

Larry Baker: Coach of the Year

By TOM BAER

It didn't take long for the area girls' basketball coaches to come up with the Observer & Eccentric's Coach of the Year for 1977.

The unanimous choice, Larry Baker of Farmington Hills Our Lady of Mercy High.

Baker, whose team finally won the Class A state championship this season after three years of losing in the finals (twice under his coaching), was voted Coach of the Year last week during a meeting of the 10 area coaches, who also picked the Observer & Eccentric All-Area Team.

"This is quite an honor considering the caliber of basketball being played in this area," said Baker, who won the top-coach award after the 1976 season.

"It's even more of an honor this year because the level of play has really improved. But I think I have to give most of the credit to the talented bunch of girls I've had for the past two years."

Baker was fresh out of the University

of Michigan when he came to Mercy in the fall of 1975. He had planned to fill a vacancy in the school's English Department, but he soon found that his duties would include more than just teaching classes.

He also landed the job of head basketball coach at the all-girl Catholic high school, which was fast becoming known for its excellent teams.

UNDER HIS guidance, Mercy compiled a 20-3 overall record in 1975, and then put together a 23-1 season in 1976. Both years Mercy advanced to the finals of the state Class A tournament, only to lose.

This year, however, Mercy didn't lose the big game. The Marlinis, an experienced and talented group, finished with a 25-0 record, including a 61-52 win over Detroit Mumford Dec. 17 in the state finals at Michigan State's Jenson Fieldhouse.

That experience — all five Mercy starters played in last year's state tournament — made Baker's coaching job a lot easier.

"With so many returning starters, we didn't have to waste a lot of time finding a starting lineup and teaching the fundamentals," he said. "We were able to get to work right away on our offense and defenses."

But molding a group of talented girls into a winning team can be a big challenge, according to Baker.

"When you have a lot of strong individual players, the big challenge is to get them to play well as a unit and to teach them to become unselfish," he said.

"And I think we've learned to be unselfish and to play together as a team. Our players are willing to give up the ball, and they're always looking for someone to pass to. We operate well as a team, and I think that's what beat Mumford in the finals."

BAKER, 24, HAD plenty of familiar company in the O&E spotlight. Mercy was well represented on the All-Area Teams.

The first team included two Mercy seniors, 5-foot-10 Katie McNamara and 5-8 Diane Dietz. Two 5-7 Mercy sen-

iors, Lynn Yadach and Suzanne Brown, landed on the second unit, and 5-7 junior Deanne Banfield received an honorable mention.

Mercy has dominated the local girls' basketball scene for the past several seasons, but that may change next year. Mercy will lose four starters through graduation.

"It'll be a different kind of challenge next year," Baker said. "But it'll be interesting, too, because there'll be a lot of competition for the starting spots."

And some of the area's public-school teams, which looked good in the recent districts and regionals, can be counted on to give Mercy some trouble next year.

"You can tell the level of basketball has improved just by looking at the scores of our tournament games (against public-school teams) this year compared to a couple of seasons ago," Baker said. "We used to blow teams out all the way through the semifinals. This year, the scores were a lot closer."



Coach Larry Baker: "When you have a lot of strong individual players, the big challenge is to get them to play well as a unit and to teach them to become unselfish." (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe).

In The Pocket.

By W.W. EDGAR

IT doesn't seem that more than a quarter of a century has elapsed since senior citizen bowling that now is flourishing across the country, got its start at Livonia Lanes.

It all happened on a Christmas Day when many of his customers called on Clarence Hoffman, then the owner of the lanes, to try out their new equipment.

As "Hoff" watched them all having a lot of fun he got the idea that the senior citizens who had just been given a club might like to watch it. He called and issued an invitation. They told him they would be delighted to come and in an hour more than a dozen appeared. After watching for a while some of them asked to try their hand at knocking down the pins.

It was granted and right there the seed was sown for a senior citizen league in the western suburbs and the organizing of leagues for the elderly all over the country.

It all started on a Christmas Day in Livonia.

THE HIGH SCORING WAVE at Wonderland Lanes calmed down a bit this week—only one 700 series was rolled. For the past three weeks there have been four classic bowlers breaking the 700 barrier. This week only Phil Horowitz was able to do it.

He did it by linking games of 249, 237 and 274 for 760.

The Addition team capt ained by John McKeever rolled games of 1,038, 1,119 and 1,060 for 3,217 to lead the field. In the ladies senior house league

Bobby Knox walked away with top honors when he compiled counts of 220, 189 and 182 for a 600.

MRS. MADVIN POSHUSZNY was one of the happiest women in Westland last Thursday morning. And it wasn't because of the gifts she received for the Yuletide season. Her big smile came because her husband, who carries a 175 average in the Lincoln Mercury League at Satellite Bowl, reached the goal of all bowlers—a 300 game.

"I can tell you what his other games were," she joyfully said over the phone. He took the sheet to work with them—and we both are so happy."

NELLIE ELLIS also was a proud lady because of her bowling feat. Bowling in the Dan's Darlings league at Westland Bowl, she put

together games of 192, 184 and 245 for a 621. And what made her so happy was the fact that it was her first 600 series.

In the tri-city men's league David Poshak made his mother, a counter clerk at Westland, feel very proud. He strung games of 236, 202 and 245 for a 683 to lead the field.

In the ladies classic Marilyn Bourgoon took top honors with a 236 in 621 while Toni Smith rolled a 245 and missed a double century count by a single pin.

Polly Huston also came in for a share of the honors by posting a 135 triplicate. Meanwhile Madeline Yousey and Linda Doyle earned membership in the split conversion club. Madeline knocked over the 3-6-7-8 and Linda did likewise with the 2-7-10.

Tankers tied up

It was a Livonia Bentley-Northville boys swimming showdown. And when the waters finally calmed and the wakes and ripples had settled, it was an 86-86 tie—a rarity on the high school swimming front.

Even though the lead changed hands six times, it was coach Keith Wright's divers who put Bentley back in the thick of the meet.

He took first place in the 200-yard individual medley with a school record time of 2:07.8. He set his second school record of the night finishing second in the 100-yard breaststroke. His record time of 1:02.8 was far outdistanced by Northville's Matt Sullivan who raced the 100 yards in 1:01.9.

Trailing 38-24, divers Pat McDonald, Don Wynne and Jeff Kessler took to the boards. They finished first, second and third to narrow the gap to 41-37. McDonald grabbed first place with 176.75 points; Wynne finished second with 155.35 points; and Kessler came in third with 142.65 points.

"They really came through," Wright said. "The way they came through, you sure couldn't tell that Wynne and Kessler were only sophomores swimming in only their second varsity meet."

While their divers narrowed the gap, the Bulldogs took first place in five other events.

Mark Winter set two new school

"Sullivan's time is probably the best in the entire state," Wright said.

Other first place finishers for Bentley were: Dave Giandietti in the 100-yard butterfly with a time of 58.1 seconds; John Battista in the 500 yard freestyle in 3:24.2 and Kevin Gauthier in the 100-yard backstroke with a 37.3-second finish.

The 400-yard freestyle team of Kary Sapleton, John Battista, Gambletti and Winter took first with a 3:34.7 performance.

Mark Yanoschick was Northville's only double winner as he copied first place in both the 100-yard and 50-yard free style.



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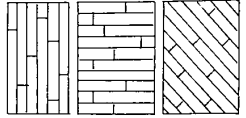
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