



ROCHESTER, NY – The 3rd Annual East Coast Fusion NY Hoops Festival was full of excitement all weekend long with games being played at Charlotte High School and The Aquinas Institute. 38 teams competed in 7 different age divisions. This year also marked the first year in which the Hoops Festival included girls divisions, both a High School and U16 division were formed with eight teams competing.

As always, the Fusion NY Hoops Fest attracted not only the families and friends of competing teams, but the local basketball junkies who wanted to watch some good action on the hardwood. The display of good sportsmanship did not go unnoticed over the weekend. “With so many rival teams competing against each other, I anticipated some heated battles. In the end, I was pleasantly surprised to see players helping other players off the ground after hard fouls as well as sincere displays of congratulations after the games were over” said Joe Tisa (East Coast Fusion’s New York Director). “I was impressed with the way the coaches carried themselves, communicated with officials and handled their teams after both wins and losses.”

The two Girls Divisions were a great display of team basketball. The winner of both divisions, the Rochester Warriors (High School division) and the Rochester Warriors – MEIER (U16 division), both showed just how well AAU teams can play together on both the offensive and defensive ends of the floor.

The five Boys Divisions showed exceptional talent even at the younger age groups. The East Coast Fusion squad (U13 division) and Syracuse Select squad (U14 division) both put on great displays of individual talent and hard work as they won their respective divisions. The older divisions were dominated by great point guard play, at least on the teams who were still standing on Sunday afternoon. Christian White (Franchise Ballers, U15), Dylan Hodownes (RAP-Hodownes, U16) and CJ Hodge (Westside Huskies, U17) all ran their squads in a way that would make Steve Nash and Chris Paul proud. It was evident that point guard play was the difference maker as these players lead their teams to championships in the U15, U16 and U17 divisions.

The two venues were great for the event. The Field House at The Aquinas Institute is perfect for high level AAU action with three courts all side by side. The setup was great, the fans were able to see several games at one time. Charlotte High School’s tremendous support of the event continues to show why the school has produced 5 college players in the last two seasons.

Girls High School Division

The Rochester Warriors U13 team played up in this division and definitely was more than capable of competing with those teams. The Rochester Warriors defeated the Rochester Zeniths (Nazareth Academy) by a score of 66 – 56 in the championship game on Sunday. The Warriors are a selfless group of girls coached by the husband/wife tandem of D’Onnarae & Rodney Johnson. There is little doubt that many of Section Vs future stars will matriculate from this team.

Girls U16 Division

The Rochester Warriors – MEIER team has a roster including only one 11th grader. They have been playing the entire spring up an age division as a way to get more exposure for their players. When you have some of the best talent in Rochester, though, you can get away with having such a young squad. The Warriors – MEIER faced rival Warriors – MEULENDYK in the championship game with the MEIER crew winning 61 – 36. A typical balanced attack helped the team to a sound victory over their in-program rival. Lindsay Gibson lead the way with 18, while Sam Sorge and Harely Cleary chipped in 12 points each.

Boys U13 Division

The East Coast Fusion squad made it two tournament victories in a row with their win over the Rochester All-Stars in the championship game on Sunday. After a successful tournament at the I-90 Shootout a week before, the East Coast Fusion squad met little resistance with a 65 – 42 win in the final. This squad continues to build chemistry as Bill Ruback gets more and more time in the gym with the team. It is very hard to predict the future success of 7th graders, but this group could have 7-8 future college players if they continue to grow and work hard.

Boys U14 Division

Jon Feris's Syracuse Select team had a strong showing this weekend, beating the Utica Titans, East Coast Fusion and Hilton Select PRINCE on Sunday in their run to winning the championship. Both Chris Hicks (8th grader, Grant Middle School) and Shakir Thomas (8th grader, Cicero-North Syracuse Junior High) were tough matchups for teams all weekend and it was the same in the championship game against Hilton Select PRINCE in which Syracuse Select won 62 – 48. Both players show superior athleticism and strength for their age. Hilton Select's team is comprised of 8th graders from Merton Williams Junior High. They have done very well as a school team on the AAU circuit this spring, normally playing all-star teams from different parts of the state. The future is bright for Hilton HS if these guys continue to grow and improve.

Boys U15 Division

The Franchise Ballers and East Coast Fusion programs, friendly rivals this year, had a chance to play two times over the weekend with the second meeting being in the championship game. The Franchise Ballers won the championship game 73 – 53. Both teams are very balanced, neither with a true superstar. No one had an answer for East Coast Fusion big-man Sam Palermo (9th grader, McQuaid Jesuit HS) all weekend, he is skilled for his age as a post player and plays hard on both ends of the court. At the end of the day, though, the difference maker was Franchise Baller's court general, Christian White (9th grader, Aquinas Institute). The point guard's impact on the championship game, and the weekend as a whole, is not something you will necessarily see in the scorebook, but it is obvious to any onlooker just how important he is. White finds the open player every time, pushes the ball up the floor with the pass and keeps the game under control while running whatever offense or defense Coach Xavier Major has them in. White's growth and physical maturity over the next couple of years will determine what level of college basketball he can play at, but he is clearly a difference maker at this level of AAU. One other highlight of the weekend was the outstanding play by Tyler Carges (6'0" 8th grader from Webster Thomas). Carges was playing up an age with Team Cavaliers who lost a close semifinal game to the Franchise Ballers. Carges showed a high basketball IQ and some craftiness on the court. You will certainly hear more about him as he enters high school this fall.

Boys U16 Division

The U16 and U17 divisions had their game schedules affected by the SAT test that was administered on Saturday morning. This forced teams to play several games on Saturday afternoon in a short period of time, not giving players much rest and recovery time. The RAP – Hodownes squad looked unaffected by this schedule as they rolled to a 73 – 64 victory over the Whitby Wildcats (Hamilton, Ontario) in the championship game on Sunday. Both teams had to play back-to-back games for the semifinal and

championship game, testing their endurance as both were playing their fourth game in 26 hours. Potentially one of the highlights of the whole tournament was during one of the semifinal games. Whitby Wildcat wing player, Justin Edwards, made a move past his defender and rose up over two East Coast Fusion players and flushed it home during the semifinal action. Edwards (6'2", Anderson CVI) is an athletic wing who made several big plays over the course of the weekend, he has a chance to be a scholarship level player as he continues to develop over the next year.

The Whitby Wildcat squad, and the rest of the tournament field for that matter, really had no answer for the one-two punch of Dylan Hodownes (5'11", Honeoye Falls Lima HS) and Jamel Johnson (6'1", Finney School in Penfield NY). Dylan runs the point very effectively for RAP-Hodownes using his speed and strength to get in the lane to create for himself and others. He was also pretty effective from the perimeter over the weekend. Johnson is a wing player who is relentless going to the rim and finishing in traffic. Jamel was tough on both ends of the floor, he was the recipient of a ton of Hodownes' assists and he also went and got it off the rim scoring on putbacks during crucial junctures of every game. Both Hodownes and Johnson have a chance to be scholarship level players.

Boys U17 Division

The notion of a team "being better on paper" than another team is something everyone has heard before, but what makes it even more interesting is when the "paper" changes so drastically from one week to another. The East Coast Fusion and Westside Huskies were the two top ranked teams as the pools were put together prior to the tournament, this was based on the rosters both teams had in previous tournaments. What we didn't know was that both rosters would be very different as the Fusion NY Hoops Fest got under way. The Westside Huskies loaded up, adding two of Rochester's best players in Blair Roberts (6'3" wing player from Bishop Kearney HS) and David Brannon (6'2" wing player from East HS) to go along with their already strong group. On the other side, The East Coast Fusion squad was going to be without the assistance of four of their players due to injuries and players away at individual camps. This made for a great championship game on Sunday afternoon, featuring some great one-on-one matchups.

Mike Glenn (6'4" wing from Fairport HS who will be attending Notre Dame Prep next year) was unstoppable on the offensive end, getting his shot off whenever he wanted to and showing an improved handle as he knifed through defenders on the way to the rim. Blair Roberts and Glenn were seen jawing at each other in the first half as each tried to outplay the other to give their teams an edge on the scoreboard. East Coast Fusion big man Dylan Sherwood (6'8" forward from Pittsford Sutherland HS) was definitely dragging after playing 5 games in about 27 hours as Fusion's only big man due to the absence of 6'9" center Josh Brown. Sherwood was still effective as a shot blocker/alterer around the rim, but offensively he missed a handful of chippies and foul shots. Part of that was because of the "break out" play of the Huskies big man, Christian Barzonkowski (6'8" center from Alden HS). Barzonkowski played with a lot of energy on both ends of the court and hit some clutch shots down the stretch for the Huskies. With the right amount of exposure over the next 12 months, Barzonkowski can easily be a scholarship level player. Brandon Miles (6'2" wing from Greece Olympia HS) and Tyshaun Murrell (6'0" point from Wilson Magnet) tried to keep East Coast Fusion close down the stretch with some key drives and perimeter jumpers, but in the end the difference maker for the Westside Huskies was point guard CJ Hodge (5'10" from Gates Chili HS).

Throughout the game CJ applied great pressure on the East Coast Fusion guards, forcing them to make bad decisions and rush shots. On the offensive end he continued to push the ball, got to the rim and created open shots for himself and his teammates. CJ will be key to the Westside Huskies success the rest of the summer and it is safe to say that he will be leading a team somewhere at the college level in the years to come. Hodge and Roberts lead the Huskies to a 90-81 victory over the East Coast Fusion squad to capture their first Fusion NY Hoops Festival championship.