

# NEPSGBA INSIDER

The Official Newsletter of the NEPSAC Girls Basketball Assoc



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## GOVERNOR'S FOCUSED ON WE NOT ME

**Written by Ayo Hart**

In her inaugural year at the helm, Head Coach Ednaija Lassiter is instilling a new spirit within the Governor's Girls' Basketball program – one that prioritizes unity and shared success over individual accolades. Coach Lassiter explains, "The game is and always will be bigger than them, and to value the individual beside them and their success."

Governor's Academy's playing style reflects this philosophy – fast, free, and fun. Embracing a culture where every player is ready to contribute, the team operates in transition and navigates challenges collectively. Key returners, including Trinity commit Fiona Neilon, a lethal 3-point shooter; Babson commit Julia St. Laurent, a versatile guard/small forward who does a little bit of everything; '24 Makayla Moriarty whom Coach Lassiter describes as the "best perimeter defender I believe the conference has"; '25 Gracie Augustine, a quiet guard/small forward with an excellent mid-post game and a phenomenal leader; and the tenacious guard '25 Cecelia Batchelder who can defend every position due to her strength and toughness, form the foundation of Gov's '23-'24 campaign.

Coach Lassiter notes the marked improvement of returners like Gracie Augustine, citing significant strides in shooting and ball handling. Augustine, in particular, emerges as a hidden gem in the conference, poised for recognition. Joining the squad and making her name known immediately is '27 guard Camila Serrano who made an impactful debut with 19 points in her first high school game.

Coach Lassiter anticipates exciting matchups against top-tier schools like Nobles, Rivers, and Tabor, stating, "We want to be in the same conversation as those schools and be given the same respect." Govs will host Rivers next week on Jan 10 and see Tabor and Nobles in February.

With the team's rallying cry of "WE not Me," the players understand that individual growth contributes to the collective success of the team.

# OLUCHI OKANANWA'S IMPACTFUL ASCENT FROM WORCESTER ACADEMY TO DUKE

Written by Ayo Hart

In the competitive world of women's college basketball, Worcester Academy's alumna Oluchi Okananwa has emerged as a rising star, making waves at the next level with her exceptional skills and character on and off the court. Now a key player for the Duke Women's Basketball team under the guidance of Coach Kara Lawson, Oluchi's journey from Worcester to Duke highlights her unwavering commitment to excellence.

Oluchi's impressive journey began to unfold even before her years at Worcester Academy. Ushearnda Stroud, Oluchi's club coach with Lady Rivals and the head coach at Austin Prep, recognized her potential early on. "I recognized her high motor, elite athleticism, and extremely high IQ. Add that all together and her own inner drive to excel in the classroom and on the court, I knew she would play at the highest level"

*"When you have those kinds of qualities and you can back it up with talent, you make a college program very happy." ~ Sherry Levin, Former head Coach, Worcester Academy*

Oluchi's high school career was marked by defining moments and standout performances that showcased her skills and leadership on the court. Notably, during the June 2022 Select Events Prime East Tournament. "Oluchi was unstoppable in every game setting her sights on each opposing player that was ranked over her or had the offers from schools she wanted," says Stroud. Another standout moment occurred at the Wootton Top 150 in Dallas, where Oluchi dominated every aspect, solidifying her status as an elite player on the national stage. In the final 1v1 championship, it was Oluchi vs Milaysia Fulwiley (South Carolina). "Oluchi dominated won and showed and proved that she is the elite of elite." During her senior campaign at Worcester Academy, Oluchi continued her domination on the court. Sherry Levin, Oluchi's coach at Worcester Academy, who also coached NEPSAC's most notable alumna, Aliyah Boston, remembers, "We lost Cam Rust to an injury.

Her [Oluchi] last three games of the season, she had 35, 38, and 35. She carried us including a thrilling overtime win over New Hampton. Not many kids can put up those numbers against tough AA teams in close contests. She really stepped it up. Everyone recognized her skill and talent in her recognition as the 2022 POY for Class AA."

Both Stroud (Coach U) and Levin played pivotal roles in shaping Oluchi into the leader and player she is today. Coach U, who also coached Taina Mair (Brooks 2022), starting point guard at Duke, prioritized skill development during their time together, focusing on Oluchi's endurance, ambidextrous finishing, shooting efficiency, and the ability to read the game strategically. As Oluchi transitioned to collegiate basketball, Coach U says the emphasis was on choosing an environment that "celebrated her and not tolerated her skill set" and matched the academic rigor, ensuring a seamless translation to the next level.

Levin describes Oluchi, "She is a person of high character, leadership, and faith. And those are rare qualities to find. And I think when you have those kinds of qualities and you can back it up with talent, you make a college program very happy." Recognizing Oluchi's potential as a guard, Levin worked on developing her guard skills, pushing her to evolve into a versatile player. Says Levin, "I told her, you're not a small forward, you're really a guard, and if you want to play at the next level, we really need to develop your guard skills." She did not come to Worcester Academy having been a point or 2 guard her whole career, but over time, she became more comfortable being in that position. Levin remembered Oluchi adjusting to going North-South and having the ball in her hands for 90 feet vs 15 feet.



Photo Credit; Worcester Academy



Photo Credit; Duke Womens's Basketball

*Oluchi's journey from Worcester Academy to Duke Women's Basketball exemplifies the intersection of talent, leadership, and a relentless commitment to personal and team excellence.*

Beyond the court, Oluchi's empathetic and caring nature, coupled with her dedication to personal growth, set her apart as a mature and wonderful leader at Worcester. Coach Levin notes, "Oluchi is one of the most wonderful people that I have met. She is someone who is always willing to look inside. It's always what more can I do."


## OKANANWA'S IMPACTFUL ASCENT *cont.*

Now at Duke, Oluchi continues to make waves. Her increasing minutes on the court including key minutes in late game situations reflect the trust placed in her by Lawson and her coaching staff. Her growing impact was most recently noted by ESPN where Oluchi was recently listed in the ESPN list of top most impactful freshmen coming in at #11.

Levin also highlighted Oluchi's quick learning ability and her capacity to apply new skills to game situations, emphasizing her growth mindset. She had that unfortunate end of game possession against Stanford. You have to know time, score, who's defending you, and where your teammates are. Next game against Georgia, she pulled it out in a very similar situation.

A standout athlete, a high-character leader, and a relentless worker, Oluchi Okananwa's journey serves as an inspiration for aspiring student-athletes at Worcester Academy and beyond. When asked what advice she might have for current NEPSAC student-athletes, Levin says, "The challenge is that players nowadays are looking outward, and I would say the best advice I can give as a coach is that everyone can only be the best version of themselves. There might not be another Aliyah or Oluchi. You can be yourself, your authentic player and if you can do that, you can walk off the court no matter what the result is." Levin continues, "I think my favorite quote of all time is 'The only place success comes before work is in the dictionary', that's Lombardi. You have to work hard, but working hard doesn't always guarantee you're going to reach those goals. And if you know you worked your hardest, you walk off feeling your best."

## Kingswood - Oxford Tournament Results

GIRLS BRACKET			
			
<b>GAME 16</b>		<b>GAME 5</b>	
49 HYDE		72 KINGSWOOD OXFORD	
36 POMFRET		30 HYDE	
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16		FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15	
<b>GAME 12</b>		<b>GAME 6</b>	
27 HOPKINS		78 HOLDERNESS	
57 ROCKY HILL		17 POMFRET	
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16		FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15	
<b>GAME 22</b>		<b>GAME 4</b>	
7TH PLACE		8 HOPKINS	
31 POMFRET		98 WILBRAHAM & MONSON	
67 HOPKINS		FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15	
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17		<b>GAME 2</b>	
		59 ROCKY HILL	
		67 KIMBALL UNION	
		FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15	
		<b>GAME 9</b>	
		61 WILBRAHAM & MONSON	
		51 KIMBALL UNION	
		SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16	
		<b>GAME 13</b>	
		39 KINGSWOOD OXFORD	
		66 HOLDERNESS	
		SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16	
		<b>WINNER'S BRACKET</b>	
		<b>GAME 23</b>	
		CHAMPIONSHIP	
		32 HOLDERNESS	
		42 WILBRAHAM & MONSON	
		SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17	
		<b>GAME 20</b>	
		3RD PLACE	
		46 KINGSWOOD OXFORD	
		58 KIMBALL UNION	
		SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17	



SATURDAY	NOBLES VS HOOSAC	RAPPAPORT	1:00
SATURDAY	STORM KING VS THAYER	RICHARDSON	1:00
SATURDAY	TILTON VS RIVERS	RAPPAPORT	2:45
SATURDAY	BEAVER VS NEW HAMPTON	RICHARDSON	2:45
SUNDAY	HOOSAC VS NEW HAMPTON	RAPPAPORT	11:00
SUNDAY	THAYER VS TILTON	RICHARDSON	11:00
SUNDAY	NOBLES VS STORM KING	RAPPAPORT	12:45
SUNDAY	RIVERS VS BEAVER	RICHARDSON	12:45

12/30 - 12/31

# WEEK SIX IN NEPSAC

## UPCOMING GAMES SAT 1/6

1:00 Dexter Southfield @ Tilton  
 1:00 Hoosac @ Worcester Academy  
 2:00 St. Luke's @ MacDuffie  
 2:30 Winchendon @ Marianapolis  
 2:30 Austin Prep @ Proctor  
 2:30 Middlesex @ Brooks  
 2:30 WMA @ GFA  
 3:00 Kent @ Loomis  
 3:30 St. George's @ Groton

## A LOOK BACK AT OUR HOLIDAY TOURNAMENTS

### First Team All-KIT

From - Rocky Hill, #3 Sophie Mahar '25  
 From - KUA, #11 Tyanna Medina '25  
 From - Kingswood, #30 Aashni Patel '24  
 From - Holderness, #12 Valeria Santiago '24  
 From - WMA, #0 Hannah Grudzien '25

**And the Girls All-Tournament MVP goes to #10 Caterina Ravosa '26 from WMA.**

### St. George's Tournament

St. George's 58  
 Greens Farms Academy 36

St. Luke's 58  
 Brooks 55

Governor's 48  
 Beaver Country Day 47

### Nickerson Tournament

Loomis 58  
 New Hampton 52

Tabor 67  
 Storm King 42

Nobles 73  
 Kent 44

### Nickerson Tournament *cont*

Winchendon 72  
 Hamden Hall 42

Tilton 58  
 Hoosac 51

NMH 45  
 Choate 37

Nobles 66  
 Rivers 50

Hamden Hall 66  
 Marianapolis 52

Worcester 61  
 Sacred Heart 51

Worcester - Cam Rust: 21p, 4r, 2a,  
 Kailee McDonald: 16p, 7r, 4a  
 Elyse MacDonough: 9p, 3r, 2s  
 Saige Youngberg: 8p, 6r, 4a

Sacred Heart - Payton Sfreddo: 15p, 4r, 3a, 4s  
 Eva Wilkerson: 13p, 11r, 3a, 2s  
 Madison Hart: 12p, 7r, 2a, 1b  
 Lucianna Parrotta: 5p, 4r, 2a