

Dowell Leads With 13 Points As Ten Different Granite City Players Score, Warriors Defeat Metro-East Lutheran 59-34 In Knights' Opener

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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GRANITE CITY - Senior Milton Dowell led the way with 13 points as 10 different Granite City players scored as the Warriors clamped down in the third quarter, allowing only four points as Granite defeated Metro-East Lutheran 59-34 in the Knights' season opener Thursday night at Granite's Memorial Gym.

The Warriors got off on the wrong foot when they were called for a technical foul during warmups when a player was caught dunking the ball, which is illegal during the period. The Knights hit the two free throws to open the game, but from thereon out, it was Granite all the way through, as the Warriors led at the break 32-21, then outscored Metro-East 18-4 in the period and never looked back.

And according to Warriors' head coach Gerard Moore, it was a badly needed win.

"Really good, feeling good," Moore said. "We needed a win tonight. We know Metro-East is always going to be well-coached. My buddy, Anthony Smith (the Knights' head coach), he does a really good job developing what he's got, and you've always got to be ready to play. A few years ago, they came here and they beat us, so we were kind of nervous. What they have cut, they have not played a game as of yet, so we didn't know what they were going to look like. So, we're going on the fly with the scouting, because we didn't know what they had and what they run."

The Warriors were able to overcome the technical at the start of the game and play very well, being able to use a strong defense to score points and force the Knights into errors and turnovers.

"They started off the game with a tech," Moore said, "because of my guys dunking the ball in he warmup. That's always like, 'oh, wow,' and they could have built on that. I'm so happy we played well enough, it didn't matter."

Although the win improved the Warriors record to 2-3 going into a game Friday night at St. Mary's Southside Catholic in south St. Louis City on Friday night, there's still plenty of work to do for the Warriors, who have nine seniors on their roster and are expected to be one of the better teams in the area this year.

"We need to play better," Moore said. "We still haven't played to our potential defensively, Right now, I don't think we're playing Warrior basketball in terms of our defensive intensity and take away the other team's best player. We need to get to that. When we get to that, then I think we can be rolling. But our schedule is very difficult. They're 2-3, but it's kind of deceptive, because we've played some really good teams.. We played O'Fallon, we played Mt. Vernon and we played Triad. All three teams went to the regional finals and went far in the playoffs."

Although the Warriors are currently 2-3, Moore remains optimistic about the season and how things could go for his team.

"When you have nine seniors, you've got to be excited about what the potential could be," Moore said. "I think if we start playing good basketball, sound basketball at the end, and when it matters, we could be playing our best basketball, and that's the key. We want to be playing our best basketball in February. And hopefully, we can get it done, get better, day-by-day, game-by-game, and at the end of the year, we can move on."

The Warriors will be hosting an IHSA Class 4A regional this February, and Moore is hopeful by the time the postseason rolls around, the Warriors will be playing at the top of their game.

"We could do something special as a team; you never know," Moore said. "You've still got to play the game, but I'm excited to see how the season's going to look after we get done with the season, and we look back and say if we had a great year, or not, with these seniors. It's a good group of kids to coach, they do things the right way, on and off the court. And when that happens, hopefully, good things come your way."

It was the Knights' season opener, and Metro-East did play very hard, but there's still a lot of work left to do for the team.

"We've got a lot of work to do," Smith said. "There has to be some systems in place, and we've got to be able to play in the system in order to get the shots we need to get. If that doesn't happen, it's going to be a long year for us. Everybody has to be bought in on what we're trying to do, and one guy can't deter what we're trying to do to make happen. It's just not going to work."

Metro-East has a large number of sophomores and juniors on their roster and Smith feels that the Knights have practiced well, but needs to translate the effort in practice into the games.

"We look good in practice," Smith said. "But once you open up the doors and play against guys that are veterans and play in athletes. And Granite City's a good program. Coach Moore does a great job, but you have to take care of the basketball, you have to buy into things. Turnovers, make lay-ups, take advantage of opportunities. We're only down by 11 at halftime, we just have to find ways to be productive for four quarters, and we weren't. We only scored four points in the third quarter, which can't happen. Not against a team like that."

It's still very early in the season, as the calendar turns to December, and Smith is still optimistic that the Knights can have a good season.

"We're early," Smith said. "It's the first game, the first battle for us. We'll go back to the lab tomorrow. We've got some game film, and figure out exactly what we can do to move forward. There's only one thing I can tell you: My grandma used to say 'You can only get better.' We'll be fine. It's the first game of the year, Granite's a good team, we've just got to work out some kinks. Once we work out some kinks and people get some more buy in, we'll be fine."

The Knights took the early 2-0 lead after hitting the free throws on the pre-game technical, but the Warriors fought back to take a 6-5 lead shortly after, hitting on their first three threes to go up 9-5. After Drew Suhre hit a three to pull Metro-East to within 10-8, the Warriors, behind Jayden Moore and Dowell, went on an 8-0 run to end the quarter, going up 18-8 after the first.

An exchange of baskets at the start of the second quarter cut the Granite lead to 22-11, but then, the Warriors, with Trevon Bond, Taurean Valentine and Dowell leading the way, the Warriors took a 32-21 lead into the locker rooms for halftime.

The Warriors put the game away in the third quarter, outscoring the Knights 18-4, lead by Evan Brewer and Dowell, who shot the ball particularly well near the end of the period, hitting a pair of threes to give Granite a 48-25 lead after three quarters. In the fourth, the Warriors continued to build their lead, but the Knights hung in well, but in the end, Granite had too much in going on to a 59-34 win.

Dowell led Granite with 13 points, while Brewer hit for eight points, Bond scored six points, Andrew Walker, Taurean Valentine, Dymani Walker and Mario Brown all scored five points each, Alex Boyer and Moore had four points apiece and Octavio Huerta had two points.

The Knights were led by Thijson Heard, who had 10 points, while Suhre added six points, Junior Brown and another player had five points each, Kaleb Turney scored four points and both Brandon Bishop and Landyn Jefferson had two points each.

The Knights open their season 0-1 and open up Gateway Metro Conference play in their next three games, starting Dec. 5 at Maryville Christian and Dec. 8 at Marquette Catholic before their home opener Dec. 12 against Belleville Althoff Catholic, with all three games starting at 7:30 p.m.

The Warriors are 2-3, and play on the road against two St. Louis Catholic powers in St. Mary's Friday night at 7 p.m. and Monday night at Chaminade College Prep Catholic at 7:30 p.m. Granite then hosts Belleville West Dec. 8 at 7:30 p.m.

[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)