

North Allegheny withstands fourth-quarter rally by Seneca Valley for 78-77 win



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North Allegheny's players took the court against Seneca Valley Friday night with heavy hearts and without the services of their leading scorer.

Tigers senior Greg Habib missed the game Friday after attending his grandfather's funeral earlier in the day, and Habib's teammates attended the funeral along with him, telling him they would dedicate Friday's game to him.

Class 6A No. 2-ranked North Allegheny (8-2, 6-0) looked like a team on a mission, controlling the game from the opening tip before withstanding a furious fourth-quarter rally by the Raiders (4-6, 3-3) to escape with a 78-77 home win.

"It's a good feeling," said Tigers first-year coach Dan DeRose. "I think the kids are enjoying it. They're happy. ... I think we're just getting better and better. There's still a lot of things we've still got to clean up, but what I like about this team is we've got multiple guys who can step up and do some things.

“We always have the ‘next man up’ mentality.”

Senior point guard Jack Christy stepped up in Habib’s absence, scoring a team-high 22 points in his first start in 10 days. Three other players reached double figures for North Allegheny — junior guard Matt McDonough finished with 17, while senior forward Khalil Dinkins and junior guard/forward Robby Jones each scored 14.

The Raiders scored 36 points in the fourth quarter, but their comeback fell just short as North Allegheny did just enough to seal the win down the stretch.

“It just goes to show how strong of a team we have and how much team chemistry we have,” Brooks said about Seneca Valley’s effort in the second half. “It just shows we can battle with them. ... I feel like we’ll bounce back, for sure.”

“With Habib out, we were playing for him and trying to get the win for him,” Christy said. “Players had to step up. My teammates gave me confidence, and I just went in there and knocked down some shots.”

The Tigers eked out their fifth consecutive win despite a spirited comeback attempt by Seneca Valley and a career game for Raiders guard Cole Brooks. The slender 6-foot senior knocked down 10 3-pointers and finished with a game-high 38 points, helping Seneca Valley chip away at an 18-point second-half deficit.

After struggling with his shot in recent games, Christy rewarded DeRose for having the confidence to insert him back into the starting lineup. The 5-7 senior came out hot and buried three consecutive 3-pointers to give the Tigers a 14-5 lead midway through the first quarter.

North Allegheny continued to hold a double-digit lead throughout the first half, and a half-court shot by Seneca Valley senior guard Connor Lyczek just rimmed out at the buzzer as the Tigers took a 42-26 lead into the break.

Christy got another 3-pointer to fall thanks to a friendly roll early in the third quarter, then Dinkins grabbed an offensive rebound off his first miss and went up strong with a put-back to make it a 47-29 lead for North Allegheny. A nice entry pass from Christy led to another easy bucket for Dinkins to make it 49-32, but that's when Brooks started heating up.

Brooks made his sixth 3-pointer of the game early in the final quarter to trim the Tigers' lead to 56-48, then Dinkins answered with a high-flying dunk at the other end. McDonough and Brooks then traded 3-pointers before Brooks drained another 3 to cut it to 63-56.

Christy and McDonough followed with back-to-back 3s to make it 69-56 with 3:23 to play, but the Raiders rallied to within six on another 3-pointer by Brooks, making it 72-66 with 57.5 seconds to play. McDonough then converted two clutch free throws to give North Allegheny a 78-71 lead with 14.6 seconds to play, effectively sealing the win for the Tigers.

“My thing is — you’ve got one guy to beat us? We’ve got a bunch of guys who can beat you,” DeRose said. “We had four guys in double figures. That formula is a lot better.”

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