a layup with 46 seconds left in the second quarter. The Porters then got the ball back and looked to cut the lead to six or seven heading into halftime.

But junior point guard EJ Mosley Jr., who had a team-high nine steals and finished with nine points, got a steal and a layup, and after a Lockport turnover with 3.3 seconds left, he hit a 35-foot three-pointer to close the half with a 36-22 Spartan lead.

Romeoville rattled off an 8-0 run to open the third quarter to make it 44-22 before junior Collin Miller (7 points) hit a three-pointer for the Porters, who trailed 52-28 after three.

"Ideally we would have scored at the end of the first half and that would have allowed us to be closer," Wilson said. "But then they got that 35-footer to go in at the buzzer. We were just rushed and they were physical. But we will make adjustments to enhance our strengths."

Junior DJ Porter Jr. led the Spartans in scoring with 19 points. He also tied for the team lead with six rebounds and came away with two steals. Also, 6-foot-9 junior Adam Walker had 16 points, including four slams, six rebounds, and four blocked shots for Romoville.

"I expect us to have good practices and clean things up," Turner said after the opening game. "I'm excited to get back to work and I expect us to be above .500. We're scrappy but not very tall."

"We can pick it up. We just have to come together. as a team and trust coaches' plan. I trust Coach Wilson and know we can stay together."

It didn't take Lockport long to find the win column. On Wednesday, Nov. 22, they bounced back with a Lockport 68-43 victory over Plainfield Central. Turner had nine points and eight assists, Senior Logan Cooper led all scorers with 19 points and seven steals, junior Anthony Kosi had 13 points, while seniors Josh Ahrens and Gallagher added 10 points apiece.

Then, on Friday, Nov. 24, the Porters nearly rallied from 10 points down and closed within one. But in the end, they fell to Lemont 56-54. Cooper led the way with 12 points and five steals.

On the final day of the tournament, Saturday, Nov. 25, Lockport got past Providence 58-49 in overtime. Kosi led the way with 15 points and seven rebounds. Miller had 11 points and six boards, while senior Evan Dziadkowiec deposited 11 points and added four rebounds.

Tied at 46-46 after regulation, Providence hit a three-pointer to start overtime but never scored again as the Porters polished it off with 12 straight points.

"The overtime victory was fun," Wilson said. "The players had to battle a little bit of adversity late in the contest and they came out victorious. Late game execution led to a run in overtime and we didn't look back. Huge free throw to tie the game by Josh Ahrens. The effort was fantastic"

The effort in the opening game this week was also fantastic. That was an 81-37 thumping of Thornridge on Tuesday, Nov. 28, in the home opener for Lockport. The Porters (3-2) led 51-16 at halftime and coasted. Copper led the way with 15 points and six steals. Dziadkowiec dinged 12 points and four rebounds, junior Jeffrey Green garnered 10 points and five rebounds, while Kosi came in with 10 points and four rebounds.

This Friday, Dec. 1, the Porters will host Lincoln-Way East at 6:30 PM. Not only is that the SouthWest Suburban Conference Blue Division opener, but it's also the annual Veteran's Night Event, where Lockport will honor dozens of veterans from all branches of service.

Lincoln-Way East is also a top team in the conference. So Wilson, who was the head coach at Andrew for nine years before coming to Lockport, will look at that as another opportunity for this squad to learn and grow.

"We're still trying to figure it out, we have a lot of new guys," Wilson said. "We're still learning from each other and they're still learning from me. There are so many adjustments and that's the beauty of coaching. You want to make those adjustments without reinventing the wheel.

"I can't wait to see us evolve."