

Mercy cagers again area's best

By C.J. RISAK

When it comes to girls' high school basketball, the Farmington area is blessed with a little of everything — champions, runners-up and also-rans, and cellar dwellers.

Our Lady of Mercy has been one of the Catholic League favorites for years, and it appears this year will be no different. Two years ago, Mercy was the Class A state champion.

Farmington Harrison was second in the Western Six League (WSL) a year ago. The Hawks have only two starters returning and don't have much height, so they may have a tough time holding that position against some improving league competition.

Farmington also is building around two returning starters, but also have plenty of height and will receive some help from two transfer students from Dayton, Ohio. The Falcons are coming off a losing season, but one of the toughest opponents in the state, the Catholic League, won't compete because of income problems. It could be Farmington's year.

North Farmington failed to win a game last year. The Raiders have a new coach, Debbie Wechna, but she won't be able to turn it around quickly. It'll be another long year for North.

Here's a look at who's got what and how well they'll do with it in the upcoming girls' basketball season.

MERCY

Coach Larry Baker's Marins are always among the top team's in the state, but this year they are coming off what must be considered a disappointing season.

The team finished with a 17-5 record, but they failed for the first time in many years to advance to the state semi-finals. They also finished second in the Catholic League tournament, losing to Royal Oak Shrine in the finals.

Now, add to that the loss of four players to graduation, and one might think Mercy has seen the last of its winning basketball seasons.

Not so. The Marins will be back on top again this year with an improved team. The squad has more overall height, with several players capable of filling the forward or center positions.

"Our greatest strength and improvement is better depth (than last year's team)," Baker said. "It allows for more flexibility. We'll have good balance and good depth—I think we'll be a stronger team."

The only full time starter returning is senior Caroline Chapman, a 5-foot-7 forward who averaged 12 points a game last year. But Mercy is so deep at forward, Baker admits that Chapman "had to fight for a starting position."

The other starting forward figures to be another senior who started several

games last year, 5-8 Kelly Walsh. Walsh and Chapman are the team's co-captains.

Lisa Morris, a 5-5 senior, and Denise Basford, a 5-9 sophomore, will be the guards. Both started at one time or another last year.

Junior Kelly Fortescue, 6-0, will be the starting center.

The bench has always been a Mercy strongpoint, and this year won't be any different. Suzanne Dietz, a 5-11 junior who's sister Diane starred for the Mercy Class A champions in 1977, is, according to Baker, "every bit as good as the starters."

Lisa Borchanian, a 5-8 forward, will also see plenty of playing time. Baker refers to Borchanian as "one of my two super sophs" (Bastford is the other).

"She has the best vertical jump and is one of the quickest players on the team. I'll definitely use her on our press."

The Catholic League is rapidly becoming one of the more powerful girls' basketball leagues in the state. With Rochelle Bostic, one of the state's top players, returning to Shrine, the Catholic League finals could be a rematch of last year's pairing.

But Baker isn't looking that far ahead, instead devoting his time to the team in his division of the league. "The league will be stronger this year, across the board. I think Marian, Regis and Bishop Gallagher will be particularly tough."

But, no doubt, Mercy will be tougher.

FARMINGTON

Seniors Betsy Van Deusen and Julie Tadrzynski are the only two starters returning to Coach Bob Lekovich's Farmington squad. But a coach might not be able to ask for a better pair.

Van Deusen was a first team pick on the ILL squad last season and averaged close to 12 points a game. Tadrzynski made the league's second team and averaged around eight points per contest.

The rest of the team is somewhat young, but it won't lack height. Van Deusen, 5-8, and Tadrzynski, 5-10, will be the starting forwards. Chris Looser, a 5-11 sophomore, will start at center and junior Kelly Wallace and Sue Caruthers, both 5-6, will be the guards.

Three juniors Lekovich figures will see a lot of playing time are Jean Zuhorski (5-8), Kim Rogers (5-8) and Brenda Looser. The Looser sisters are the new students from Dayton, Ohio, and Lekovich is expecting big things from them.

"We've got more height than in past years, but it's a young team," Lekovich said. "We can shoot well from the outside and the guards have good speed."

"So we have all the ingredients, we just have to put them together." As far as the ILL race goes, Farmington may have gotten a big break with the dropout of Pontiac Northern.

Last year, Northern finished second and was picked to win the league this year.

"I think it will be a battle between Walled Lake Central (last year's champs) and us," Lekovich said, adding, "But I don't know much about the others."

If the Falcons can overcome their inexperience, they may make a run at the title.

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Grid preview

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Central is big enough or physical enough to go to North. The only problem North may have is in the defensive backfield. Flint capitalized for three touchdowns via the airways, and if the Raiders are going to be hunting for a second consecutive NSL title, they'll have to rectify that problem.

But Central should be no problem in that respect. The game will be played Friday night at Walled Lake Central, the second of three-straight games on the road for North. The Raiders won't open their home season until Sept. 29 against Redford Thurston.

Game time Friday is 7:30 p.m. PICK — NORTH FARMINGTON

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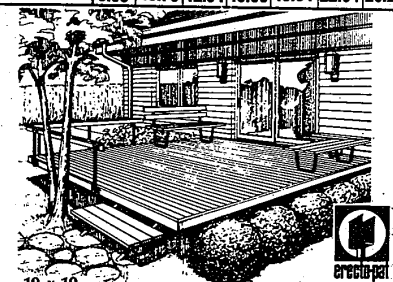
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