

Santa Barbara Dons defeat Dos Pueblos Chargers in 48-43 boys basketball thriller

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Waylen Finkel (#3) lines up his free throw attempt for the Santa Barbara Dons at a game Jan. 22 at the JR Richards Gymnasium in Santa Barbara, California.

SANTA BARBARA, California — The Santa Barbara Dons emerged victorious on their home court over crosstown rivals Dos Pueblos Chargers in a varsity boys basketball showdown, winning by a score of 48-43 on Jan. 22 at Santa Barbara High School.

The Dons advanced to 17-7 overall and 9-1 in Channel League play, while the Goleta-based Chargers fell to 9-12 overall and 2-8 in the Channel League.

In a game where the Dons would have otherwise been heavily favored over the visiting Chargers, Dos Pueblos had a massive opportunity to pull off an upset over Santa Barbara due to the absence of star junior guard Luke Zuffelato. Going into Monday night's matchup, Zuffelato was averaging 26.9 points per game on 46%/36%/74% shooting¹. He was ruled out of the contest with an illness, however, by his father and the Dons' head coach Greg Zuffelato.

Despite missing a crucial member of their offense, several Dons players stepped up to carry the load on offense and an impressive team effort all-around on defense led the way to victory over the Chargers. In fact, the Dons held the Chargers off the scoreboard completely in the first quarter, racing out to a 14-0 lead after one quarter of play, capped off by an Owen Horn (freshmen – guard) three-pointer in the final seconds of the quarter.

“In my five years coaching here, I don't know if I've ever had a zero-point quarter,” Coach Zuffelato remarked after the game. “They were so ready to prove themselves without Luke.”

Despite a relatively low-scoring first quarter, the floodgates opened for both offenses in the second quarter. The two teams scored more combined points in the first three minutes of the second quarter than in the entire first quarter. The Chargers outscored the Dons 16-12 in the second quarter, but Santa Barbara still took a comfortable 26-16 lead into the halftime locker room.

The Chargers' offense made major adjustments during halftime, and the Dos Pueblos backcourt of Justin Stock (Sr.-G) and Matthew Zamora (Sr.-G) led the way to a Chargers comeback. Coulter Jay (So.-C) converted a tough and-one to earn the Chargers their first lead of the game

¹ Field goal percentage / Three-point percentage / Free throw percentage

late in the third quarter with the score 34-32. The Dons, however, ended the quarter with five unanswered points to take a three-point 37-34 lead into the final quarter.

The final six minutes of the fourth quarter featured four lead changes, the first of which earned the Chargers a 39-37 lead thanks to a huge Zamora three-pointer after two Allester Linden (Sr.-F) free throws. Tobin Shyrock (Sr.-G) quickly tied the game for the Dons before Waylen Finkel (Sr.-G) hit one of his two free throws to recapture a 40-39 lead for the Dons.

Finn Whipps (Sr.-C) converted on both of his free throws with just three and a half minutes left to expand the Dons lead to 42-39. Still, the Chargers refused to be quelled. Stock, the Chargers' leading scorer, scored on back-to-back Dos Pueblos possessions to recapture a 43-42 lead for the Chargers with two and a half minutes left in the game.

Shyrock once again got the rock and regained the lead for the Dons, this time for good. His layup earned Santa Barbara a 44-43 lead with 1:10 left in what turned out to be the game winning basket.

Coach Zuffelato offered lots of praise for Shyrock's contributions on offense. "Tobin really drives our offense. When he's out, it's hard to get anything going. Everything we got was created by Tobin," Zuffelato explained. Shyrock led the Dons in scoring with 12 points.

Zamora was called for a traveling violation, forfeiting an opportunity to regain the lead for the Chargers, who instead turned the ball over to the Dons at 39.4 seconds left with the score still 44-43. Whipps expanded the Santa Barbara lead to 46-43 after converting on both his free throws from an intentional foul. Whipps finished with 8 points as well as 12 rebounds for the Dons in a winning effort.

Stock was given the ball for the Chargers with an opportunity to tie the game in their final possession. Stock's first three-point attempt rattled out, but Jay hauled in the offensive rebound for the Chargers and dished out to Stock on the left wing for another three-point opportunity. Stock got the look he wanted, but his potentially game-tying three-point attempt rimmed out and the Dons secured the rebound. Shyrock then iced two free throws in the final ten seconds to secure the win for Santa Barbara by a score of 48-43.

Coach Zuffelato was impressed with the well-roundedness of his team's offense, spreading around the praise. "It was really shared," Zuffelato said. "I know our youngin's, Owen [Horn] and Cayleb [Miller], both had good moments of scoring."

Stock and Zamora led the Chargers in scoring, with 13 and 11 points respectively. Yet the star backcourt duo's scoring figures were lower than usual, with Coach Zuffelato crediting DJ Wilson's (Jr.-G/F) incredible defensive effort. "Justin [Stock], besides Luke [Zuffelato], is one of the best scorers in our league," Zuffelato noted. "DJ did an amazing job. He used his athleticism, his strength, and he played smart. Huge heart. He was the key tonight, his defensive effort."

After Monday's contest, Dos Pueblos will prepare for a three game homestand against San Marcos, San Juan Hills, and Pacifica. The Chargers will then wrap up their regular season with trips to Oxnard and Buena. The Dons, meanwhile, follow up the win over Dos Pueblos with huge matchups against Oxnard and Ventura with the chance to leapfrog over Oxnard for first place in the Channel League. Santa Barbara will then conclude its regular season with visits to San Marcos and Rio Mesa.