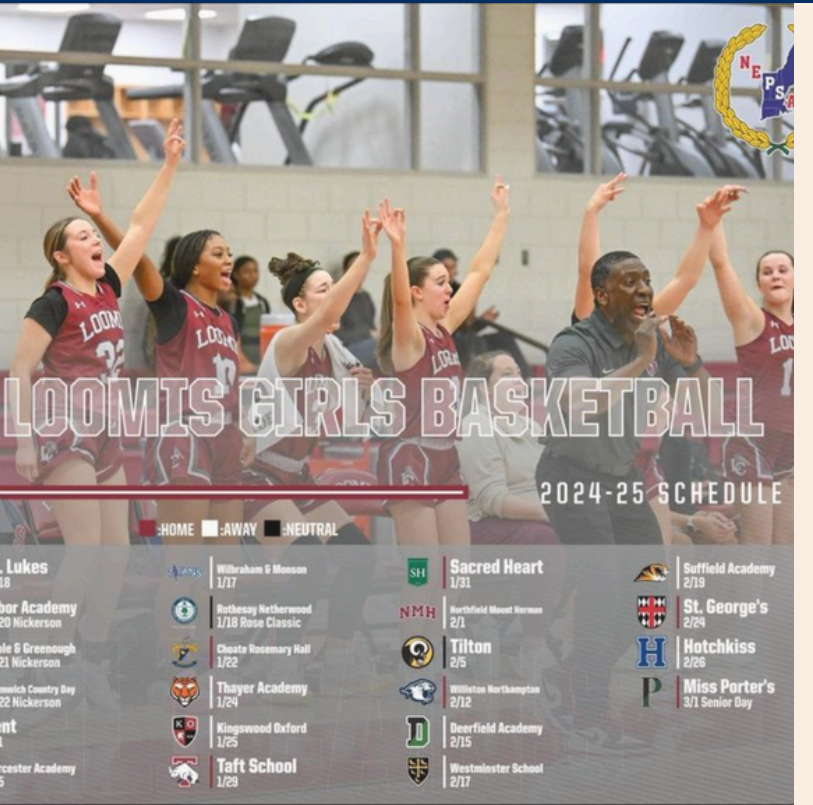


NEPSGBA INSIDER

The Official Newsletter of the NEPSAC Girls Basketball Assoc



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PUSHING THROUGH THE MIDSEASON GRIND - FOR OUR STUDENT-ATHLETES

Written by Ayo Hart

As January comes to an end, many student-athletes find themselves battling fatigue—both physically and mentally. Games are coming in flurries, recovery time feels limited, and schoolwork isn't letting up. This is when the best athletes separate themselves—not just through skill, but through resilience, discipline, and smart decision-making.

First, prioritize recovery even if just in small ways. You may not get a full rest day, but stretching, foam rolling, and hydrating consistently can make a big difference. If your legs feel heavy, take ice baths when possible and fuel your body with nutrient-dense foods. Of course, there is no substitute for sleep. Aim for at least 7-9 hours per night, even if that means cutting back on screen time.

Second, make sure to stay on top of your academic commitment so you're less stressed. Use travel time to games and/or school to knock out assignments, and communicate with teachers if you're struggling to keep up. Your ability to manage stress will impact both your performance on the court and your focus in the classroom.

Finally, lean on your teammates and coaches. The midseason grind can feel isolating, but your team is going through it too. Bring energy to practice, encourage your teammates, and remember why you love the game. Tough stretches build character, and those who push through will come out stronger when the playoffs arrive.

The grind is real, but so is your ability to rise above it. Stay locked in, take care of your body, and soak up every opportunity —because the best moments of the season are still ahead.

AUSTIN PREP - A PROGRAM ON THE RISE

Written by Ayo Hart

In just their third season in NEPSAC and first at the AA level, Austin Prep Girls Varsity Basketball is making significant strides under the leadership of Head Coach Ushearnda Stroud ("Coach U") and Assistant Coach Edwin Norgaisse. A longtime NEPSAC coach and board member of the NEPSAC Coaches Association, Coach U brings a wealth of experience, having led Brooks School to back-to-back NEPSAC Class B championships before taking over at Austin Prep in 2022. She is once again building a program that will consistently compete for postseason success. The team's credo, "Unitas", reflects their focus on unity, growth, and competition at the highest level.

Leading the charge is 6'3" Fope Ayo '26, ranked #40 in ESPN's national rankings. Ayo is a dominant force on both ends of the floor and a true leader for the Cougars. She is joined by sophomore Tiffany Burns, a 2027 ESPN Watch List player, who has emerged as a key offensive weapon.

Austin Prep thrives on a fast-paced, aggressive style of play, featuring full-court pressure and a transition-heavy offense. The Cougars look to disrupt opponents defensively and capitalize on scoring opportunities in the open court.

Several players have shown major growth this season, including Ruby Thompson '27 and Eliana Axelrod '25, who have stepped up in key moments. Meanwhile, promising newcomers Angel Efosa '27, the younger sister of Providence guard Grace Efosa, and Lea Devito '27 have quickly adapted to the team's up-tempo system.

Coach U is most excited about the development of her players and the foundation being built. "We're not just competing—we're establishing a culture that will allow us to contend in NEPSAC AA for years to come," she says. With elite talent, a high-pressure defensive identity, and the leadership of a championship-winning coach, Austin Prep is proving it belongs in NEPSAC AA, and a promising future is likely in store for the Cougars.

*"We're not just competing
—we're establishing a
culture that will allow us
to contend in NEPSAC AA
for years to come" ~
Ushearnda Stroud,
Austin Prep.*



JAYDA JOHNSON: LIFE AFTER A STANDOUT CAREER AT HAMDEN HALL

Written by Ayo Hart

From the moment Jayda Johnson stepped onto the varsity court at Hamden Hall as a seventh grader, her talent and passion for the game were undeniable. Under the guidance of her father and coach, Brian Johnson, she developed into a dynamic player, breaking records and leading her team to new heights. Now, as a sophomore at the University of Dayton, she is embracing the challenges of Division I basketball and continuing to grow as both an athlete and a student.

Coach Brian Johnson knew early on that Jayda had the potential to play at the highest level. "At a young age, she had the passion, work ethic, and high basketball IQ that are key ingredients for success," he recalls. Over six varsity seasons, Jayda's defining moments were plentiful, from hitting game-winning free throws as a seventh grader against Greenwich Academy led by NEPSAC standout Kaitlin Davis (Columbia '23, USC '24) to breaking Hamden Hall's single-game scoring record in another FAA matchup against Hopkins then reaching her 1,000th career point against St. Luke's.

Perhaps more impactful than her individual successes was that Jayda set a standard of excellence at Hamden Hall, excelling in the classroom and leading by example on the court. "Firstly, J was a kind human being and had great energy with her teammates. She helped build the fun, competitive culture we had at Hamden Hall," says her father. "Her ability to make others better really elevated our program."

Moving to the college level always presents new challenges, but Jayda's transition to Dayton has been smooth. "The coaches were extremely supportive and involved from the jump, and my teammates were really welcoming and always wanted to hang out," she says. While the adjustment to the pace and physicality of A-10 basketball has been demanding, she is embracing the process. "Coach Meek has given me a lot of opportunities in the games and in practices to grow as a player and be able to make mistakes and then correct them."



Photo Credit Dayton Women's Basketball

In fact, what drew Jayda to Dayton's program was its culture of support and development. "Coach Meek is not only an incredible coach but an amazing person. It's hard to find head coaches in college so bought into their players," she explains. The staff's wealth of experience, along with the team's welcoming and hardworking environment, made Dayton the perfect fit.

Jayda's journey was not always smooth. Her high school career took an unexpected turn senior year when she suffered an ACL injury, a setback that tested both her physical and mental resilience. "The hardest part was when you have goals you want to hit and you don't progress how you want to exactly," she admits. Jayda offers advice to younger student-athletes facing setbacks: "Stay consistent, stay level-headed, and trust your body. Recovery isn't a race—it's about becoming a better version of yourself." Indeed, despite the challenges, she has remained focused on improving her game. "I'm working on becoming a knockdown three-point shooter and making the right reads off bad closeouts."

Through the ups and downs, Jayda's father has watched her mature into a driven young woman. "She took seven courses in her first semester, passed all of them with high grades, and managed a Division I basketball schedule. That says a lot about her work ethic and determination," Brian Johnson says proudly.

With her recovery complete, Jayda is excited about the future. Dayton is in contention for an A-10 championship, and she is eager to contribute in any way she can. "We're all bought in and working extremely hard. Our team has been surprising people, and we're determined to bring home an A-10 trophy."

With her resilience, leadership, and dedication, Jayda Johnson is proving that her best basketball is still ahead of her. And for those who watched her dominate at Hamden Hall, we know this inaugural season at Dayton is another chapter in an already remarkable career.

Class AA

Nobles
Tabor
Tilton
New Hampton
Hoosac
Southfield
St. Andrew's

Class B

GFA
Berkshire
Suffield
Lawrence
St Georges
Rivers
St Lukes
Brooks
Ethel Walker
Beaver Country
Proctor

Class AA

Newman
WMA
NMH
Worcester
Darrow
Marianapolis
Winchendon
Austin Prep
Storm King
MacDuffie

Class C

KUA
Hamden Hall
Kents Hill
Brewster
Holderness
King
Berwick
LCA

Class A

Loomis
Sacred Heart
Kent
Hotchkiss
Choate
Taft
Andover
Thayer
Milton
Miss Porter's

Class D

Penguin Hall
Brimmer & May
Vermont
Forman
Watkinson
Hyde
Bancroft
Commonwealth

WEEK TEN IN NEPSAC

UPCOMING GAMES SAT 2/8

12:00 Kingswood Oxford @ GCDS
12:30 MacDuffie @ Austin Prep
1:30 Wooster @ Watkinson
2:00 Marianapolis @ Storm King
2:00 Sacred Heart @ Newton Country Day
2:00 Worcester @ Hoosac
3:00 Pingree @ Exeter
3:00 NMH @ Ethel Walker
3:30 Vermont @ Brewster
4:00 Proctor @ St. George's

Top Teams of 2/2/25

A LOOK BACK AT RECENT GAMES

Loomis 43
Sacred Heart 33

Austin Prep 60
Storm King 43

Loomis - Abby Congdon '25 (12p, 4r, 3s, 4a)
Alicia Mitchell '25 (10p, 10r, 2b)
Leah McKenzie '27 (6p, 2r)
Liv Westfort '25 (4p, 6r, 2a)
Catherine Chadwell '25 (4p, 2r)
Lauren Wright '26 (2p, 5r)

AP - '26 Fope Ayo 27 pts 14rbs
'27 Angel Efosa 18pts 11rbs
'25 Colleen Simmons 11pts 3stls
'27 Tiffany Burns 8ast

Worcester Academy 59 Marianapolis 73
Marianapolis 40 MacDuffie 47

SH - Lucianna Parrotta '27 (11p, 3r, 2b)
Aisha Hassan '25 (8p, 7r, 3a, 1chg taken)
Emma Mathews '27 (6p, 2r, 2s)
Jadamarie Henry '25 (4p, 3r)
Ava Curto '26 (3p, 2r)
Eva Wilkerson (3a, 4s, career high 15r)

Marianapolis - B. Miele '26: 34 pts, 7 ast, 10 rbs, 7 stl M.
Early '27: 14 pts, 10 rbs, 11 asts, 6 stls
S. Anderson '27: 20 pts, 11 rbs, 3 asts, 6 blks

Bella Miele scored her 1000th point

Worcester Academy 81
Storm King 72

Milton 43
Pingree 37

WA: Ella Getz '26- 25 pts
Saige Youngberg '25- 20 pts
Sadie Metzger '27- 11 pts

'28 Baez 9pt 2ast 2reb 2stl
'28 Abelard D 7pt 3reb 2stl 5def
'26 Vaughan 8pt 10reb 3stl 3def
'25 Morton 10pt 7reb 2ast '26
Trefethen 10reb 5pt 2ast 2stl 4def

Rivers 58
Middlesex 38

Rivers - Grace O'Sullivan '25 23p 6r 1a 3s
Natalia Hall-Rosa '25 13p 7r 6a 2s 1b
Chase Anderson '25 12p 12r 2a 1s 5b
Joy Robinson '28 6p 3r 3a
Kelsey Johnsonton '27 2p 2a 1b
Nicole Iffih '27 2p 2r 1s

Berkshire 57
GFA 55