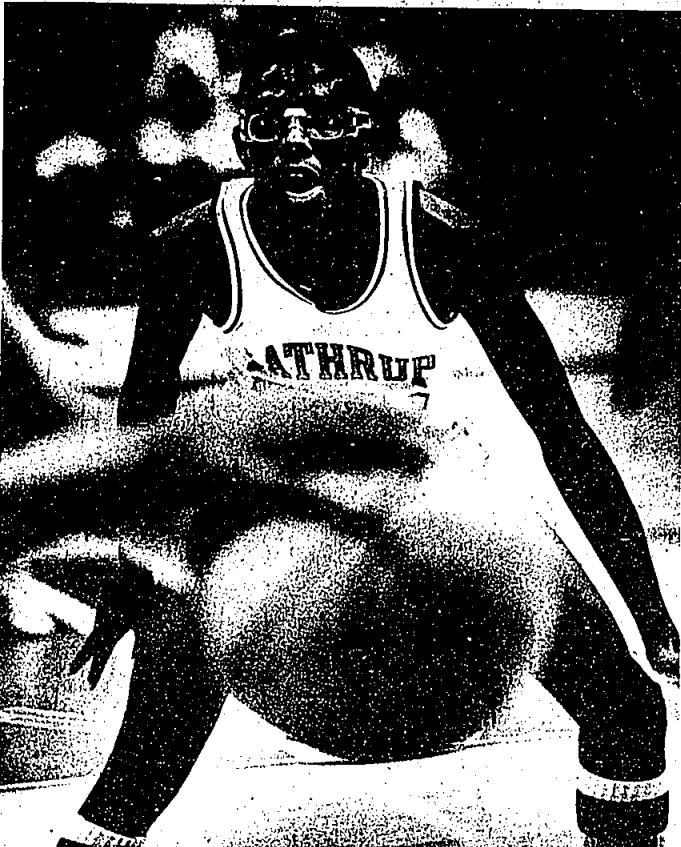


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MORRIS BAXTER/staff photographer

Morris Baxter provided 10 points in Southfield-Lathrup's victory over Warren Cousino and 10 more in the Chargers' loss to Highland Park in the Highland Park Christmas Tournament last week.

# Polar Bears put bite on Lathrup

By Tom Baer  
staff writer

The winning coach was down in the mouth. The losing coach seemed to be taking it well enough and even found something positive to say.

That was the case following the finals of the Highland Park High School Christmas Basketball Tournament Thursday night. As expected, Southfield-Lathrup was buried, 61-33, by host Highland Park.

"Well, I was disappointed," said Highland Park coach Darrell Pursiful, whose teams are usually top-10 material ranking-wise and whose current Polar Bear squad is 6-1.

"We'd play tough for two or three minutes and then we'd let up," Pursiful said. "We'd start, and we'd stop. Oh sure, we won rather easily, but we weren't able to do those things that we needed to get done."

"We've got to develop some consistency. We've got to get them in the groove for our conference (the Suburban Athletic Conference). We've got some tough games ahead."

Lathrup, which fell to 2-4, was never really in the game, and Highland Park pulled steadily away. The Polar Bears led by nine at the quarter (15-6), by 15 at the half (29-14) and by 25 (47-22) at the three-quarter mark.

"We were intimidated," said Lathrup coach Jim Kourtakis. "We were in awe. But I thought we did a lot of nice things at times."

"At times we played some pretty good team defense, even though the final score wouldn't indicate it. One of their points came on our stupid turnovers. Sure, they were stressing, but it wasn't a real intense thing. We were just intimidated."

FOUR HIGHLAND Park starters scored in double figures; the fifth didn't make a point.



Lathrup coach Jim Kourtakis: "We were intimidated. We were in awe."

Glynn Blackwell, a 6-foot-4 junior who came off the bench to score a game-high 21 points in HP's semifinal win over Detroit Pershing Wednesday, found a starting spot at forward against Lathrup and responded with 18 points.

Lonnie Woodward, a 6-7 senior forward and the only returning starter from last season's No. 1-rated club, scored 11 points, as did Jonathan Hall, a 6-foot guard. Patrick Franklin, the other guard, contributed 10 points.

Morris Baxter, a 6-3 Lathrup junior, scored 10 points, eight coming in the fourth quarter. Curtis Riley had nine points and Scott Shafer eight.

"Morris has a nice game," Kourtakis said. "He's just a junior. We're starting three juniors (Riley and Mike Carithers are the others) and it's going to take some time for them to fit in."

"I think we're right about where we belong in terms of progress. I was hoping for 3-3, but 2-4 isn't that bad."

Lathrup shot a sizzling 50 percent from the field in beating a weak Warren Cousino team, 56-46, in the tourney semifinal Wednesday.

Shafer, a 6-4 senior forward, led Lathrup with 14 points and senior guard Ron Smith had 12. Baxter contributed 10 points and Riley had eight to go with his 11 rebounds.

"At times we looked very good," Kourtakis said. "At times we did some very good things."

Lathrup returns to action tomorrow night at home against non-league Bloomfield Hills Andover. The Chargers' Metro Suburban Activities Association season resumes Friday night at Birmingham Groves.

## LATHRUP 54 - COUSINO 46

SOUTHFIELD-LATHRUP (54) — Morris Baxter 5, 0-10, 10; Scott Shafer 7, 0-4, 14; Curtis Riley 3, 2-4, 8; Mike Carithers 1, 0-2, 2; Ron Smith 8, 0-4, 12; Sean Tracey 1, 0-1, 2; Doodle Hubbs 2, 0-0, 4; John Stankowi 1, 0-0, 2. TOTALS: 54-46.

WARREN COUSINO (46) — Jeff Gilliam 4, 0-3, 8; Jamie Zyron 1, 0-4, 2; John Gonzalez 1, 0-10, 18; Dave Garwood 2, 2-3, 4; Mike Paulsen 5, 2-3, 12; Greg Pivinski 1, 0-0, 2; Phil Hurdall 1, 0-0, 2; Tracy Thomas 1, 0-1, 2. TOTALS: 46-54.

TOTAL FOULS — Lathrup 20, Cousino 9. FOULED OUT: None.

LATHRUP 11 15 18 14 — 54  
COUSINO 6 9 10 21 — 46

## HIGHLAND PARK 61 - LATHRUP 33

HIGHLAND PARK (61) — Patrick Franklin 3, 4-4, 10; Lonnie Woodward 5, 1-1, 11; Glynn Blackwell 6, 0-4, 16; Irving Williamson 6, 0-4, 8; Jonathan Hall 1, 0-1, 11; Chris Merriweather 1, 2-3, 6; Lakervet Cooley 0, 1-3, 1; Perkan Livingston 1, 1-3, 3; Greg Balle 0, 1-2, 1. TOTALS: 61-33.

SOUTHFIELD-LATHRUP (33) — Morris Baxter 5, 0-10, 10; Scott Shafer 2, 2-4, 8; Ron Smith 1, 0-4, 2; Curtis Riley 4, 1-4, 8; Mike Carithers 2, 0-5, 10; Mike Miller 0, 0-2, 2; John Stankowi 0, 0-1, 0. TOTALS: 33-61.

TOTAL FOULS — Lathrup 16, Highland Park 15. FOULED OUT: None.

HIGHLAND PARK 15 15 18 14 — 61  
LATHRUP 6 8 8 11 — 33

# Southfield's 'Popcorn' impresses MSU coach

By John Raby  
staff writer

There were the skeptics who thought, Ralph Walker had a great high school career but wouldn't make it in major college basketball. And then there were the believers like Michigan State's Jud Heathcote, who signed the Southfield High stand-out to a letter-of-intent last spring to play as a Spartan.

The previous winter, "Popcorn," as Walker was called, was still 16 years old and leading his Blue Jay basketball team to a 25-2 record and into the state semifinals. As everyone in these parts would like to forget, the Jays were eliminated on a last-second bomber by Flint Central's Mark Harris.

Now, still four months shy of his 18th birthday, Walker has shown great promise in Heathcote's eyes and earned a varsity letter as the Spartans enjoy a 7-1 record.

WALKER, THE skinny 6-foot-8, 180-pound freshman, has averaged only six minutes of playing time per game at Michigan State. But, Heathcote says, Walker's style of play reminds him of a former player, whose on-court presence made him MSU's all-time leading scorer.

His name — Greg Ketsler. "I watched Ralph play last year and was impressed with his quickness to the ball. That you can't coach. Kids either have it or they don't," Heathcote said. "That's the comparison I made with Gregory, who had great quickness."

But, unlike Ketsler, who averaged more than 17 points per game in his four-year career, Walker will have to fight his way through the ranks. He was one of three recruits Heathcote added to the Spartan roster to bolster the lineup.

The other two recruits — guard Scott Skiles, of Plymouth, Ind., and Detroit Cass Tech's Patrick Ford, a 6-6 forward, who is Walker's roommate — were among the top 100 blue chippers in the nation.

Walker denies a rivalry between he and Ford, but says they're good friends at present. Incidentally, both

*'I watched Ralph last year and was impressed with his quickness to the ball. That you can't coach.'*

—Jud Heathcote  
MSU coach

were honored as First Team Class A All State selections.

"I knew him previously because we played in all-star games this summer," Walker said. "He's a low-key type of person. Our relationship is really strong right now. We're like brothers."

IT COULD be that Walker's steady progress went hand in hand with improved knowledge of his teammates and the program.

"At first I didn't expect to play at all," Walker said. "Coach Heathcote said my playing time would be equal to how hard I worked in practice. At first I was skeptical because of my size and strength. I couldn't muscle anybody down low, so he told me to use my quickness. That's natural to me, and actually helps me a lot."

"Ralph's improved more and surprised us more as a coaching staff than any of our untired players," Heathcote said. "We predicted earlier that Ralph would be a factor at all only until he gained some additional strength and maturity."

"And in all honesty, he goes out and challenges the starters every day in practice. He plays very hard; he's an intelligent basketball player."

The talk around East Lansing is that the Spartans are a year away from prominence, that the team is still young and inexperienced. Among the starting five are one senior, two juniors, a sophomore and a freshman.

The senior is co-captain Derek Perry, a 13 points-per-game scorer at forward this season. With first-year player Larry Folsom and Ford battling along with Walker for the spot, it isn't likely Walker will be the candidate, but Heathcote says his chances have come a long way since the frosh was signed.

RALPH'S ADJUSTED well to college ball, and he's really getting along with the kids," Heathcote said. "He's got a really pleasant, outgoing personality that's unusual for a freshman. We think he'll develop to be a very good Big Ten basketball forward."

Heathcote knew that nature would take its course in adding weight to Walker's small frame, and emphasized it isn't size, but strength that makes the talent show.

"If you look at Jamaal Wilkes, he played so many years at 180 pounds," Heathcote said of the Los Angeles Lakers' forward. "Greg Kelsier always started the season at 200 pounds. He never put on any weight, but he got stronger. He lifted weights religiously."

"We hope Ralph will put on added weight. If he doesn't, we still think that added strength can enable him to play even at his present weight. I can see him playing at 200-210 pounds, but not much more than that."

Although the comparisons lean toward Kelsier, Walker admires one of Kelsier's old teammates the most — Magic Johnson.

"I TALK to him frequently," Walker said. "He's told me to work hard and all. I look up to him because he's someone that really made it big."

Walker also looks up to Spartan center Kevin Willis, in more ways than one. Willis, a 7-foot junior, has been "like an older brother" to Walker.

"He's put me under his wing ever since I got up to school," Walker said. Walker emphasized patience as the Spartans head into Big Ten season play in January. He is pleased with his progress, although it's hard work, he says.

"This team is pretty talented," Walker said. "Once we get the right chemistry and learn to work together, we can be a contender in the Big Ten. I'm not sure about this year, but I think we can win it."

Incidentally, Walker's father, Arthur, is the basketball coach at Detroit Cooley High School, and brother Jerome and former Southfield teammate Mike Priest are playing basketball at Cook County College in Texas.



MINDY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

Ralph Walker, shown above in a Southfield High uniform last season, would seem to have a bright future at Michigan State University.