

Rice cagers slip past Lahser in 45-43 thriller



Lahser's Glenn Cross closely guards Rice center Judd Hart during the defensive battle.

By DENNIS O'CONNOR

Brutal — that's the only word that could describe the defensive war on the basketball court between Birmingham Brother Rice and Bloomfield Hills Lahser Tuesday night.

It was "Generals" Bill Norton, leader of the Warriors, against brother-in-law Nick Conti, the head of the Knights, matching strategic warfare all night at the Rice gym.

In the end, it was three clutch free throws by Rice's Brian Brennan in the final 19 seconds that thwarted a late Lahser attack, giving the Warriors a 45-43 victory in the first of possibly two big battles.

For now, the Warriors have won a battle in grabbing this non-league game. But the real war may occur in the first week in March when these two top squads in southern Oakland County are likely to meet again in district competition of the state tournament.

The victory for Rice extended its winning streak to 10 games. The state-ranked Warriors have no time to rest, however, as they bring their 10-2 record into the Detroit Catholic Central gymnasium for a Catholic League Central Division rematch with the arch-rival Shamrocks Friday night. Rice beat CC, 58-53, earlier this month.

Things won't be any easier for the Knights, either. Lahser must stay on the road and face a rematch with Southfield-Lathrup, which is riding a five-game winning streak after an emotional 66-65 Tuesday night victory over arch-rival Southfield High.

Lahser, unbeaten in the Metro Suburban Association, defeated the second-place Chargers in December. It is Lathrup's only league loss of the year.

"We've got to go over there (to Southfield) and we've got to play," said Conti. "We're going to do all our crying tonight and get ready to go to work tomorrow," he said after the heartbreaking Rice loss.

THERE WAS NO crying in the Warriors' lockerroom, even though Rice saw its 35-27 third-quarter lead diminish in the final eight minutes.

Rice held the upperhand most of the game after solving Lahser's half-court trap press with eight straight points to start the second quarter, giving the Warriors a 21-12 advantage.

Rice was able to maintain a six-to-eight-point margin for the second and third quarters before the Knights rallied in the final 5 1/2 minutes.

Lahser cut a seven-point deficit to only one point, 42-41, with 4:34 left in the game when Rice slowed down the pace and sat on the ball for the next 3 1/2 minutes.

Lahser's Steve Hirsch almost got a

steal at the 1:01 mark, but the Warriors maintained control until Brennan was fouled with 19 seconds left.

He sank both free throws on a one-and-one situation to give Rice a 44-41 lead, but Lahser's top scorer, Tim Wau, answered with a bucket only seven seconds later to bring Lahser back within one, 44-43.

But Brennan, whose 17 points tied him with Wau for scoring honors, was fouled again with five seconds left. Brennan made the first of two free throws to end the scoring. Lahser never got off a final shot after grabbing the rebound on Brennan's missed free throw.

"WE JUST HAD a little trouble scoring (in the fourth quarter)," Norton said. "We had trouble with their man-to-man. We don't see it that many times. Most teams play a zone against us."

"We had the scoring opportunities — we just didn't seem to find them."

Rice's stingy man-to-man defense was nothing to ignore, either, as it held Lahser to only 19 first-half points and 27 through the first three quarters.

Lathrup's 5 surprise Southfield

By BOB GROSS

forced him to throw it back outside to Bean for the desperation shot.

Tuesday night's game between arch-rivals Southfield-Lathrup and Southfield High was as close as the 66-65 score indicated.

Lathrup didn't get the winning points until Greg Seach made a turn around jumper from the lane with 10 seconds left.

"We wanted it to go inside," said Lathrup coach Jim Kourtakas. "We didn't care if it went to Seach or to (Mel) Tucker, but we wanted it definitely to go inside, and if we couldn't get it in, we wanted (Jim) McKnight to take the jumper."

McKnight, who led Lathrup with 19 points, was deadly from the outside the entire game. He had pulled Lathrup to within striking distance, 65-64, with a 18-footer from the corner with 43 seconds left.

After Seach's field goal, the Chargers were still far from wrapping the game up. They had to sweat out the final eight seconds with the ball in Southfield's possession. Vince Bean threw up a desperation 35-footer at the buzzer that missed, and the Chargers could finally breathe easy.

Southfield had its chances at the end of the game. Guard Paul Chaben brought the ball upcourt quickly, but he penetrated too far to the right of the basket. Lathrup trapped Chaben and

THE TEAMS STARTED the game as if they were going to play give and take with the lead all night. Southfield finally pulled out to a 12-11 margin with 1:47 remaining in the first quarter on a basket by Dave Sucher. The Jays added to that lead and were up by six, 18-12, at the first-quarter buzzer.

Lathrup came alive in the second quarter thanks to a full-court press. The Chargers forced Southfield to turn the ball over, outscored the Jays 25-10, and took a 37-28 halftime lead.

"The press has been doing a good job for us," said Kourtakas. "That took us from six down to nine up, and I think that was the difference."

Southfield coach Greg Sliwka was well aware of the effectiveness of the press.

"It shook us up in that second quarter," said Sliwka. "It should've never bothered us."

"This type of a game anything can happen, and that's what happened probably."

Lathrup increased its lead by two, 55-44, in the third quarter. Southfield, however, showed signs of renewed vigor in the quarter. Vincent Bean hit the period's last shot with five seconds left, setting the stage for what was to come. Bean and Byron Greer scored right

off the bat in the fourth quarter as Southfield cut the Lathrup lead to 55-48 before one minute expired.

Craig Reid had four chances to add to the Charger lead at the free throw line, but he made only two of four attempts. Greer got those points back for Southfield with a field goal at 6:05.

Paul Bobbitt missed the front end of a one-and-one at 5:49. Bobbitt was fouled again, this time while in the act of shooting, and missed his free throw at 5:35.

Southfield lost no time in taking advantage of Lathrup's lapse at the free throw line. Baskets by Eric Smith and John Piper cut the lead to 57-54 at 4:46.

Twenty-eight seconds later, at 4:18, Piper stole the ball, made a layup, and was fouled. He hit the free throw, and Southfield had finally caught Lathrup.

"In the last quarter," said Kourtakas, "we let them come back on us. We couldn't make our free throws. They were fouling us, we couldn't get into

the flow of the offense like we had in the third quarter. We couldn't get in the flow of the offense because they were fouling us and we weren't knocking them in. If we had knocked a few of those in early there . . .

"They made a heck of a comeback," Kourtakas continued. "a heck of a comeback, give them a lot of credit. Their kids played a real tough ball game."

"We started to play," was how Sliwka explained his team's comeback. "The kids were a little more patient, they played our game. It could've went either way."

AFTER PIPER TIED the game, Seach took the ball inside and gave Lathrup a 59-57 lead. Darryl Darden came back for Southfield with a tip-in. McKnight hit the front end of a one-and-one and Lathrup had a 60-59. Darden answered with another tip and Southfield regained the lead.

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