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Numbers won't define Bergen's next girls basketball star



Local Sports

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North Jersey Record
USA TODAY NETWORK - N.J.

RIDGEFIELD PARK — There were a couple of catch-and-shoot 3-pointers, a few put-backs and one nifty up-and-under drive for a lay-up.

Rylie Theorekauf only played about

15 minutes in Tenafly's season-opening win over Ridgefield Park on Friday night, Dec. 17, but she showed her full potential. Afterwards, she didn't know how many points she scored. She said she didn't care.

"Not at all," she laughed.

But it may be time for the rest of North Jersey to start caring.

For the record, Theorekauf, a 5-foot-8 junior, scored 21 points against

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Ridgefield Park host Tenafly on the opening day of girls' high school basketball on Friday Dec. 17, 2021. Tenafly's #14 Rylie Theorekauf scores during the game. Photo by [unreadable] for USA TODAY NETWORK - N.J.

Basketball

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the Scarlets, raising her career total to 1,098. At this pace, averaging more than 27 per game in her career, she looks like the next 2,000-point scorer in North Jersey. At the moment, there are only 14 Bergen County players who have reached that milestone.

When we add up her career numbers, we'll also have to note that one of her seasons was shortened thanks to COVID-19.

The daughter of one of North Jersey's most respected track coaches, Demarest's Mike Theuerkauf, Rylie brings a team-first, everything-else-second approach to the court.

"She does everything," Tenafly girls basketball coach Devin Feeney said. "She rebounds. She plays defense. She is such a hard worker. She is the first one at practice, the last one to leave. She just loves basketball and it shows."

The love affair with hoops sparked in fourth grade. Theuerkauf was a gymnast at first, then her friend Anna Taufield's mom encouraged her to go out for basketball. After a couple years, Theuerkauf was hooked. Taufield is now her teammate and starter with the Tigers.

Tenafly exists in a unique spot in North Jersey athletics. They're too big to play against the small schools and too small to compete against the big schools – the dreaded upper middle of the pack. When she arrived, Theuerkauf immediately gave the program a boost, but the Tigers still went 10-14 when she was a freshman and 3-12 last year.

But she's determined that her legacy not be really-good player on losing team.

"This team is really special this year," she said. "It's one of the best teams we have ever had. Everyone seems so into it. We have some freshmen who have



Ridgefield Park hosts Tenafly on the opening day of girls high school basketball on Dec. 17, 2021. Tenafly players huddle on the court with #14 Rylie Theuerkauf in the center. ANNE-MARIE CARUSO/NORTHJERSEY.COM

shown some skills and leadership and I love Anna. I am so excited."

Having a Dad for a coach can be a mixed blessing. Mike was in the stands Friday night, top row, watching his daughter, then congratulating her on the win.

"He is always there to help," Rylie said. "When I actually ask him for help, he knows the difference from being a dad and being a coach, which is so important, so it's never like, you have to be one or the other. When I ask him for advice, he gives me the truth."

In the spring, Rylie can't help but be on the track. She competes in the high jump, triple jump and discus for the Tigers, but she also plays basketball all

year with a club program based in New York.

"All the players around me there are Division I athletes, everyone is wanting to get better," she said.

It can be a problem for kids like Theuerkauf to live in two different worlds. At the club level, she needs to pass, play defense and work for a shot. Some nights this winter for Tenafly, she will score 30 points and barely break a sweat.

"In the beginning of the season, I go right from AAU to here, but I would say it just comes down to being a leader and being patient and helping girls out," she said. "I love both."

Theuerkauf has already started hear-



Tenafly's #14 Rylie Theuerkauf makes a move to the basket. ANNE-MARIE CARUSO/NORTHJERSEY.COM

ing from a few Division I schools, and that's her goal.

"The way she works, she definitely has the ability," Feeney said. "She has the skill. She can score, but she does so much more than that."

For now, Theuerkauf is focused on getting her team to take the next step. A winning season would be nice, maybe challenge one of the traditional powerhouses along the way.

"I think we just have to have everyone on the team buy in," she said. "So that everyone is working hard and wants the same goal."

North Jersey is full of outstanding players who can get buckets. Theuerkauf may not know how many points she has each night, but it's starting to add up to something special.

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