

Basketball Kats, Lions to make Pit stop today; Fitzgerald | Memorial games at UNB main gym for varsity teams

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The Mike Fitzgerald Memorial Basketball Games, pitting the varsity boys and girls teams from Leo Hayes High School against their cross-river counterparts from Fredericton High School in memory of a 16-year-old who played at both schools, will be played this afternoon at the UNB Main Gym.

The girls will hit the court at 2 p.m. with the boys on the floor at 4 p.m. The games were originally booked to be played last night, but with schools in District 18 closing one hour early due to yesterday's inclement weather, all extra-curricular events were postponed.

While it was a relatively simple matter to reschedule the varsity games to the Pit - the V-Reds men's and women's basketball and the men's volleyball team are all on the road and the women's volleyball team is idle - not so for the junior varsity boys' game, which had been booked for 5 p.m. last night at the FHS Main Gym.

Black Kats boys coach Gary Young said the FHS gym is unavailable today and he was unable to arrange an alternate site with Leo Hayes counterpart Dan Leonard on short notice.

"I haven't been able to find the right people at the right time," said Young. "We've been trying for two hours to reschedule it. It looks like we'll play it after the exam schedule is over. It will probably be a week from today."

District 18 School superintendent Alex Dingwall, who ultimately makes the call to close schools and thereby postpone extra-curricular activities, said "safety takes the precedence" in the decision to close the schools. "There's no school on Saturday obviously, but we've asked any organizers to look at the situation and be very prudent in making any decisions in that regard."

Nashwaaksis Y's Men Lions boys varsity coach John Hickey hopes the postponement doesn't affect the crowd or the spirit of the games today.

The Mike Fitz games, with all proceeds going to a scholarship fund to support a graduating senior basketball player from both schools, kicked off with the junior varsity girls game Thursday night. The Black Kats won 61-34 before a larger than normal crowd - including Mike Fitzgerald's parents, Don and Colleen - at the Leo Hayes gym.

"That game was an anomaly," said Hickey. "That doesn't happen between those two teams...it hasn't for the last couple of years. But you know what...I don't think the varsity boys have played a close (Mike Fitz) game yet either. And it doesn't seem to deter the game or the atmosphere. I remember telling our guys last year 'I've never heard a gym as loud as this one for a 20-point

basketball game in my life.' It's still a great atmosphere, because people are there for the right reasons, to support basketball and support the cause. Hopefully we get that crowd (today)."

The rescheduling actually resolves a conflict for local sports fans. The Fitz games would have gone up against a high-profile Atlantic University Sport men's hockey conference game between the University of New Brunswick Varsity Reds and the Saint Mary's Huskies at the Aitken University Centre last night.

With the games booked for this afternoon, they'll be completed by the time the V-Reds are scheduled to face the St. Francis Xavier X-Men tonight at 7 p.m.

Lions outlast Kats in Mike Fitz thriller; Basketball | FHS girls roll to win over LHHS

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Byline: JASON WILSON For The Daily Gleaner

Just love it.

Those three words headlined the Mike Fitz Memorial Basketball games Saturday afternoon between the FHS Black Kats and Leo Hayes High School Lions.

Both the varsity girls' squad and varsity boys' for both schools took the court in honour of Mike Fitzgerald, a former student at both schools who cherished sport, competition and fair play. But regardless of whether you win or lose, you need to enjoy it. That was Fitzgerald's meaning behind "just love it."

"That's important. If you don't enjoy playing the game then there's no point," Leo Hayes Nasis Y's Men's varsity boys' coach John Hickey said. "Just love it, that was Mike's philosophy, right? Enjoy everything you do and make the most of it."

The energy in the UNB Main Gym was ample building up to the varsity boys' showdown. With about 800 fans in attendance, cheers for both teams echoed as the teams took the floor.

"The turnout was tremendous. It was very encouraging," Don Fitzgerald, Mike's father, said. "It kind of tells me that we're on the right track to take it to a bigger venue at the Currie Center next year. We're looking forward to that."

The games brought in a total of \$5,700 that will be put toward scholarships and awards to students at both Leo Hayes High School and Fredericton High School. Two scholarships will be issued based on financial need, while two other awards will be given to a basketball player at either school based on scholastic achievement.

"\$5,700 is a really great result," Fitzgerald said. "It will do well and fund those scholarships and awards."

The fans in attendance were in store for an intense and close basketball game. Much closer than the 85-72 score, in favour of Leo Hayes, would indicate. The Maritime Case Black Kats, in fact,

led 70-67 late in the fourth quarter.

"There's so much emotion in this game because the kids know Michael, we know Michael," Hickey said. "Both schools were heavily involved. There's just that much emotion in these games, so it's important for these kids to understand that and to play like that."

Both teams went shot for shot in the first, ending the quarter tied at 24. If it looked like the Lions were pulling away, the Black Kats would charge down the court as player of the game Peter Esson likely netted two of his team-high 18.

The Lions pulled away slightly in the second relying on points from Josh LaFleur and player of the game Richie Wilkins, who scored 21 and 20 respectively. All told, Leo Hayes had four players in double figures including Sam Goucher with 16 and Alex Fredericks with 10.

"That's the strength of our team when we're playing well," Hickey said. "Everybody scores. If they key on a certain guy we have other guys that will step up. So it's nice when you're balanced."

Down by five at the half did not deflate the Black Kats as the team flew out of the gate in the second half, putting up 28 points in the third quarter to tie the game at 62.

"Anytime we play Fredericton High, it's always like that," Hickey said. "They're always exciting, they're always close. It's just the dynamic of the two teams usually."

Joining Esson on the scoresheet was Weston Durling with 11, Andrew Petrie with 10 and Kyle Arseneault with 9.

The fourth saw the game edge slightly in the Lions' favour. When its lead reached six, the Black Kats desperation move was to shoot from beyond the arc to close the gap. Luck was not on FHS' side, however, as the net would not yield the ever-beloved "swish."

"You can see the kids enjoy playing, they love being in the gym," Fitzgerald said. "Really, the closer and tighter the game, the more they seem to enjoy it and it brings out the best in them."

As FHS missed its three-pointers, Leo Hayes capitalized by running down the clock; the team took its time with the ball and notching a point here and a point there to seal the deal.

"These kids all know each other," Hickey said. "No question these kids know each other inside and out. We play lots every year, so we certainly know each other's teams well."

The varsity girls' game was a bit different. The FHS Lady Black Kats took the lead early and didn't relinquish it as FHS defeated Leo Hayes in palindromic fashion 84-48.

Emily MacLeod received player of the game honours for FHS as she scored 15 points and showed off her rebounding prowess. Amy Appleby led all scorers with 26 points.

While Tori McCarty scored eight for Leo Hayes, it was her ball movement that landed her player of the game laurels for the Rowe Dental Lady Lions. Top scorer was Morgan MacGregor with 18, many of which came from beyond the arc. Rhiann Coulombe added 10 in the effort.

"The games were really exciting," Fitzgerald said. "It's great to see the kids play with such heart and passion. They're really, really talented athletes. I'm glad they enjoyed it and we're going to start right away to think about making next year even more fun for them and to engage even more people because that's what it's about."

On Thursday, the FHS JV Lady Black Kats beat the Leo Hayes Dixie Lee JV Lady Lions 61-34. The FHS and Leo Hayes JV boys will play this week.

By BRUCE HALLIHAN

The Fitzgeralds, Don and Colleen, "are honoured and humbled," Don said, by the response shown so far for this year's Mike Fitzgerald Memorial Basketball Games.

Their son, known for his infectious personality, died of brain cancer in February 2008. Mikey Fitz pulled off a different kind of basketball double-double, playing hoops for both Leo Hayes and Fredericton high schools.

The junior varsity girls played a week ago at Leo Hayes, the varsity girls and boys on Saturday at UNB's Pit. The fourth and final game - JV boys - goes Saturday at noon at the FHS main gym.

The first three games raised \$5,700 for the Mike Fitzgerald Memorial Fund. The Kats-Lions' kitty will surely surpass \$6,000 after the fourth game is played.

"I forget the exact number from last year," Don said, "but it was around \$3,500. It's a significant increase and it's very encouraging."

This is the first year a four-game format has been used, but it won't be the last. All eight teams will play on the same day in 2012 at UNB's new Richard J Currie Center.

After the Fredericton High School JV and varsity girls took control of their respective games early, basketball fans were waiting to see a competitive game. The varsity boys gave it to them.

The FHS Maritime Case Black Kats lost by 13, but led the Leo Hayes Nasis Y's Men's Lions by three with about three minutes to play.

But as one of 800 or so people in the Pit, I can attest to what an entertaining game it was.

"It sure was," Don Fitzgerald said. "It wasn't the type of game where you were tempted to leave early, that's for sure. The kids really, really competed hard and that game could have gone either way. It was who was going to make the run with three minutes left. Then the other team had to change their approach because the clock became their enemy."

When the Lions went on that pivotal run, the Kats were forced to try three-point attempts to scramble back into it. The ball wouldn't drop, so that's how the final margin ballooned to 13 points.