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Tenafly junior Rylie Theuerkauf (14) demonstrated a nice touch from the perimeter with her 37-point outburst vs. Caldwell in Thursday's 57-49 Tigers overtime win. The

5-8 star was also a strong defender as she shows with a block of shot taken by the Chiefs Cassidy Brown (3). As time was winding down she tried to heave long shot over outstretched arm of Caldwell's Kayla Ishigami (24). Chiefs head coach Amanda Keenan crouches in front of her team bench as she sizes things up on the court where Theuerkauf also battled Chiefs' hard-working junior forward Shayne Stafford (45). In the end Tenafly's team had earned an impressive holiday victory. (Photos by Gene Nann-visit www.genenann.smugmug.com)

Theuerkauf-Led Tenafly Impressive While Edging Caldwell In OT Contest

By Steve Tober
For sidelinechatter.com

CALDWELL- Who knows if Tenafly will ever appear again in the West Essex Area Holiday Hoops Festival, but regardless of if or when the Tigers play again in any similar event in the near future, Thursday's quickly-devised, fill-in performance vs. Caldwell at Mount St. Dominic's Mary Jo Codey Gymnasium was quite impressive thanks in large measure to the presence of the Bergen County school's junior sensation Rylie Theuerkauf.

The 5-foot-9 junior, who has already amassed 1,199 points in just 41 high school games (29.2 per game average) sank a game-high 37 points, including six in the critical overtime period to lift unbeaten Tenafly (4-0) to an exciting 57-49 victory over the Chiefs (3-1) in an entertaining tournament final.

When the West Essex girls had to withdraw from the West Essex area holiday hoops event due to a covid pause and the Verona girls were already in a quarantine surrounding issues with the virus, there was a special need for another team to enter the tournament and Tenafly turned out to be the answer in rather quick order on late Wednesday afternoon.

“(Caldwell coach) Amanda (Keenan) wanted to play a game and we talked about reaching out to Immaculate Heart, but that didn't work out so we knew that Tenafly was looking for a game, their athletic director (Joe Carollo) is a Caldwell resident and it all just came together very quickly,” said Caldwell AD Dan Romano. “It turned out to be a very good game and Tenafly's No. 14 (Theueurekauf) was definitely a great player to watch.”

Tenafly's star in the making was a force throughout the contest, with 17 first half points and then 20 after the intermission capped by six in the extra session when the Tigers outscored the Chiefs, 10-2, to pull away in the final minute.

“We held the ball when we had to in order to get good shots and we played team basketball,” said Theuerkauf, who also added 12 rebounds, 6 steals and 3 blocks to her stellar stat sheet. “I loved playing in this gym and it was a fun game to be a part of.

“Fortunately, we came out with a hard-fought victory and I believe we've got the type of team to have a very good season.”

Caldwell was in control for much of the first half, leading 24-12 on Lauren Sanderson second 3-pointer of the second quarter with 5:42 still showing in the second quarter.

The Chiefs maintained a sizeable lead which went from 29-20 at the half to 32-23 on another Sanderson tri-fecta early in the third quarter; however, the Tigers began to claw back, first on a basket by Juliet Schwartz (10 points) to cut the Caldwell lead to 34-29 with 1:02 still left in the third before back-to-back 3's from Theuerkauf saw Tenafly trailing by the narrow 37-35 margin as the teams headed into the fourth quarter.

The Tigers took their first lead, 39-37, with 6:34 remaining in regulation on a basket by Hadley Blatt, but Caldwell reasserted itself and led 43-39, with 3:46 left as junior point guard Cassidy Brown (10 points, 5 rebounds, 5 assists, 3 steals) scored on a layup following a steal.

Then, just 15 seconds later, Schwartz hit a huge '3' to pull Tenafly to within 43-42.

Saddled with four fouls, Theuerkauf had a key block of a Brown shot underneath with just under a minute remaining as Tenafly tried to maintain a 49-47 lead; however, Caldwell's playmaker had two clutch free throws with 18.8 seconds left to knot the score at 47-all.

Tenafly was unable to convert in the final seconds of regulation; however, in overtime, after Brown again tied the contest at 49-all, the Tigers went on an 8-0 run in the final 1:11 to put the game away on two free throws by Anna Taufield and then six straight points from Theuerkauf, including four free throws in the final seconds.

In the end, the best player on the court proved very difficult to stop at crunch time.

"We knew how great a player Theuerkauf is and we focused on trying to contain her, but kudos to her because she shot the ball extremely well," said Keenan. "Our girls battled hard and we made some big baskets in the fourth quarter, but Tenafly was the better team in overtime."

Caldwell received strong performances off the bench from both junior forward Shayne Stafford (9 points, 7 rebounds) and senior guard Ashlee Rodriguez (5 points, 5 rebounds), and Sanderson (14 points) showed a good perimeter touch.

It's a promising Chiefs team with Brown a 3-year starter as the lead guard and youngsters like sophomore Kayla Ishigami (5 points, 4 rebounds) showing good promise.

"Our strength starts with our defense and that fuels our offense," said Keenan. "We faced a great player today and came up just a bit short, but we'll get back to work and be ready for our next game (4 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 4, at Arts High in Newark)."

And, Tenafly heads back home as a team to watch with a standout player to keep a close eye on as she will soon threaten to be the next 2,000-point scorer in Bergen County.

In a holiday tourney appearance that was unique to teams continuing to find matchups during these covid times, Tenafly had a very nice afternoon in the Codey gym.

"We found out about this game sometime after 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon," said Theuerkauf. "We made some big shots and earned a nice victory to hopefully give us some momentum heading into the New Year."

NOTES- Theuerkauf, who plays for the AAU team 'Exodus' in New York City, has scored at least 30 points in all four of Tenafly's games so far this season. She said that in addition to her interest in Ivy League schools she is also looking at major Division programs such as Wake Forest and Clemson...Her dad is Demarest track coach Mike Theuerkauf...Tenafly's girls hoops coach is Devin Feeney...Tenafly AD Joe Carollo is the former head football coach at New Providence and had also been a defensive coordinator on Lou Racioppe's staff at Verona...Retired Caldwell football coach Ken Trimmer has returned as a volunteer member of Keenan's staff with the Chiefs this winter. Trimmer had been a former head girls basketball coach at Caldwell. Keenan and her assistant coach Kelli Josephsen are both former standout Chief players...Caldwell defeated Cedar Grove, 39-21, in first round WE area holiday hoops action on Wednesday (Dec. 29) at Cedar Grove.

West Essex Area Holiday Hoops Festival:

TENAFLY (4-0) 10 10 15 12 10 - 57
CALDWELL (3-1) 18 11 8 10 2 - 49

Tenafly: Sasha Adelman 1-0-0-2, Hadley Blatt 2-0-0-4, Rylie Theuerkauf 6-6-7-37, Juliet Schwartz 2-2-0-10, Anna Taufield 1-0-0-2, Adar Senek 0-0-0-0, Rebecca Beaver 0-0-0-0, Maya Assor 0-0-0-0; Leavel Avni 0-0-0-0. **Totals: 12-8-10-57**

Caldwell: Cassidy Brown 3-0-4-10, Lauren Sanderson 1-4-0-14, Nikki Raskowsky 2-0-0-4, Kayla Ishigami 1-1-0-5, Emily Hessberger 1-0-0-2, Shayne Stafford 4-0-1-9, Ashlee Rodriguez 2-0-1-5. **Totals: 14-5-6-49**

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Caldwell's Cassidy Brown makes her move along the baseline, Ashlee Rodriguez (1) has her focus on the basket as she prepares to take free throw, Tenafly's Anna Taufield (13) puts up shot and Tigers' junior star Rylie Theuerkauf (14) winds up being story of day.

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