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(F)18

## Diets, McNamara are freshmen stars

## Mercy grads lead Michigan

By C.J. RISAK

It was just longer than a year ago that Farmington Our Lady of Mercy swept through its basketball season and captured the state Class A title by defeating Detroit Mumford in the finals, 63-52, at Michigan State's Jenison Fieldhouse.

The Marliners were less successful this season, losing in the first round of the regional. But two of their graduates from the '77 championship team have picked up their college basketball ca-

reers where their prep careers ended. Katie McNamara and Diane Dietz led Mercy in many of the team's statistics through the '76 and '77 seasons. The Marliners lost in the state finals when the pair were juniors, but rallied for a perfect season in '77, culminated by winning the state crown.

Now, McNamara and Dietz are again leading a team up a ladder towards a possible future championship.

Both girls are freshmen at the University of Michigan. However, the duo

still is in the familiar position of leading the team in scoring.

Michigan has a young squad, with three freshmen, a sophomore, and a junior as starters. But despite being in what coach Gloria Soluk terms as a "rebuilding year," the Wolverines are off to a fast start with five wins in their first eight contests. Dietz leads the team with 149 points for an 18.6 average, while McNamara has 147 points, for an 18.4 average.

Needless to say, Soluk is more than

happy to have the two Mercy grads on the team. Now in her second year at U-M, this is the first team that Soluk has recruited for the Wolverines.

"I KNOW the Catholic League pretty well," she said. "I coached at St. Ladislaus back in '73 and '74, when we won the Class D state title. We used to scrimmage against Mercy then. I saw Diane play as a freshman and knew she was a good one."

"In '75, I went to Wayne State. I knew I'd never get girls of their caliber to come to WSU. They were strictly big school athletes. But when I came here last year, (Mercy coach) Larry Baker was the first person I called."

Soluk's first year at Michigan was not a good one. The Wolverines finished with an 8-16 record. So Soluk decided to go with the youngsters this season, with only one starter from last year's squad among the first six players. However, Dietz and McNamara have made it anything but a rebuilding year.

"Both Katie and Diane are very unselfish," Soluk said. "And they're both floor leaders. They have that 'never say die' attitude. They have a tendency to look for each other more than the others, but that's only because they're used to playing together. They're the first two players I wanted to build a program on."

TEAM PLAY WAS what Baker stressed to his girls at Mercy.

"I think we learned to be unselfish and to play together as a team," he said following the state championship win. "Our players were willing to give up the ball, and they were always looking for someone to pass to."

Looking for the open player to pass to has proved to be a problem for Soluk.

"The only reason they're scoring as much as they do is that they know I'll kill them if they don't shoot enough," Soluk said with a laugh.

At Mercy, both girls had similar statistics for their junior and senior years. Dietz averaged 16.5 points, 9.9 rebounds, three steals and 3.4 assists a game in her senior year, while McNamara had 15.6 points, 9.3 rebounds, 2.1 steals, and 2.7 assists a game in her final season. Both were named to the O&E All-Area team in their junior and senior years.

Despite similar figures, their style of play is different, according to Soluk.

"Katie just loves to play. She loves the game, it's fun for her. She leads our fast break, is an excellent perimeter shooter and a good passer."

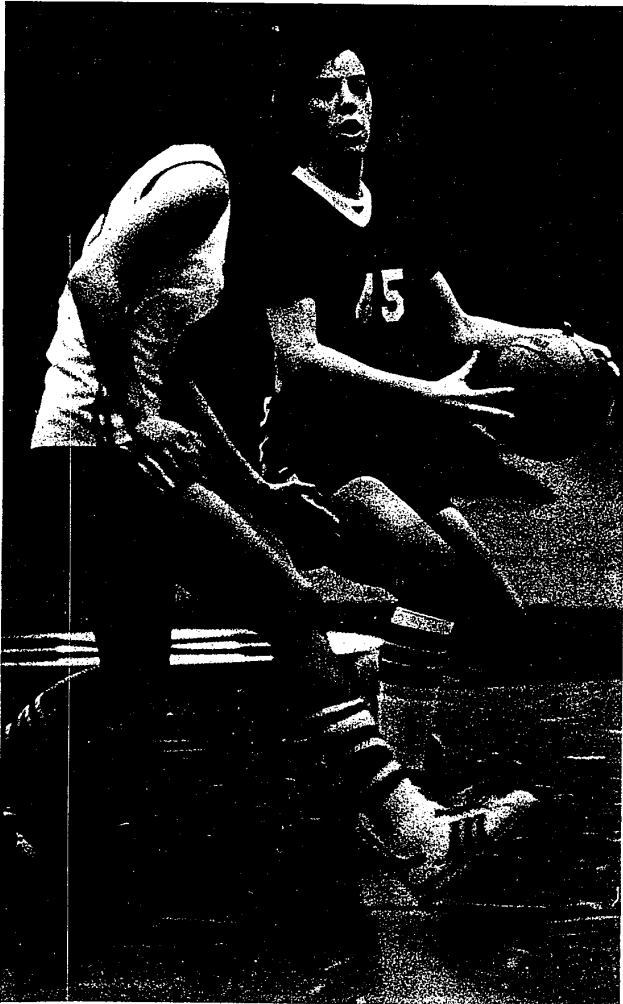
"Diane is very intense at both ends of the floor. She's also a very good perimeter shooter and an excellent defensive player."

"Both the girls are well-liked off the floor by the other players. And, they're both very good students."

With the team as young as it is, improvement seems likely. Already, either Dietz or McNamara have led or tied for team scoring honors in seven of the eight games. In a victory over Grand Valley, McNamara pumped in 30 points while Dietz had seven steals, both high marks for the Wolverines this season.

"We're excited about our year because of our early success," Soluk said. "The Big Ten season is about to start, and we are really looking forward to it."

Soluk might see something else down the road in about three years. If McNamara and Dietz finish their collegiate careers in the way they finished high school, U-M's girls' basketball team will have a championship.



Diane Dietz (45) has helped turn Michigan's women's cage program into a winner.



Katie McNamara "just loves to play" in the words of Michigan coach Gloria Soluk. (Staff photos by Gary Friedman)

## Cross country skiing gains fans

By DAVE WINES

Alternatives have often been sought by those unable to cope with the frigid northern winters.

Florida is just one warm example. But for people who must bare Michigan temperatures, it would seem that a winter activity which allows one to be outdoors, yet is not costly or overly demanding on the body, would be quite an invention.

There is no need to invent, though—one sport that has existed for centuries is finally beginning to win numbers in the northern U.S., where the white cover seemingly thickens while the thermometer lowers.

Scandinavians know cross-country skiing as one of their most popular athletic endeavors.

At first glance, this thing called cross country may appear to be just another gimmick to prey on the gullible consciences of people who have been told how necessary it is today to exercise, to do family things, to "get back to nature."

But, when thinking about it, how many winter sports offer all these features? It is a pastime for the entire family to enjoy together, it is a way of finding the natural beauty of the winter landscape, and it is economical when com-

pared to downhill skiing.

One to the sport's chief proponents in this area is Chic Mendez, officially an instructor in cross-country skiing and one of the increasing number of former downhillers who has converted to cross country.

His conversion is representative of many who investigate the sport for the first time. They end up liking it so well that an investment into equipment is made, a circumstance that explains why sales of cross-country ski equipment have been almost doubling each year for the past several years.

And, upon further examination of its features, it may leave one asking why it has taken so long for cross-country skiing to take hold in this country.

Actually, it is easier to consider cross-country skiing on two levels, one involving the novice strolling the countryside, the other concerning a more experienced skier interested in competition and conditioning.

In the former case, the family can rent equipment and go to a local park, such as Stony Creek or Independence Oaks, where an enjoyable day can be spent for less than \$10 per person (much less than downhill skiing).

For the more ambitious types, touring is available at state parks and wilderness areas, such as Hartwick Pines

near Grayling. Gliding through virgin forests in the still of winter with occasional wandering peeks from animal inhabitants can add up to a pleasurable, if not unique, experience.

Whether a racer or tourist, Mendez stresses that basic instruction is important.

"The statement 'If you can walk, you can ski' is one I'm trying to stamp out," said Mendez. "It's not a difficult sport to learn. Many people just shuffle along, but that's not skiing."

In this day of growing concern for individual health, physical fitness expert Mendez points out that studies of Olympic athletes have shown that the cross-country competitors possess the greatest aerobic capacity.

Basically, this means that these athletes have more oxygen available and more efficient usage of it in blood vessels leading to vital organs, such as the heart, lungs and brain.

It appears that the sport of cross-country skiing has grown in popularity for several reasons relating to current concerns for health, environment and having fun. As Mendez puts it, "you can do it almost anywhere—a municipal park, or even just practicing in your own backyard."

Happily for residents, Mendez will be giving instruction in cross-country

skiing through King's Bikes and Things in Rochester. For the price of renting at King's (\$8-\$10), everyone attending will receive a free lesson in the basics, and enough time to go to a local trail, and practice.

If the sport is appealing, one can purchase all necessary equipment of good quality for about \$125, which is considerably less than for comparable downhill equipment, according to Mendez.

And for those really taken by cross-country, there is the traditional garb as worn by Chic: lightweight long underwear, with an outer covering consisting of turtle-neck sweater, special gloves, calf-length socks and knickers. Perhaps a down vest jacket can be worn if the temperature is below 15-20 degrees Fahrenheit.

It is important to keep in mind the desirability of lessons. More information about Mendez' lessons may be obtained by contacting King's and Things Bike Shop (652-1555). This will not only enhance the enjoyment of the sport, but may also lead to more challenging trails and competitions.

Why, it may even mean having to enjoy the snow and cold, or turning a "bad" winter into a "good" one. In any case, it's probably much cheaper, and easier, than travelling to Florida.

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