

Cool senior calms St. Frances Academy in big win over John Carroll

Midway through the fourth period of a game matching two of Maryland's best boys' basketball teams, Elijah Epps stood during a time out while the four other St. Frances Academy players who were about to return to the floor with him took a seat to rest their legs.

A 6-foot-3-inch senior who does a little bit of everything for the Panthers, Epps is playing through a dislocated toe, but it was visiting John Carroll that he left wobbly as St. Frances Academy maintained its perfect record in the Baltimore Catholic League with a 71-61 victory Jan. 10.

A hot, packed gym on Eager Street included Kentucky coach John Calipari, on hand to watch one of his commits, Patriots' guard Immanuel Quickley, and a large banner proclaiming the Under Armour hashtag "UnleashChaos," but Epps gave the Panthers some much-needed stability.

In his fourth year on the varsity, Epps scored a team-high 14 points, defended wherever he was needed, broke the press and always seemed to come up with a vital assist when St. Frances Academy needed a basket.

While Epps isn't as attractive to major programs such as Kentucky and Maryland, which will get Mount St. Joseph's Jalen Smith, the reigning BCL Player of the Year, his value is not lost on Panthers' coach Nick Myles.

"Elijah is a great high school player - and he's playing hurt," Myles said. "He can guard anybody on the floor. With him, it's a matter of heart over height. His leadership, and willingness to do whatever we ask of him, that defines a 'program' guy. He's what St. Frances Academy basketball is all about."

While Epps, who lives in Woodlawn and plays for Team Melo on the AAU circuit, helped the Panthers win the Maryland Interscholastic Athletic Association A

Conference championship as a sophomore, success in the BCL has been harder to achieve.

St. Frances Academy last finished atop the BCL regular standings in 2013, and last won the tournament in 2009. It's already won big games at St. Maria Goretti in Hagerstown, at John Carroll in overtime in Bel Air, and crosstown at defending champion Mount St. Joseph.

The regular season concludes Feb. 16, with Mount St. Joseph going to St. Frances Academy. The BCL tournament is March 2-4 at Goucher College.

Epps settled his teammates through foul trouble that disqualified 6-8 Koran Moore. His field goal in traffic put them ahead to stay at 53-51, and the Panthers' unyielding defense held the Patriots for the first six minutes of the fourth period. Rajeir Jones and sophomore Adrian Baldwin, an honorable mention BCL all-star last season, combined for 25 points.

For the Patriots, Montez Mathis got 10 of his 21 points at the free throw line. Yavuz Glutekin, a 6-7 junior from Turkey, got 11 of his 16 points in the first 10 minutes. Quickley, who missed nine games with mononucleosis, had 15 points.

St. Frances Academy improved to 8-0 in the BCL and 18-2 overall, the only losses coming to Gonzaga of Washington, D.C., and Bishop Loughlin of Brooklyn, N.Y.

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