

Sports

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Monday, August 5, 1985 O&E

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Summer hoops: a coach's obsession

Larry Baker has been the head basketball coach at Farmington Hills Mercy High School for 10 years. He and several other area coaches have a unique way of spending their summer vacation. Baker has agreed to share the experience with us.



Larry Baker

ARE YOU enjoying your summer vacation? he or she asks me innocently enough, but as a high school teacher I always respond cautiously. It's like "Are you still beating your wife?" To respond positively or negatively to either question accepts the premise that I am actually engaged in the activity.

Is one really on vacation when he is not receiving a pay check for two months? Am I on vacation when I am caring full time for children ages 4 and 17? Was directing basketball camps for Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation part of my vacation? I stayed at a resort one weekend at Manistee, but when nine boy-crazy and pizza-craving teen-age girls travel with you does that still constitute "getting away from it all"?

Consequently, these thoughts of martyrdom faithfully bring a pained look to my face before I ever respond about my "vacation." But between you and me, I have enjoyed my vacation.

IT'S BECAUSE I love summer basketball.

To some, summer basketball probably sounds like a contradiction of terms. Basketball is meant to be played in warm gyms on cold nights before rowdy crowds. Summer hoops are played in hot empty gyms on sticky nights. But I love it.

In my mind the camps I run for parks and rec weren't summer basketball. The pay was great, the staff at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College is always friendly and professional. Assistants like Mary Roscetti, Lisa Mummert and Annette Ruggiero are so good they could virtually run the camp without me.

My afternoon group was as cooperative and as enthusiastic as any I have ever worked with. Who wouldn't be working with such great kids as Jenny Hyslop from Holly, Stacy Swanderick from Farmington High and Ellen Austin from North Farmington.

But the key word is work. The camps were fun and fulfilling, but they also included the hard work and responsibility of lecturing, demonstrating and organizing.

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ON THE OTHER hand, the summer league Ken Butler runs at Walled Lake Central is vintage summer basketball. Every time I drive to work in the fall, winter and spring I cross Haggerty Road. And every time I wish I were turning north. On 11 nights in June and July, 12 teams labor in obscurity at Walled Lake Central for an hour and a half.

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The coaches nurture their fledgling teams in the summer. It is certainly a different atmosphere than the "real" season. No one is injured when my 1-year-old, Andrea, joins our sideline huddles or when my son Christopher gallops up the sideline when the girls are playing.

The coaches give all their players equal time on the court. Though most mistakes get laughed off, the girls play hard.

Instead of a participation fee, Ken requires that the teams bring a full contingent of players each night. Though to my knowledge none of the coaches make participation mandatory, the girls who choose to play each evening have made a commitment to the league and their sport.

IS IT surprising that coaches like Ian Smith (Oxford) and Mike Green (West Bloomfield) are successful year in and year out in the fall season when their girls play so hard and with such enthusiasm in the summer?

The difference between Mercy kids playing Plymouth Salem kids this summer at Walled Lake and in the state Class A quarterfinals last fall was not the level of intensity or even the quality of play. The difference was that ev-

eryone played and both teams won. It's amazing how things change when you wipe away the score every 10 minutes. Less strategy but more coaching in terms of teaching the game to young people who only want to get better.

And no coach has summer basketball in better perspective than Salem's Fred Thomann. I wonder if the people in Plymouth realize how much he has given their athletes this summer.

But Fred, like the rest of us, gets a little strange in the summer, too. Unless I was hallucinating (that's a possibility after a couple of days at team camp) I saw Fred's kids actually playing (or attempting to play) a zone defense. Maybe Fred had been hallucinating. In the fall no team in the area will be tougher than the Rocks, but don't count on seeing that zone again.

FRED IS A confirmed summer hoops junkie, and he is the one who got me turned on to team camp. I formerly resisted the notion of taking a group of players to a scrimmage camp for a week because most camp directors sell it as a coaches' opportunity to practice and play games before we are officially allowed to practice as a school-sanctioned team in August.

That seemed like a lousy idea to me — have your kids pay to practice. The real season is plenty long enough. Even the two seasons my teams won state championships the players and coaches were tired of each other and practice by the end of the season.

But Fred assured me that the camp run by Jim Anderson (Traverse City) and Larry Goss (Leland) was in line with my goals for the summer: building individual confidence and presenting the girls with chances to play and play, then play some more.

What he didn't tell me was how rewarding it would be to spend a week with other summer hoops junkies like myself. At the dorm the coaches share ideas, relive past victories, and commiserate about past defeats. The only disappointment was how much garbage I had to bring home as a consequence. When you jot down new plays on napkins, old envelopes and potato chip bags, you can't throw anything away.

THIS YEAR I preceded the team camp with a trip to Manistee where host Mike Huro, the most severely addicted girls basketball junkie I know, hooked up some of the best teams in



Mercy coach Larry Baker, addressing his players during a game last season, finds the coaching more laid back and enjoyable during the summer months.

the state for a weekend.

On the first day we scrimmaged last year's state Class A finalists Flint Northwestern and Benton Harbor. What an opportunity for the girls to measure themselves against some of the state's most talented players.

These challenges are great for the girls to experience, but playing girls from such far-flung locations as DeTour and Sarnia at team camp was just as challenging when our feet got sore and our legs got tired. One player summed it up when she told me, "I love it here at camp because all you do is

wake up and play basketball until you go to sleep."

Each summer, it seems through hard work an individual dramatically improves her overall playing level and steps forward to play with new confidence. This summer Missy Duczynski came into her own as a dominant post player. In June I never dreamed that she would be drawing compliments from college coaches in July.

Watching someone like Missy improve her individual skills is pure joy if you are a teacher. But if you are a

coach summer hoops is about becoming a team as well. In that light the evenings spent building bonfires on the Lake Michigan beach (none of us will forget Maureen Scullen's discovery of the "burning bush") or riding in the bumper boats at Arnie's Fun Land were just as important as anything we did together in a gym this summer.

BASKETBALL OBSERVATIONS? Of course I have a few after another summer of hoops. Flint Northwestern

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WMGA golf tradition strong after 50 years

By C.J. Rissak staff writer

Certain, specific qualities provide the foundation for the Women's Metro Golf Association (WMGA). But perhaps the best insight into the WMGA's success could be found by meeting a single member — Agnes Larson.

For the past half-century, their histories have been intertwined and much alike. The WMGA has endured throughout the years with the same basic format: 28 weeks of golf, every week a different course. And Larson has been, week after week, year after year.

The love of the game is the key ingredient in the WMGA's survival. That same love for the game is why Larson keeps returning.

MIND YOU, this affection is not for a social club atmosphere. None of the 80 members races through their 18 holes of golf so they can get a good seat at the banquet table.

Golf is No. 1. There's fun, there's camaraderie, but it's mixed with equal portions of competition.

As WMGA president Zoe Alpern of Troy defined it: "The purpose of our organization is to promote good golf and sportsmanship — not one over the other."

That's the way it was back in 1934, in the WMGA's first season, and that's the way it remains today.

"There's been very little (change)," said Larson, now 77 and living in Farmington, and the only remaining charter member. "We've always played USGA titles, and it's always been very strict."

"That's what's made the organization so great. It's what's kept the organization as good as it is."

THE IDEA for the WMGA was pieced together by Bob Sutherland, who served as the golf pro at Sylvan Glen in the '30s.

"There was a district association for private club (women) golfers," Larson recalled. "Mr. Sutherland's idea was to provide something for the public links players."

With Sutherland's help, the WMGA was formed in the fall of 1935, with play starting the following spring. The formula was simple: weekly tournaments at different public courses throughout the metro Detroit area, starting in early May and continuing through September.

Membership was originally limited to 100. It has since been reduced to 80, due more to the restraints of time available on certain courses than lack of members.



Agnes Larson WMGA charter member

"We don't have a big turnover, really," said Alpern. Larson added, "We've always had a waiting list here."

Members come from throughout the Detroit area. Recording secretary Katie Christy is from Rochester Hills, past president and current advisory board member Donna Fegley lives in Southfield; Ducky McEwen, another advisory board member, and treasurer Judy Muller are from Bloomfield Hills. Livonia, Plymouth and West Bloomfield are also represented.

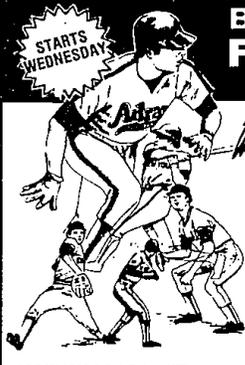
THOSE WISHING to join the WMGA must be sponsored by two current members, then approved by the executive board. Many things are considered, Alpern said, including handicap. But it isn't the only thing.

"We try to keep a balanced number in each flight," Alpern said. The WMGA is divided into four flights. Handicaps, determined by USGA standards, are updated each month, with members changing flights according to performance.

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1985 MIKE ADRAY REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP FOUR MAJOR CITY A.A.A.B.A. REGIONAL BASEBALL TOURNAMENT AT FORD FIELD, LIVONIA

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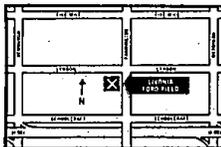
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