

Victor hoops on the rise

By Ramon Mercado

Home Team Sports

VICTOR — Prior to the start of basketball season, Jeff Amoroso knew his team could be pretty good.

And if they played to their potential, very good might come to mind.

So far Victor's fifth-year head boys' basketball coach has been getting the latter as the Blue Devils have started the season with an impressive 10-3 record and a honorable mention in the Class A state polls.

"We knew going into the start of the season that we needed to have some early success," said Amoroso. "Sometimes it can be hard to get the kids to buy into something if you struggle a little early on or if its just not working. If it doesn't work early, maybe the belief just isn't there."

So far, so good.

Sparked by outstanding senior leadership, terrific defense, and some well-balanced scoring, this year's Blue Devils are making a name for themselves. Although the starting line-up changes from time to time, Lee Lomenzo and Tyler Brooks are the starting guards in the backcourt while Chris Rose and David Vistocco start at the forward spot and Rob Page has been getting the nod at the center spot.

Lomenzo, a 6-foot senior leads the team in scoring at 13 points per game

while Brooks, a 5-foot-10 sophomore is close by at 12.2 points a game.

Vistocco, a 6-foot-5 senior is next at 12.1 points per game while Brad Ford, a 6-foot-3 junior guard is hitting for 9.3 points a game.

Usually a starter, Ford injured himself in the first three minutes of Victor's thrilling OT victory against Pittsford Sutherland.

"We've had some outstanding balance this season," said coach Amoroso. "I think the most important part of our early success has been all about our tremendous senior leadership. I remember talking with (Canandaigua coach) Mike Broderick a few years back and he told me how much he was getting out of his team because of their senior leadership. When your senior leaders step up — it makes everyone around them comfortable. This group has bought into what we've coached and our philosophy of not letting other people take away from what we've accomplished."

Another part of Amoroso's philosophy is team basketball.

"We definitely play a team brand of basketball," said coach Amoroso. "You can't take one guy away because others will step up. That's been our game all season. We've had players struggle on the floor at times, but we've had others step it up."

Victor's biggest victory of the season came Jan. 9 as the Blue Devils nipped Pittsford Sutherland 81-80 in OT as Lomenzo made a pair of free-throws with seven seconds left to pull it out.

In the victory, Brooks netted a team-best 21 points while Vistocco and Page had 19 and 17 respectively.

Although the Blue Devils came out on top in the huge Monroe County D-III showdown, coach Amoroso was more than relieved to leave the floor with a 'W' after watching his kids blow a late lead.

'We had Sutherland down 11 with 4:17 left," said coach Amoroso. "That right there shows you how gosh darn good they are. Sutherland kept chipping away and we needed an extra period to get the win. It was a big win for our program."

Victor, who hasn't claimed a sectional title banner since 1979, needed a signature win this season says Amoroso.

"We haven't been in alot of meaningful contests like Sutherland," said Amoroso. "Until you get over the hump against that caliber type of team — you

never know. We missed a few free-throws down the stretch that kept them in it, but in the end, we showed some resiliency and got the win." Although he didn't put up much in terms of offensive numbers, coach Amoroso pointed to the play of senior Chuck Beckwith, a 5-foot-9, 205-pound defensive whiz.

"He took (Sutherland's top player) Patrick O'Keefe away on that last series," said coach Amoroso. "We took away their number one scoring option with Chuck. With 7.6 left, he face-guarded O'Keefe and he never got the ball. That maybe went unnoticed a little from others but not to us."

Victor's gameday roster goes 9-10 deep, with plenty of talented players with positive attributes.

Lorenzo is one of those senior leaders that Amoroso talks about and he is also Mr. Clutch, evidence of his game-clinching free-throws against Sutherland.

Rose, Victor's standout quarterback during the fall football season is "one of toughest kids I know" says Amoroso, who says that Rose came back very quickly after breaking his wrist early in the season.

"He broke it in practice and played the Greece Odyssey game with a fracture," said coach Amoroso. "He took his cast off prior to the doctor's orders. He missed like one game with a broken wrist. He's just a tough, tough kid who wants to compete."

Brooks, according to Amoroso, has "court savvy and knows how to win. The kids got game."

Amoroso calls Vistocco his most athletic player and "is very even keeled and an outstanding team leader."

Page, listed in the roster at 6-foot-10, and 210-pounds, is a work in progress but expect his 7.7 points per game average to rise says Amoroso.

"He's a special player and a very imposing player," said Amoroso. "He's the tallest kid I've coached and is very skilled for a 6-10 kid. You can certainly expect his numbers to go up."

Max Richardson, a six-foot, 170-pound senior guard is the first player off the bench and is one of the league's top defenders.

"In my opinion, he's the best defender in our league," said Amoroso, of Richardson. "He plays 100 miles an hour - the entire game. He gives us a big spark off the bench."

Another top sub is Andrew Pfeffer, a 6-2, 160-pound junior forward, who plays much bigger than his frame says Amoroso.

"He plays so hard that he somehow gets rebounds over people much bigger than him," said Amoroso. "We call him 'Oscar The Grouch' because he's our garbage man. When the balls up for grabs, he's usually getting after it."

Other players on the roster include seniors Beckwith, Matt Mika (6-5, For) and Dan Thull (5-11, G), along with junior Darin Carter (6-1, G).

One of Victor's losses this season came early on (Dec. 12) against Batavia, in a 13-point setback, in Batavia.

"The final score (67-54) was not indicative of the game," Amoroso said.

"They are a very talented team. They can shoot the lights out and they are very, very good at their place. But, we know we can compete with them. We're a little different team and hopefully things will be different the next time we play."

Batavia visits Victor Friday, Jan. 23.

The Blue Devils' other two setbacks have come in heartbreaking fashion.

First they dropped a 72-60 overtime game to Pittsford-Mendon Jan. 14, and then two days later they fell to Eastridge by one point (59-58).

Coach Amoroso's squad will have their sights set on the first sectional title in nearly 30 years when Class A1 sectionals begin in a few weeks.

Other teams that are in Victor's sectional bracket include Newark, Pittsford Sutherland, Pittsford Mendon, Honeoye Falls-Lima and Eastridge.

"I saw Newark play the other night and they are very talented and they will be a tough team for anyone to beat," said coach Amoroso.

"Javon McCrea and Tyshun Stephens are both very special players."

Don't expect this little run that Victor's on to end any time in the near future either. The Blue Devils' JV team is off to a perfect 10-0 start.

"Things are looking pretty good here," said Amoroso.

"We have a great group of kids in all of our programs, and they are really working hard. These kids love to compete, and they love doing it is a team."

