



Montclair Basketball: Immaculate girls rain 3-pointers in 77-53 win



*ICHS senior guard Taylor Williams takes to the air for a layup during Immaculate's 77-53 win over Newark Academy on Jan. 24.
PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF*

by Andrew Garda

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Three-point shots rained down in the Immaculate Conception High School gym during the girls basketball game against Newark Academy last Thursday resulting in a 77-53 win for the Lions. It would happen again two days later, Jan 26, as the Lions beat Bloomfield, 70-51, pulling their record to 11-4 overall and 9-0 in SEC-Liberty.

All told over the course of the last three games, which included a 65-37 win on the road at Columbia, the Lions have scored 24 three-point shots.

ICHS doesn't hesitate to bomb the opposition from long range, a mentality which head coach Joe Whalen is just fine with.

"We'll shoot threes in transition," he said after the win over Newark Academy. "We'll come up the floor, and shoot threes because that's a good shot to take. It's a great opportunity for offensive rebounds. Because we're crashing the boards and they're back on their heels and don't know what to do."

Along with assistant coaches Chez Williams and Trinette Carruthers, Whalen has his team shoot threes every practice. Their main drill is to hit 100 three-point shots in just five minutes.

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"This summer, it took us twelve minutes, and now we've got it down to five minutes. I think we've only missed that mark once in the last month."

The Lions are ready, willing and able to take shots from long distance, and have the freedom to try.

"They can all shoot threes," Whalen said. "And they all have license to shoot."

Junior Nasira Williams' five three-point shots were the most on the team, and helped her to a team-leading 21 points on the night. Seniors Jordan Hill and Taylor Williams had the next most points with 17 and 14 respectively, six of Hill's points coming on a pair of threes. Taylor Williams also had four rebounds, five assists and three steals, while Hill had a pair of rebounds, steals and blocks each.



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As it was also Senior Night on Thursday, it was fitting that Hill and Williams carried the load they did.

"Jordan's the glue, I call her our Swiss Army Knife. She does everything. She'll bring the ball up, she'll shoot it, she'll defend," Whalen said. "Taylor can get to the rim. You really have to know where she is on the floor. Other teams make it a point to try and take her out of her game and right now she and Kendra [Lawrence] are our best defenders. When we play really, really good teams, we'll put Taylor on their best player."

They'll need both Nasira and Taylor Williams, Hill and Lawrence as well as the rest of the team on point as they head into the Essex County Tournament as the fifth seed. They'll have time off until Feb. 9 when they face either 12-seeded Bloomfield or the winner of the play-in game between No. 21-seeded Golda Och and 28-seeded Montclair Kimberley Academy.



Immaculate senior guard Jordan Hill drives through the defense to the basket for two of her 17 points against Newark Academy.
PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF

No matter who they face, Immaculate is going to be a hard team to beat, not only because of the talent they have on the floor, but because they made sure to schedule some tough teams out of conference. Games against Trenton Catholic, Archbishop Carroll (PA) and Midwood (NY), as well as an upcoming game against Long Island Lutheran on February 2, should help sharpen the Lions before they hit the County and State Tournaments.

Despite that, ICHS hasn't lost two games in a row this year, bouncing back every time they have stumbled.

With just four losses, those stumbles are few and far between.

"We're a tough out," Whalen said. "We're going to be a tough out."