



450-pound Sixers fan gets to do a victory dance

BROAD STREET BALLER as told to DAN GERINGER

LIKE SO MANY long-suffering Sixers fans, I walked into Wells Fargo Center feeling like the two Delaware County teens who sat in nosebleed seats with a handmade sign: #WITNESS27.

If the Sixers were going to lose their 27th game in a row Saturday night, earning them the longest losing streak in major American pro sports, I wanted to see it.

"We are true Sixers fans," said Joe Bakey, 16, of Brookhaven, who held the sign. "But this is a big moment in sports history."

His cousin, Ryan Stephano, 14, of Garnet Valley, said, "LeBron James' motto is 'Witness.' And we are here, witnessing."

But wait! Hope was alive on a lower level on the other side of the arena, where I sat near the Sixers' (literally) biggest fan, James "Big Daddy" Brister, who tips the scales at 450 pounds - all heart.

The Upper Darby mountain of a man was accompanied, as always, by his wife, Tracy, wearing her Mrs. Big Daddy jersey.

"She's the loud one," laughed Big Daddy, who is famous for dancing himself and his belly into a frenzy, until Sixers fans get crazy with him.

Big Daddy shook his shakables through 18 Sixers home losses in a row, and never gave up hope.

Fueled by a slice of pizza so big it stretched across two oil-stained paper plates, Big Daddy watched a sloppy first minute against the Detroit Pistons, then rose to his 76ers-sneakered feet and exhorted whiz-kid guard Michael Carter-Williams to take over the game - which he did.

As Carter-Williams, Thaddeus Young and a cast of castoffs built a jaw-dropping 30-point lead, Big Daddy boogied in the aisle, high-fiving Zion Williams, 9, a joyful West Philly kid in a skeleton hoodie who seemed to know everybody in the joint.

Joining them was Baseemah Downing, known to Big Daddy's Section 119 diehards as "Ms. Missit" because she rises up and screams, "Miss it! Miss it! Miss it!" at enemy free-throw shooters in a voice that can be heard all over the arena.

Season-ticket holder Terri Ayres, who brought three dozen kids from the James Wright Rec Center in Mantua, as she often does, swayed gracefully with the Big Daddy dancers.

When the Sixers' score reached 100, and cheerleaders ran around shouting that all fans had won a free Big Mac, Ayres laughed and said: "You can have the Big Mac. Just give me the win."

By the fourth quarter, the Sixers had iced the win, but Bakey and Stephano held up their sign till the final buzzer.

"We considered our #WITNESS27 sign as a good-luck charm for our Sixers," reminding them to fight to the end, Bakey said.

The Sixers won, 123-98. So the losing streak is history, but losing will likely continue during the team's nearly total makeover.

"Philadelphia fans understand there's going to be pain - in this case, a lot of pain," said Thomas Kline, a personal-injury lawyer who has watched 20 Sixers seasons from floor seats but had to savor the biggest win of this season on TV down the Shore.

"But it's like taking a medication for a serious ailment and getting full warnings about the side effects beforehand. We were warned about a losing season.

"In the meantime, they haven't changed the popcorn, or the hot dogs or Lorenzo's pizza, so win or lose, I'm there."