

## An act of sportsmanship at Ridge reveals hidden talent in Morris Hills player

Gabby Orama, a junior guard on the Morris Hills JV basketball team, figured a recent game at Ridge would be like any other, and for the most part it was.

But because of an overall feeling of sportsmanship in the gym that evening, she returned home as its biggest star, greatly impressing the crowd at Ridge and revealing a talent to her surprised teammates, coaches and Morris Hills community that is a secret no longer.

The non-conference visit from Morris Hills was also serving as Senior Night at Ridge, which in itself fostered a feeling of sportsmanship since the home side not only recognized its players in a ceremony before the varsity game, but the ones from Morris Hills as well, who were individually announced and presented flowers by the hosts at Ridge.

Everything connected with that went very well. But there was still one item between the ceremony and the start of the game: the playing of the Star-Spangled Banner. The recording of the anthem wouldn't work, leaving the PA announcer in awkward position. But Kaylee Amicucci, the Morris Hills scorekeeper, offered him a possible solution - there was a girl on her side who had told her how she liked to sing, and suggested that she could do the job on short notice.

So Gabby was offered the chance, and she followed with a rendition that wowed everyone in the gym. The good feelings generated from the ceremony and Gabby's voice created a mood that extended throughout the game, making it worthy of recognition as part of NJSIAA Sportsmanship Appreciation Week, sponsored by JAG-ONE Physical Therapy, which runs through Feb. 12.

Gabby was involved in performing arts through middle school, but paused after arriving at Morris Hills to become a three-sport athlete, taking part in cross-country, basketball and spring track. So no one there knew about her voice.

"I was in the locker room after my game and then they asked me if I wanted to sing," she said. "I was like 'Sure if I don't mess up.' But then I took the mic, and I just went out there and tried my best."

As for the end result, her friend Amicucci put it best.

"She brought the house down," she said.

Rich Shello, the Ridge athletic director, was equally impressed.

"As our announcer struggled, the Morris Hills scorekeeper let him know that that a player on the Morris Hills JV could sing the anthem with a microphone," he said. "We said 'Okay, let's go with it.' Little Number 10 from the JV squad went to center court and provided us with a great rendition of the anthem. As she sang, her varsity teammates could be seen turning with amazed looks on their faces for not knowing she had such a beautiful voice. The audience gave her a great ovation and her teammates gathered around her to congratulate her for a job well done. It was awesome to witness."

And it was all something she was attempting for the first time.

"I had never done it," Gabby said regarding both the anthem and the solo setting. "And it was a long time since I performed before an audience. It was really nerve-wracking, honestly. I thought I was going to mess up and trip up on the words, but I just said to myself 'Take a deep breath, and I'm gonna do this for this senior night.' And then I guess they liked it. It felt liberating to do it, and who knew it would happen there. You just have to take the opportunity and make the most of it."

"The tone of the night was really set with a sportsmanlike flair with the recognition of the seniors from both teams and it was capped off with the impromptu singing of the anthem from our visiting player," Shello said. "The game then went off with two teams competing extremely hard, but within the spirit of good sportsmanship. Nights like that make me proud to work with our student-athletes."

The best part of all is that the story didn't end that night in Basking Ridge, starting with Morris Hills athletic director Rob Haraka learning about Gabby's performance in an email from Shello.

"I had no idea she could do it," Haraka said. "She's not taking any of the chorus classes because of her schedule. We have singers for every game and I work with the chorus teacher who does the assigning. We brought Gabby down right away and introduced her to chorus teacher to get her on the schedule and we're going to get her signed up. It shows you how many students have talents and are just so well rounded. To me, I was most impressed with her guts. To just stand out there, grab the mic in a strange gym on somebody else's senior night and sing the anthem was outstanding. It's all about recognizing kids, and showing their talents."

And for Gabby, it was all that and more.

"I had been wanting to do it at least one time in my high school career," she said. "So I was like 'This is the day, and I'm going to do it.' And now I'm going see where it goes. I'm going to do chorus next year."

