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Duel of champs breeds respect

FRIENDSHIPS ARE as varied as Michigan weather. They can be based on need, on common interests, on trust. Friends share generously. They provide help when help is needed, or they suggest solutions to worrisome problems. Friends will be there when you need them. That's why John McIntyre's description of B.J. Armstrong seemed such a contradiction. "We're good friends," McIntyre said. "We hang out in the summer together sometimes. We've gone to the same camps." Seems like an amiable relationship. Except that, less than a half-hour before McIntyre spoke those words, Armstrong was prodding his Birmingham Brother Rice basketball team to a lopsided victory over McIntyre's Redford Catholic Central squad.

FRIENDS SHARE? They provide help, advice. Some might. But this friendship is cemented in a different foundation. McIntyre was hurting Friday night. He hadn't picked up a basketball in a week, not since drilling Redford Bishop Borgess for 46 points in a Shamrock victory. He was home with a case of influenza most of the week. His shooting showed it. He was off — not by a lot, but enough. McIntyre suffered through the worst shooting game of his prep career, making just 4 of 29 field goal attempts and scoring only 12 points. Was Armstrong sympathetic? Hardly. The 6-foot-1 guard started fast and finished faster, scoring from every angle, from all distances. He hit 11 of 18 from the floor and 8 of 10 from the line for 31 points in a fantastic performance. That's no way to treat a friend. But then again, this friendship is bound together not by need or trust but by respect.

THE FINAL score Friday was 75-52. The game was played at University of Detroit's Calhoun Hall, with an estimated 4,000 fans gathered for what had been hyped as a duel between two of the best high school guards in the state. McIntyre vs. Armstrong, a classic match-up. McIntyre, the shot-inventor with the range and accuracy of an MX missile, against Armstrong, the methodical ball-handling magician who always finds a way to win. Both are now seniors. Both have signed with major colleges. Armstrong with Iowa and McIntyre with the University of Detroit.

AND FOR THREE years, the two have battled in some classic Catholic League match-ups. Whenever the pair have met on the court, the stands overflow — except last Friday, where 4,000 doesn't fill the stands, but it's big enough to entice U-D administrators.

The "friends" have put on awesome displays in their time. Earlier this season at Schoolcraft College, a McIntyre-led, fourth-quarter rally brought CC to within a basket of Rice after the Shamrocks had trailed by a dozen. McIntyre scored 27 points in that one, while Armstrong poured in 20 in a Rice victory.

But Friday was the first time the individual duel was so one-sided. McIntyre knew it. "I'm not just saying this because he's a friend," he said, "but he played a great game tonight."

NO KIDDING. He wasn't, either. McIntyre spoke softly as he dressed in the Titan locker room, where he will spend the next four years of his life. He stated the obvious — that Armstrong had been outstanding while he was at his worst — with no trace of bitterness, no vengeful vengeance.

McIntyre had every reason to be. After all, Armstrong had just upstaged him on his own "home" court, Calhoun Hall. With U-D's coach Don Slicko in the crowd, no less.

But instead McIntyre dialed out compliments like he does assists. "He handles the ball better than anyone I've seen," McIntyre said. "We're both competitive. We do the same thing — go out and do all we can to win."

Down the hall, Armstrong was all smiles. But he didn't glow. "I was just playing," was how he defined his performance. "The guys were getting the ball to me, and I was putting it in."

MAKE NO mistake: This game meant much to Armstrong. A loss would have dropped Rice into a tie with CC for first in the Central Division. And if the Warriors had lost, no doubt McIntyre would have been responsible.

"He's such a great player," Armstrong said of his friend. "Most definitely (I get psyched to play him), he's so good."

And as much as the media and fans build up the individual rivalry, both players acknowledged that only one stat is relevant — the final score. Who wins the individual scoring or assist duel is small consolation if that player loses. Armstrong and McIntyre know that. Their friendship is based on a mutual respect for winners.

Miller picks Michigan State



John Miller's life can get back to normal now that the Harrison All-American has announced that he'll play football at Michigan State University.

'I didn't really know where I was going until yesterday (Sunday). Michigan State was the first school I really wanted to go to — that's where my gut told me to go.'

— John Miller
Harrison All-American

Hawks' All-American ends recruiting war with gut pick

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

Michigan State University head football coach George Perles and John Miller shook hands on the third floor of Farmington Harrison High School. "We'll see you soon, John," Perles said. "Thanks a lot, coach," said Miller. Perles chorled. "Man that sounds good, doesn't it?"

Having John Miller call him coach must have indeed sounded sweet to Perles. It meant that after a grueling year of recruiting, the state's most sought-after football player was coming to East Lansing.

Miller officially ended a year and a half of speculation Monday by announcing that he would sign a national letter of intent to attend Michigan State on Feb. 13.

"Well, I didn't really know where I was going until yesterday (Sunday)," said Miller, a two-time All-American and three-time all-star. "Michigan State was the first school I really wanted to go to — that's where my gut told me to go."

MILLER NARROWED his choices to four early on. They were Michigan, Michigan State, Penn State and Ohio State. Those are the only four schools he visited.

After the visits, it became clear that Miller had decided it best to remain in his home state. "All the schools were great," Miller said. "They obeyed what I wanted. They didn't really bother me that much. All the coaches were gentlemen."

Still, the recruiting push intensified dramatically throughout January. Packs of coaches and recruiters attended all of Harrison's basketball games. Michigan State brought Kirk Gibson in for one of the games. Bo Schenckler dropped in one day via Tom Monaghan's helicopter.

"It was like they were each trying to one-up the other," said one Harrison coach.

Through it all, Miller was poised, polite to all, completely unflustered by the attention.

"John handled it unbelievably well," said Harrison head football coach John Herrington. "I think he was getting a little tired toward the end, but he didn't let it show."

MILLER was all smiles Monday as the media turned Harrison's third floor into a press box. All the Detroit television stations were there with their camera crews in tow. Even Al Ackerman, who hadn't seen Miller play a down of football in his life, was there to interview MSU's newest addition.

When asked if he was bothered by all the commotion Miller said, "I don't mind it at all. I haven't been to class all day."

He and Herrington, both, however, did express relief that the ordeal was finally over.

"I'm just glad he's staying in the state where his name is well known," Herrington said.

Those who had been speculating that Miller would choose MSU did so because he has a number

friends currently at MSU like Dave Blackmer and Bob Wascenski — both former Hawks now playing for Perles.

"No, that didn't have anything to do with it," Miller said. "I could have gone anywhere and known people."

"I CHOSE Michigan State because I like the coaching staff, I like the people and because it's a growing program," Miller said. "It's nice to go in and be part of a winner."

Said Herrington: "The friendship thing didn't have anything to do with it. Ken Hixon, probably his closest friend at Harrison, is going to Michigan. I just think John felt very comfortable at MSU. He had thought about going to State since his junior year. Then, after seeing Michigan, things kind of evened out for him. He decided to go with his original feelings."

MSU recruiters also expressed an interest in Miller outside of football. That, too, may have influenced his decision. Miller, who aspires to become an accountant, will be given a part-time job with an accounting firm in East Lansing, Herrington said.

Perles was on hand Monday for Miller's announcement, but because of NCAA recruiting laws, he wasn't allowed to comment specifically on Miller.

"I really wish I could tell you what I thought," said the beaming MSU coach. "We are very happy with the way our recruiting looks thus far. We came in two years ago with a plan. The plan was to recruit well in our own state and I'm glad we did that. We believe the state of Michigan has the best football talent in the country."

ALMOST AS if to verify his own statement, Perles added that he has not recruited outside of Michigan except for Ohio.

Miller has indicated that, although he was the premier running back in the state this season, he would rather play defense. If that works out for him, MSU could start an all-Observer & Eccentric area secondary next season: Miller and Wascenski (who is considering a switch from wide receiver to defensive back) from Harrison, Todd Krumm from West Bloomfield and Paul Bobbitt from Southfield-Lathrup.

Miller, in his three years as a Harrison starter, amassed 4,491 yards rushing and scored 72 touchdowns — both are state Class A records. He alone accounted for more than 10,000 career yards, including kickoff and punt returns, receiving and rushing.

Last season, he rushed for 1,508 yards and scored 30 TDs.

On defense he averaged 8 tackles per game and holds the school career interception mark with 20. He is the school's second leading tackler of all time with 260.

He also posted for 40.6 yard average.

In the four years Miller has at Harrison, the Hawks compiled a 41-2 record.

As Herrington has often said, a player like John Miller comes around once in a lifetime.

Raiders come up shy at Pontiac Central

They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but they never say how many tricks an old dog is able to teach. Ralph Grubb, Pontiac Central's legendary basketball coach, taught an old player a few things Tuesday night when his Chiefs handed North Farmington a 70-62 loss in Pontiac.

North coach Tom Negoshian, an ex-player of Grubb's, discovered the difference between mentor and student.

The Chiefs put together excellent second and third quarters to put the game out of reach of the Raiders. Central outscored North 39-25 in those two quarters.

"They killed us on the boards," said Negoshian, whose team dropped to 10-4 overall.

Eric McKinney led Pontiac (11-4) with 24 points. Tony Hamilton and Glenn Taylor added 12 and 10 points, respectively.

Paul Wahman pumped in 23 for the Raiders and Bob Chwalk and Rick Anderson had 13 each.

JOHN GLENN 75, HARRISON 59: When Baydarian is away the Rockets will play. Despite the early foul trouble of leading scorer Mike Baydarian, host Westland John Glenn (7-7) played a strong offensive game, whipping Farmington Harrison, 75-59.

The Rockets hit 34 of 60 shots from the field while the Hawks continued to struggle, connecting on just 23 of 70 from the floor. Harrison jumped out to a 15-12 first quarter lead but the Rockets took off in the second period, outscoring the

Hawks 26-11 to take the lead for good. Ron Talg came off the bench and pumped in 18 points and grabbed 14 rebounds for the Rockets. Phil Koeller gunned in 18 points and Steve Hawley added 14 to the winning cause. Scott Winfrey came off the bench and scored 12.

Ken George and Vince Enright led the Hawks (9-4) with 14 points apiece. Mike Dempsey and John Miller had 13 and 11 points, respectively.

STEVENSON 51, FARMINGTON 47: Like a freight train, it took Livonia Stevenson a while to get going but, when it did, it rolled over Western Lakes opponent Farmington in the Falcons' gym.

Bob Siska paced the Spartans with 15 points, 18 rebounds, 4 blocked shots and 4 assists.

Stevenson trailed by 4 heading into the last quarter when the Spartans outscored the Falcons 14-8. The Spartans hit 8 free throws in the final quarter.

"We just got tired," said Farmington coach Richard Roy. "They are so much taller than we are. We worked real hard." Ed Gilbert scored 14 for the winners, 13-1 overall and 9-0 in the league.

Farmington was led by Bruce Kratt's 19 points and Kyle Mutz had 11 points and 7 rebounds. Bill Robinson chipped in 9 rebounds for the under-sized Falcons.

"We came back strong and played well," Stevenson coach George Van Wagoner. "Give (Farmington) credit, they did a good job."

The Falcons are 7-7 overall, 5-5 in the Western Lakes.

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