CRYSTAL FALLS—West Iron girls Coach Mike Dallavalle could only smile and shake his head after watching Lexi Gussert blast his team for 37 points during Forest Park's 61-37 win here Jan. 4.

"We didn't have any special plans for Lexi," Dallavalle said right after the game. "We just wanted to try not to let her get in her shooting rhythm, stay on her tight and make her put the ball down and dish." __PUBLIC__

That's not how it worked out, of course. "We gave her way too much room in the first quarter, and she took full advantage of it. Once she got rolling, it just piled on from there."

Too tough: Of course, it's hard to stop a player of Lexi's size with a deadly shot both inside and outside. Gussert buried 7 of 12 three-point attempts, nailing four in the first quarter when she scored 16 points.

The Wykons' coach wished his team had paid closer attention to Gussert's whereabouts. "Both offensively and defensively, we have to know that she is the go-to, the shooter. We still need to make her do something with the ball instead of letting her just shoot over us."

Gussert is a lot more than a scoring machine, though, What about all those rebounds, steals, assists and that intimidating presence on defense?

"We've got to know that she's in there [on defense], waiting to block shots," said Dallavalle. "We've got to recognize space—if she cheats up on the weak side, we've got to not throw that pass without looking.

"But she's a great player. It was fun to watch."

Unfinished: West Iron's loss leaves the young team with a 1-5 record overall, 0-2 in the West Pac Conference. Dallavalle said he liked how his team penetrated in the lane against Forest Park and how they rebounded. "But we weren't finishing down there."

That's the Lexi factor, of course. "She got the first few blocks, and then we start, 'Oh, we better get it off quick before she comes out.' I think we could have made an extra pass or recognized our space to get a better look at the basket."

Despite the demoralizing start, the Wykons never quit. They rallied and cut FP's lead down to 14 in the third quarter, but Maria Stankewicz hit a three to ignite a 9-0 Trojan rally.

Off target: Tough Trojan defense translated into 20% Wykon shooting from the floor. "We didn't hit many outside shots against that zone," the coach said. "That makes it tougher to get it inside.

"I was hoping for a little better showing from our shooters—but after that tough start, I think everybody was hanging their heads a little bit."

Kylee Erickson, who has powered the Wykons offense most of the season, had a miserable night shooting with just three points—maybe because the Trojan defense played her really closely. "Once she penetrated, Lexi was there to help on a lot of the drives.

It was a heavy loss, but Dallavalle wasn't overly worried. "We have the tools here," he said. "We have to start finishing and making an extra pass. Things will come along."

Coming up: The Wykons play their next three at home. They host North Dickinson on Jan. 8, then play Hancock here Jan. 10 in a make-up game from late December. On Jan. 14, Ewen-Trout Creek visits the Greenlund Gym.

Good news: None of those teams has a Lexi Gussert on its roster.