



Five of a kind!

All-Area basketball team: A hand that can't be beat



MINDY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

Southfield basketball coach Greg Sliwka, who led the Blue Jays to championships in the regional tournament, the district tournament and the Southeastern Michigan Association, has been named the Observer & Eccentric Coach of the Year.

By Jim Hughes
staff writer

If you came up with five aces at a card table in Las Vegas, the odds are pretty good you wouldn't leave the casino alive.

But this is not Las Vegas, so the high-school basketball coaches can get away with stacking the deck. And that's just what they've done with the 1992 Observer & Eccentric All-Area boys' high-school basketball team.

A group of coaches recently met to pick the top five players in the area, and they gave Southfield's Greg Sliwka — the O&E Coach of the Year — a hand that can't be beat.

Sliwka, who led the winning cards at Southfield this season, led the Blue Jays to the Class A state basketball semifinals before they lost a 48-47 heart-breaker to Flint Central, the eventual Class A state champion.

Two of his aces, 5-foot-8 senior center Ralph Walker and 6-4 junior forward Mike McCaskill, have landed first-team honors.

Neither Walker nor McCaskill were members of the All-Area team last season, but the remaining three members repeat from the 1991 honor squad.

Brother Rice forward Paul Jokisch, Orchard Lake St. Mary's forward Hiram Harris, and Southfield-Lathrup guard/forward/center Paul Bobbitt all return from last season's all-area first team.

"I'd match this All-Area team against any other all-area team in the state, that's for sure," Sliwka said. "I think it would be interesting if we could do that in some kind of benefit game. I'd sure like to see it."

THE CENTER of attention on this All-Area team is Southfield center Walker, the leading vote-getter on the first team. Walker, a co-captain for Sliwka's Blue Jays, was a dominating figure on the court.

Walker averaged 17 points and eight rebounds per game while shooting 56 percent from the floor and 69 percent from the free-throw line. Walker also averaged four blocked shots per game.

"Ralph is a dominating force in the middle. He intimidates a lot of other teams," Sliwka said. "He is a great shot blocker, and just a super young man. He's a 16-year-old senior. He is a great leader, he has a great attitude, and is an excellent student."

"He has so many strengths," Sliwka continued. "He has a great shot, and he does a lot of rebounding. His shooting and rebounding skills definitely are strengths, aside from the intangibles (leadership and intimidation factors)."

McCASKILL, Walker's teammate, was a versatile performer for Sliwka. Defense was his forte, despite the fact he averaged 15 points per game. McCaskill averaged five blocked shots and six steals per game. He shot 54 percent from the field and 48 percent from the line.

"Michael was our defensive ace," Sliwka said. "We put him on Jokisch, Bobbitt and (Royal Oak Kimball's Steve) Hamzy, and he always did the job. When we needed it, he was always there to stop the big man."

"He is so intimidating as a shot blocker and an offensive rebounder," Sliwka continued. "So many times he came out of nowhere to get the tip-in."

JOKISCH, a 6-8 senior forward for Brother Rice, is a two-sport all-state and All-Area selection. He reaped honors during the football season for his performance on the gridiron, and the honors continue to mount for him in basketball.

Jokisch, who is headed to the University of Michigan on a basketball scholarship, averaged 16.4 points and eight rebounds per game. He shot 51 percent from the floor and 74 percent at the free-throw line.

"The experience Paul had and his desire to win were big factors on the younger kids," Rice coach Nick Conti said. "His strength was his ability to play the inside game. He played so many facets of the game naturally for a big man."

"His ability to play the full court was another key factor."

HARRIS, Orchard Lake St. Mary's 6-6 senior forward, was one of the reasons the Eagles coveted the Class C state basketball championship. He is a pure shooter, and, when left alone, will find the bottom of the net from anywhere around the perimeter.

'I'd match this All-Area team against any other all-area team in the state, that's for sure.'

— Greg Sliwka
coach of the year

Harris, who averaged 21 points per game, was right on cue in the final four contests with 86 points — including 24 in the title game against Reed City. Harris averaged eight rebounds per outing, and shot 54 percent from the field and 67 percent from the stripe.

"Mark was a three-year starter, so he's accustomed to winning," St. Mary's coach Bob Shoemaker said. "He's a quiet leader, and a great perimeter shooter. He has great range."

"He's one of those kids who does everything you ask him to do."

BOBBITT, a 6-3 senior, was a jack-of-all-trades for coach Jim Kourtakos and the Southfield-Lathrup Chargers. Bobbitt, a first-team All-Area selection in football, capped a successful basketball career at Lathrup as he emerged third on the all-time scoring list with 1,065 points.

Bobbitt played all three positions — guard, center and forward — and averaged 16 points and 10 rebounds per game. He also averaged three steals

and three assists per outing. The Michigan State University-bound Bobbitt shot 44 percent from the field and 63 percent from the line.

"Paul was an asset in all phases of the game," Kourtakos said. "Defensively, if we needed him to go against the best player, he would. When we needed someone to come up with the big steal, basket or rebound, he did."

"He's strong and he's quick, and he has as good a first step as any kid around," Kourtakos continued. "He's just a good shooter, a good rebounder, and a smart player."

COACH OF THE YEAR: Southfield's Greg Sliwka was given the nod by a unanimous decision at the all-area meeting — and who could argue? Sliwka led the Blue Jays to the Class A semifinals before the loss at the buzzer to Flint Central.

The Blue Jays finished the season with a 25-2 record, the best in the school's history. Sliwka, who was a Class B all-stater at Wyandotte Our Lady of Mt. Carmel High School, took the Blue Jays to the final four for the first time in 17 years.

He said the key to the team's success was its "unselfishness."

"Without a doubt, the fact that we went so far was because the team was unselfish," Sliwka said. "I feel we could have been the best team in the state, and I'm not so sure we aren't."

SECOND TEAM

JOHN SHASKY, a 6-10½ senior center for Brother Rice, averaged 15.9 points and 10.9 rebounds per game. He shot 62 percent from the floor and 52 percent from the line.

Please turn to Page 2C

All-Area basketball team

FIRST TEAM

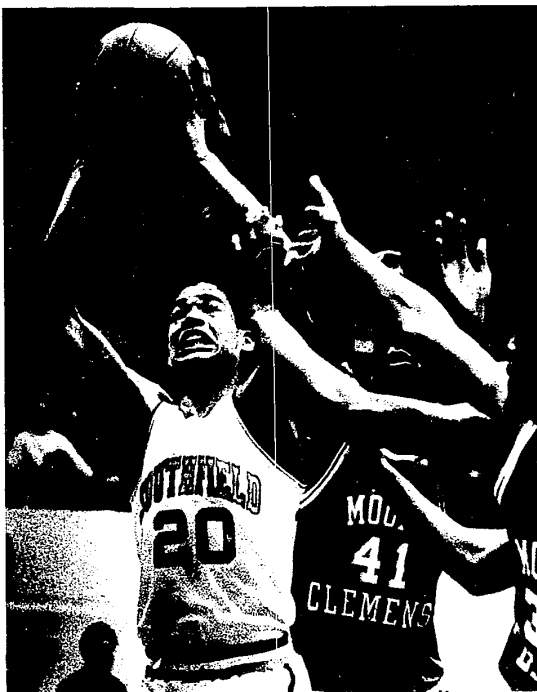
PLAYER	SCHOOL	YEAR
Ralph Walker	Southfield	Senior
Paul Jokisch	Brother Rice	Senior
Mike McCaskill	Southfield	Junior
Hiram Harris	St. Mary's	Senior
Paul Bobbitt	Lathrup	Senior

SECOND TEAM — John Shasky, Brother Rice; Chris Howze, St. Mary's; Mike Priest, Southfield; Damon Jones, Detroit Country Day; Todd Rich, West Bloomfield.

THIRD TEAM — Jerome Walker, Southfield; Ken Lamb, Avondale; Lance Davis, St. Mary's; Steve Stratton, Bloomfield Hills Lahser; Troy Hudson, Detroit Country Day School.

HONORABLE MENTION — Chris Sass, John Kojick, Brett Green — Orchard Lake St. Mary's; Rich Goldberg, Doug Howell — Detroit Country Day School; Eric Smith, Will Montgomery, Scott Scharg — Southfield-Lathrup; Darin Cornell — Southfield; Ryan Woodhouse, Derek Woodhouse, Mike Fisher, Tim Morton — Auburn Heights Avesdale; Mike Green, Mark McGrath, Brian Cameron — Birmingham Groves; Phil Perkins — Bloomfield Hills Lahser; Dave Butler — West Bloomfield; Brett Reed, John Truica — Rochester; Scott Miller, Tim Brice, Bob Burnstein — Bloomfield Hills Avesdale; Mike Chew, Brian Nefcy — Birmingham Seaholm; Jim Keitner, Jeff Conatas — Troy; Steve Hollatz — Farmington; Bill Gravias — North Farmington; Paul Koble — Farmington; Kevin Brail — Troy; Bethany Christian; Mike Aurness — Farmington; Lutheran Northwest; Greg Brown — Southfield; Christine, Denis Corcoran, Mike Alfano — Troy; Athens; Dennis Kosak — Birmingham Brother Rice; Ed Conill — Cranbrook; Terry Allen, Jeff Bullard — Rochester Adams.

COACH OF THE YEAR — Greg Sliwka, Southfield.



MINDY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

Southfield's Mike McCaskill (20) was the only junior voted to the first team of the

Observer & Eccentric All-Area basketball squad.