

Latham sparks Alton to tourney win with 21-point outing

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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GODFREY – For **Marcus Latham**, it was just a matter of waiting his turn.

The senior guard for **Alton's boys basketball team** had several talented players ahead of him the past three years.

Wednesday night, Latham finally got his chance and made the most of it, scoring **21 points** as the Redbirds opened their 2015-16 campaign with a **70-61 win over Northwest Academy of St. Louis city** in the Alton Tipoff Classic tournament.

Latham was behind several good players on last year's team, including Carlos Anderson and Bryan Hudson. With those players having graduated, Latham was inserted into the lineup and realized that he had to take advantage of the opportunity.

“I knew I was going to be one of the top players this year,” Latham said, “and I knew I had to go out and handle my business.”

Where it comes to the team, Latham said “we're not selfish. We play hard; we're small, we've got to play hard. We don't have a Bryan or a Carlos out there; we've got to play hard on defense.”

Redbird coach Eric Smith had a different view of the game, however. “That's not remotely close to what we looked like in two-and-a-half weeks of practice,” Smith said. “We didn't guard very well at all, we didn't share the ball; we were extremely selfish to start out with. We've got some new kids, and making sure they understand right now we're not necessarily worried about who's time it is to shine, it's what we can do collectively.

“The frustrating part is that for two-and-a-half weeks in practice, we've been outstanding. Offensively, the stuff that goes down in practice, as a coaching staff, we've kind of walked around a little bit just shaking our heads a little bit because we've shared the basketball, we've made unselfish plays and tonight, that just wasn't the case.”

Of Latham, Smith said “he was behind several really good kids last year and everyone he played behind got a scholarship somewhere; we knew what we were going to get out of Marcus going into the year, so that's not a surprise at all.”

“He's a good player,” said Hornet coach Gerald Jones. “I didn't expect for him to play that well, of course; I was looking at (Maurice Edwards) and (Kevin Caldwell). My kids played hard for me; I know it's not the caliber of team they had last year, but they're still quick and fast and stronger than our kids. That's why we come over here to play.”

Both Caldwell and Edwards had 15 points each for Alton, with Damion Reed adding six; the Redbirds, as a team, went 20-for-21 from the free-throw line. The Hornets were led by a 26-point effort from Charles James, with Wilshon Warren adding 12, Jamarr Williams 11 and Rayonte Childs 10.

In the opening game of the evening, Jacksonville got 10 points each from Brady Hays and Joe Brannan in a 41-37 win over Chatham Glenwood. The Titans were led by Parker Allen's 21 points, with Matt Bahlmann adding seven.

Tournament play resumes Friday when Northwest meets Jacksonville at 6 p.m. and Alton meets up with Glenwood at 7:30 p.m. The tournament concludes Saturday when Northwest and Glenwood clash at 6 p.m. and the Redbirds meet Jacksonville at 7:30 p.m.