

**BOYS BASKETBALL**

# Unsung heroes: These 14 boys basketball players do the 'little things' to help their teams

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Here are the North Jersey boys basketball players whose names rarely show up in box score but do so many of the little things to help their teams.

They pass, rebound, defend, lead by example and, since I began as a professional sports writer in 1987, make me want to include them in my stories.

As we work through another pandemic-impacted season, please permit me to honor 14 program veterans who are "Unsung Heroes." Their work ethic, unselfishness and leadership earn praise from their coaches, and my respect.

## **Fredys De La Cruz, Ridgefield Park**

The 5-foot-9 senior is a "gym rat" who can regularly be found practicing alone before sunrise and after dark. He averages 8.5 points, 4.1 assists, 2.0 steals and has taken a team-leading four charges.

"Fredys is our inspirational leader," Scarlets coach Chris Gaskin said. "He is our best on-ball defender and without question the most dedicated and determined team member."

## **Vincent Ducut, Bogota**

He's a 5-foot-8 senior guard and All-League cross-country runner who has defended the opposing team's top player for most of the past three seasons. Nicknamed "Duke," he has registered 13 three-pointers, a team-leading 18 deflections and 10 steals, and drawn five charges.

"He leads by example," Bucs coach Jay Mahoney said. "He plays the top of our half-court trap and he never gets tired. In my 43 years as head coach, we always preach accepting your roles and Duke will be the example I will use 'til I retire."

## **Greg Garcia, Fort Lee**

The 6-foot-4 senior forward has made dramatic improvements during his four years in the program. He averages close to a double-double, with 10 rebounds and almost 10 points. He scored 11 points and pulled down 10 boards in a 58-40 victory over Wayne Hills.

“In my 20-plus years of coaching, I have had only a few examples of a kid that from freshmen year (freshmen team) to his senior year has made this type of improvement both on and off the court,” Bridgemen coach Adam Shrager said.

## **Michael Giannini, DePaul**

The 6-foot-3 senior swingman has joined the rotation due to Spartans' injuries and illness and has made the most of it. Playing about 12 minutes per game, he averages two points, four rebounds, and 1.1 assists and has 10 deflections and five steals

“He cheers on his teammates when he is not in the game, does not ask to shoot the ball, is extremely unselfish, passes first, and accepts any challenge we give him,” Spartans coach Ryan Hagen said.

## **Nino Iacovino, Wood-Ridge**

He's a 5-foot-10 senior guard who is in his first full season as a starter and always defends the opposing team's top guard. He averages 4.8 points, 1.9 assists, 1.5 rebounds and 1.0 steals. He scored a career-high 14 points in the Blue Devils' first win, 63-53, over Becton.

"Nino is a three-sport athlete, with basketball being his third sport, no doubt," Blue Devils coach Jimmy Maher said. "And he may not be the definition of a 'basketball' player, but he's as tough as they come."

## **Luke Kressaty, Wayne Hills**

The 5-foot-10 senior swingman is a versatile piece who seems to fit anywhere into the Patriots' ever-changing puzzle. He often defends the opponent's best player while averaging 5.8 points, 6.0 rebounds and 3.0 assists. He scored a career-high 16 at a holiday tournament.

“His position is ‘everywhere,’ He plays big for us when we need him to and can handle the ball and play on the perimeter if we need him too,” Patriots coach Kevin Grimes said. “He keeps us, and it, all together. He is by far our best defender.”

## **Troy Milton, Passaic Tech**

The 5-foot-8, 135-pound senior guard also plays football and, pound for pound, might be North Jersey's toughest player. He averages 5.0 points and 4.2 rebounds and leads the team in deflections (2.4), steals

(1.2) and charges drawn (1.2).

“His will defend and get 50/50 balls like nothing I've ever seen,” Bulldogs coach Mike Boorman said. “His style of play is infectious and this year his style of play is rubbing off on other players. His mental toughness is something to admire. If I was still in the boxing business, Troy could become lightweight champ of the world.”

## **Kiernan Moynihan, Mahwah**

He is a 6-foot-3 senior forward who is among North Jersey's leaders in perspiration. He has taken on a much larger role this season, after starting a few games as a junior. He averages eight points and nine rebounds.

“He leaves the game and all practices dripping of sweat,” T-Birds coach Michael Branagh said. “He gets countless tips, deflections, and wins 50/50 balls. He is the first guy on the floor for loose balls.”

## **Michael Ramos, Saddle Brook**

The 5-foot-10 senior is a three-year varsity player and two-year captain. Despite being the Falcons' smallest starter, he plays power forward and routinely defends much taller opponents. He averages 4.2 points and 5.6 rebounds.

“He plays defense on way bigger kids than himself and never complains,” Falcons coach Kris DeBlasio said. “His best skill as a player is boxing out. On every shot, Michael takes someone and tries to drive them into the bleachers with a box-out. If you told me I had to coach a team full of Michael Ramoses, it would be a dream come true.”

## **Jesus Romero, Kennedy**

The heady 6-foot-2 swingman does a little bit of everything, from defending multiple positions to handling the ball to hitting corner three-pointers. He sealed a 57-53 win over DePaul with two free throws. He averages 8.7 points, 4.7 rebounds, 2.4 assists and 1.6 steals.

“This is a guy who just gets it,” Knights coach Tommie Patterson said. “A rugged physical defender who we often call on to defend the opposing team's best player, Romero is the epitome of a great role player.”

## **Sam Saraceno, Ridgewood**

The 5-foot-9 senior is a two-year starting point guard. He controls the pace of the game and makes sure teammates are in the right spots. He averages five points, two rebounds, and two steals and has drawn a team-high five charges.

“Sam is the smartest player on the floor, takes pride in his defense, coaches guys through the rotations and is always willing to step in and take a charge,” Maroons coach Mike Troy said.

## **Grant Sloan, Ramapo**

The 6-foot-3 forward is the lone senior starter on a roster dominated by promising sophomores, and he's a mentor to the underclassmen. He often defends forwards and centers, but he can also defend guards. He averages seven points, four rebounds, 2.5 assists, 1.5 steals and 1.0 blocks.

“He plays multiple positions on offense and can guard all five positions on defense, making him extremely valuable to us,” Green Raiders coach Nick Vier said. “His leadership is where we lean as a team on Grant the most.”

## **Sean Vadis, Demarest**

The 6-foot-4 senior forward returned to basketball despite his father passing away from a COVID-related illness during the football season. He brings high energy and leadership and averages 7.4 points and 8.2 rebounds.

“More than anything else, he is our glue guy,” Norsemen coach Pat Gabriele said. “Although I think we have some talent, we are not where we are without Sean. He brings energy to practice and games.”

## **Nick Weaver, Passaic Valley**

The 5-foot-7 senior guard is a ball hawk whose job description includes defending the opponent's point guard. He averages three points, three rebounds and three assists, with a team-leading 18 deflections, 17 steals and five charges drawn.

“He is never afraid to mix it up in the paint, dives on the floor for loose balls, leads our team in steals and deflections.” Hornets coach Kevin Tuohey said. “He dictates our tempo offensively and defensively and is a leader on this team with his passion and energy each game.”

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