NEWMAN WINS AAA CHAMPIONSHIP

It was the high school game that brought back memories of the Duke-Kentucky classic in 1992 when Christian Laetnter’s buzzer beater sent Duke into the final four.   Newman School survived and won a thrilling 107-100 game vs. New Hampton to win the AAA NEPSAC championship in a game that had all the thrills one would want in a basketball game.

The first half was a blueprint of how to play basketball at its finest, with brilliant shooting, passing, dunks and thrills as both teams played to a 49-49 draw at the halftime break.

The second half was just as good, and even more electrifying as the fans, who were all on their feet in the game’s final minutes, would be treated to an overtime.  An improbable overtime it would prove to be.  Newman had taken what appeared to be a commanding 16-point lead with 3:32 left in the game.   New Hampton then applied some furious pressure that led to some costly Newman turnovers, coupled with some outstanding shooting to go on a 14-0 run to close the gap to 88-86 with still nearly two minutes to play.  Newman was holding on to a 91-90 lead with 0:12 left in the contest before New Hampton forced another turnover and a chance to win the game.

With less than a second left on the clock the Huskies Nasir Meyer put up a shot that fell short of the rim that prompted a brief celebration from the Newman faithful.  But wait – a foul was called on a Newman player which sent Meyer, who scored 19 points in the games first few minutes of the game and had made seven three pointers during the game.  Meyer made the first but missed the second that gave Newman new life as the game went into overtime.

The overtime belonged to Newman as they did not lose their poise and regrouped for the four-minute extra session.  The Cardinals scored the first eight points and then held off New Hampton as a wild celebration featuring players, coaches, fans and included many parents who traveled to the championship game in Hartford, Connecticut.

The Cardinals hoisted two trophies at the exuberant post-game ceremony. One was the first ever NEPSAC team trophy to the Newman team playing in only its third year of basketball at its highest prep level, the second was the tournament MVP trophy awarded to Newman’s Lucas Morillo.

Morillo poured in 35 points, pulled down 10 rebounds and did a masterful job of bringing the ball up the court late in the game against the intense pressure defense applied by the Huskies.  Jalen Harper (Rhode Island commit) had a season high 25 points, with 12 of his tallies coming on three-point bombs. 6’11 Collins Onyejiaka scored 14 points but was the human eraser on defense with seven blocks shots while altering countless others Huskie attempts. The product from Nigeria who has many high level D1 offers on the table joined Morillo with a double-double with 10 boards.  Steady Reggie Grodin (Penn State) produced another of his routine games with 13 points, six assists and zero turnovers. Louis O’Keefe had 10 points with six of his points coming on timely 3-pointers in the second half.

The win was a program record 30 wins in only the third year for the fledgling Newman program under their youthful head coach Jackson Johnson. And if you’re looking for an anomaly to this reference to the Christian Laettner historic bucket from yesteryear. Laettner current lives in Ponte Beach, Florida and had a son who played for Ponte Vedra High School last school year; the same high school that produced Newman coach Jackson Johnson.