

The Living Room Times EXTRA

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Newington vs. Southington #3 Indians play #1 Knights tonight in important girls basketball showdown

WHO: #1 Southington Blue Knights (12-0)
vs #3 Newington Indians (11-0)

WHERE: Southington High School

WHEN: Tonight at 7:15 PM (JV game at 5:45)

WHAT: A critical showdown between the two best teams in the CCC South conference and two of the three best teams in the entire state.

TOP PLAYERS:

Allison Macca, SHS, junior, 5-10, forward—
She is the best girls basketball player in the state, according to *The Hartford Courant's* "25 with the drive" top players list on 12-10-95. "Just give Macca the ball. She'll find a way," the article states.

Ela Lapciuk, NHS, junior, 5-11, forward—
Lapciuk, a star player in both soccer and basketball, has led the Indians with an average of nearly 15 points per game. She was ranked #11 on the *Courant's* list.

QUOTE: "[We have] a better chance than most of the people in the state think we have," said Newington coach Sandy Piltz on his team's chances of upsetting the top-ranked Knights. "We're a good team, and when you're a good team, anything can happen."

Most Newington High School students have spent much of this week frantically preparing for exams in math, science, history, and english. But nine girls at Newington High have another big test to get ready for, and it may turn out to be the toughest midterm of all.

Those nine girls—Ela Lapciuk, Amanda Ficacelli, Kim Milardo, Teraesa Milardo, Ashley Vicino, Amy Strong, Kate Strong, Tina Lessard, and Leslie Carlson—make up Newington's third-ranked varsity girls basketball team, and their big midterm is a game tonight at Southington High School against the state's top-ranked team, the Southington Blue Knights.

The Indians (11-0) are just past the midpoint of their 20-game season, and yet their coach, Sandy Piltz, said he still doesn't really know where they stand in comparison to some of the state's other top teams.

"I know it sounds funny to hear me say this halfway through the season, but it's still much too early to even make a guess about that," Piltz said in an interview last Sunday when asked whether the Indians' state coaches' poll ranking of #3 is accurate. "There so many teams that are so close in ability from the third-to, like, the fifteenth ranking, that I don't know. I really don't."

You'll notice that Piltz said the teams closest in ability are from #3 to #15. The #1 and #2 teams—Southington and Norwich Free Academy—are sort of in a class by themselves, he said.

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Can Indians stun #1 Knights?

They'll try for upset tonight at Southington

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Even so, the coach added that he thinks Newington should be able to stay close in tonight's game against Southington, and if they do what they need to, they have a chance to knock off the Blue Knights.

"Probably a better chance than most of the people in the state think we have," said Pilz when asked about his team's chances of upsetting the top-ranked Knights. "We're a good team, and when you're a good team, anything can happen," he added.



Above: Leslie Carlson, second on Newington in total points, scores the first basket in a game earlier in the season against East Hartford.

Pilz said one key to the game for Newington is stay close throughout the first quarter.

"Southington, in past years, usually gets a very, very big burst on us in the first quarter," the coach explained. "They get, like, an eight or ten point lead. And then we gradually creep back in, and creep back in, and get close, and maybe tie them. And then they get the lead again and they hit their foul shots at the end, and that's what happens a lot."

"If we get off a good first quarter, we have a chance."

But in order to have any shot, Newington will have to control Allison Macca, Southington's 5-foot-10 power forward who is considered to be the state's best girls basketball player.

When asked what the Indians will do to stop Macca and the rest of Southington's offense, Pilz responded honestly, "Oh, I don't know."

"We're going to try a lot of different stuff, and see what works....When you have a team as good as Southington, you can't just concentrate on one person. If you concentrate on Allison Macca, Jen Gombatz [ranked #17 in *Courant* list] and Colleen Klopp [*Courant* honorable mention] will kill you. And if you concentrate on those three, Tiffany Steele [*Courant* honorable mention], a six-footer, can hit from inside, and Wendy Coleman hits threes all day, from the outside. And if you focus on them, you've got [Megan] Burava, and you've got some other kids coming off the bench. There's just so much talent, you just have to play a complete game defensively."

"On offense, we've got to not be afraid," Pilz said. "The way you beat pressure is to attack pressure. If a team

comes after you, presses the daylight out of you, you can't be afraid, be conservative. You have to attack it, you have to go after it. We have to drive to the hoop, we have to get them in foul trouble, we have to get to the foul line."

"The biggest deciding factor, for us to be in that game, we

have to come out with a lot of confidence, a lot of courage, and have a good start. If we don't get a good start in the first quarter, and we're playing catchup the whole game, we may make it exciting, but I don't think we'll catch them. I think we have to have a good first quarter. And the kids are going to be given permission to use three timeouts in the first quarter if they have to. I do not want Southington deciding this in the first quarter. I want to stay in this game. The longer we hang around, the more pressure on them, because they're not used to having a close game. So that's got to be our thought pattern."

Pilz also said that Southington will hope that their bench will be the deciding factor, as they try to rotate players in and out to wear down Newington's small roster of players. "But no one's been successful in doing that yet this year," he added.

Regardless of what decides the game, the game will, in turn, decide several things. For one, the winner will take sole possession of first place

in the CCC South conference. Right now, the Indians and the Knights are tied at 6-0 in conference play. Also, the game is likely to have major ramifications for the state coaches' poll of the state's best teams. If Southington loses, they would almost certainly fall out of the #1 spot, replaced by either Norwich Free Academy, the current #2, or Newington. If Southington wins, they would keep their top ranking, and the Indians would presumably drop several spots in the poll.



Above: Kate Strong, who has averaged 7 points per game this season, plays against East Hartford in December.



Above: Newington forward Ela Lapciuk gets one of her many steals this season.