

## Celtics defeat Wildcats 73-50 in ?Battle of Aurora?



The Cardinal Carter Senior Boys basketball team has had one of those charmed weeks full of regular season and tournament success.

On Monday afternoon on their home court, the Celtics defeated the reigning York Region Athletic Association (YRAA) champion Dr. GW Williams Wildcats 73-50 to improve their North Division record to 7-1.

Last Tuesday afternoon, in a dramatic home court victory, Carter edged regional rival Sacred Heart 60-58.

On Friday, the Celtics captured the Bur Oak Invitational Tournament in Markham by defeating the host school in the championship final 48-35. Peter George earned the tournament MVP award by scoring 24 points versus Bur Oak.

George credited his teammates for his prodigious scoring throughout the tournament during which he averaged 20 points per game.

?My teammates created shots for me. I was also responding to some trash talk so it was good to score after all the talking on the court. We barely beat Bur Oak (39-34) in the first game of the tournament so it was a big wake up call for us. We were better against Milliken in our second game and beat them 62-45.?

Captain Athan Babalis credited George's intensity in the championship final as a key difference maker for the Celtics.

?We were down 9-0 to start the championship game, but Peter's drive to score was unmatched at the tournament. He was in the scoring lane right away and he was finding his spots. After he got going in the final, Bur Oak was barbecued chicken.?

Babalis, in addition to generating superb poultry metaphors during his courtside interview, offered insights into the team's success both at Bur Oak and against the Wildcats on home court.

?We work really well together. We've been playing together for four years so our trapping defense is another product of our team chemistry. We've been successful as a starting five, but our bench really motivates us to play hard.?

George echoed his teammate's assessment: ?The energy that the bench brings has a lot to do with our success. If we miss a shot, I know they'll keep on encouraging us and we learn to play with more and more confidence.?

Head Coach Zach Zapanta credited his entire team for supplying energy on and off the court versus the Wildcats so the Celtics could play the kind of game that works best: ?In today's game, they were aware of using their speed. Our strength is our transition game. It starts with a commitment to defense and strong rebounding so we can run the court.?

Coach Zapanta's squad showed off their defensive prowess at a key turning point in the third quarter versus the reigning YRAA champs.

?Our four steals in a row in the third quarter got the guys running and scoring.?

Noah Wetzel led the Celtics' run and gun offense with 22 points against the Wildcats. George chipped in 16, including 13 points in the decisive second quarter. Samuel Street played a strong game both offensively and defensively. The veteran Celtic finished with 15 points.

Centre Ryan Collie led the Wildcats offense with a strong inside game. He finished with 21 points. Shooting guard Tim Antonios, whose backcourt quickness helped impel GW Williams to the YRAA championship in 2024, added 11.

?The Battle of Aurora? was largely over by half time as the Celtics led 38-22 after two quarters of play.

The Celtics' fast break offense and timely three-point shooting continued into the second half and the home team built a 56-35 lead. Coach Zapanta substituted freely in the final quarter and the Celtics' depth was on display as the spirited bench mob maintained the starters' margin of victory.

Last Tuesday, the Celtics defeated regional rival Sacred Heart in a remarkably different way. Carter's offence stalled at various points in the game and only their stellar defense allowed them to subdue a feisty Sentinels squad.

Wetzel scored 17 points and Street chipped in 16 to catalyze the Celtics to a thrilling two-point home court victory. Babalis and George contributed 10 and 9 points, respectively, to Carter's balanced offensive attack.

Coach Zapanta outlined the factors to his team's knee-knocking win.

?Timely scoring and excellent situational defense. They recognized the intensity of the situation and responded well ? right down to the last play Street made to deflect an inbound pass with two seconds left.?

Zapanta?in his fifth year of teaching and fourth year of coaching at Cardinal Carter CHS?observed that his starters endured the end-of-game pressure due to ?their chemistry.?

?It's the result of playing together for four years. This is their last chance to win a championship since most of the team is in Grade 12.?

The Celtics' starters played with urgency when it mattered in their win over Sacred Heart. The regular season game had a playoff feel in the fourth quarter. Mistakes were magnified and points were precious. With two ticks left on the clock, George drew a shooting foul. George's first made free throw was called off due to a foul line violation, but he sunk the second to give the Celtics a two-point lead.

The Sentinels called a timeout to advance the ball into the offensive zone.

The Celtics' veteran presence paid off during the final play when Street rotated to the paint and deflected the Sentinels' alley-oop in-bound pass out of harm's way to prevent a last-second loss on home court.

**By Jim Stewart**