

Sports

Chris McCosky, Brad Emons editors/591-2312



(P10)

Birdie spree nets O&E title

Livonian Thomas scorches Whispering Willows course



Jerry Thomas shot a blistering 69 in the opening round of the O&E Mens Golf Tournament Saturday and held on Sunday for his second championship.

DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Ocelot kickers best an old nemesis, 5-3

Schoolcraft College men's soccer coach Van Dimitriou knew his team was solid. There was only one factor he was concerned about, a key element in any championship team's makeup. And there was no way for Dimitriou to tell if his team possessed it or not, other than by a test by fire.

Saturday, Dimitriou got his answer. The Ocelots visited bitter rival Macomb CC and came away with a come-from-behind 5-3 victory in both teams' Region XII opener.

Opening the Region XII season with such a game concerned Dimitriou, but so did his team. He needed to know how they would react to adversity.

He found out. After John Gelmisi gave the Ocelots a 1-0 lead on a penalty kick early in the game, Macomb scored three straight goals, two by Dan Yovanovski.

DIMITRIOU KNEW about Yovanovski, so early in the game he had Rick Hamers mark him. But taking Hamers out of his normal midfield position hurt the team's offense, so Dimitriou switched back to the Ocelots' normal defense.

The move backfired when Yovanovski scored twice in the next 10 minutes and assisted on a third as Macomb took a 3-1 lead at halftime.

Dimitriou was unconcerned. "We regrouped at the half," he said. "I could see our confidence growing."

Hamers went back to shadowing Yovanovski, and Abe Yaffai filled in at midfield in the second half. The move paid off quickly when Yaffai converted a Gelmisi pass to cut the deficit to 3-2.

Yaffai then popped a perfect chip-shot pass to Joe Novak, who buried it to knot the score at 3-3. Matt Pace did the rest of the damage for Schoolcraft, blistering in a direct kick from 19 yards out for a 4-3 lead, then hammering home a crossing pass from Novak.

"Needless to say, it was a very convincing come-from-behind win at their place," said Dimitriou. "It really helped our confidence to know that we could come back like that and win."

The victory improved the Ocelots record to 3-0-1. Lakeland CC visits Schoolcraft at 1 p.m. Saturday.

THOMAS' 69 was the only round to break par Saturday, despite excellent playing conditions and a field packed with past champions. Four other former O&E winners (Thomas and 191 other golfers) also vied for honors.

But none provided a challenge. The defending champion, Nunzio Marino of Plymouth, fired an opening round 79 and failed to show Sunday; John

Van Vleck of Farmington, who set a tournament record 139 to win in 1983, was never a factor with rounds of 83 and 81 for a 164.

Matt Wiley of Canton (1982) and Billy Himm of Livonia also never threatened. Wiley shot 156, while Himm finished with a 154. Despite the talented field, Sunday's best round was Bob Urbat's 71.

"It's hard playing with the lead," said Thomas. "I don't think anyone will tell you any differently. You know it's yours to win or lose."

But it proved more difficult to come from behind. Herford shot a 72 Saturday and trailed the leader by three strokes, but he couldn't mount a charge Sunday. He ended with a 77 and the knowledge that just two strokes separated him from the title.

But Herford made no excuses. "Everybody can say that," he said. "Everything I got I deserved."

WHILE SATURDAY'S string of birdies put Thomas in control, it was his chipping that saved him Sunday. After driving into the woods on the par-three 15th, Thomas pitched to within four feet of the cup and salvaged a bogey.

Two shots into the par-five 16th Thomas was 20 yards to the right of the green, with a sand trap perched in between. His chip again stopped four feet from the cup. He missed his birdie attempt, two-putting for par.

On the par-three 17th, Thomas again left his tee shot right of the green with a sand trap in between. But once again his chip was near-perfect, rolling to within four feet of the cup. He two-putted for a four.

OTHER TROPHY winners in the championship flight were John Smith, who took third in low gross (76-74 — 150); Bill Orrick of Redford, fourth low gross (77-75 — 152); and Urbat of Livonia, fifth low gross (82-71 — 153). Herford claimed top low net honors (139), with Bill Paul of Farmington Hills second low net (140).

In first flight, Craig Oliver of Westland emerged from a tight race to claim the low gross championship with a 79-79 — 158. A stroke behind was Corde Krol of Westland (78-81 — 159), with three others tied at 160: Dale Kimball, Rick Van Tien and Tom Mody. Mody, from Livonia, was first in low net (136), with Bob Bates of Canton second low net (144).



C.J. Risak

Fame is fine as long as it's limited to \$5

DEAN KOBANE wasn't upset, vindictive or vengeful. He was just confused. Kobane had finished playing his first Observer & Eccentric/Whispering Willows Golf Classic. He had done exceptionally well, firing a 73 Saturday and a 75 Sunday. His 148 total missed the outright championship by one measly stroke — Jerry Thomas won with a 147.

Kobane's outing was reason for joy, but there he stood, bewildered.

Which goes to prove that excellence can be dangerous, particularly when the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) is somehow involved.

Kobane is a member of Livonia Churchill's golf team. He would do nothing to endanger either his own or his team's standing.

AND YET, on Sunday he held something that could threaten both.

It was a plaque. A blank, brass-colored rectangle was pasted below the figure of a golfer, frozen in mid-swing. On the bottom of the plaque was inscribed, "Second Place, Championship Flight." All that was lacking was a name to fill the brass-colored plate.

Kobane's rightly deserved to be there. A 16-year-old kid, still a junior in high school, had bettered all but one of them.

No one could argue — except the MHSAA, of course.

Rules, rules. That's all the MHSAA is, really. It's an association that governs 800-plus junior and senior high schools — by the rules, by the rules, nothing but the rules.

Kobane's dilemma was whether to accept the plaque. Why? Because the MHSAA has rules regarding prizes, trophies, medals, etc., etc.

HE WAS worried it would jeopardize his high school eligibility. And he was determined to do the right thing as defined by the MHSAA.

"Anything worth more than \$5 — not including the engraving — cannot be accepted," was how assistant MHSAA director Warren McKenzie defined the association's rule.

Why? "If we don't hold it to a bare minimum, it becomes a contest between sponsoring agencies," McKenzie explained. "We want to keep the budget on trophies down. They can cost big bucks."

In other words, the MHSAA is fearful that high-priced, shiny trophies or awards will crop up everywhere. Expense will be disregarded as unsavory promoters compete to entice naive high school youth to partake in their tournament, bribing them. Good heavens — our whole amateur athletic code is in danger!

Pardon the sarcasm. But this belief seems pretty hollow.

FIRST, I DON'T believe a financially-profitable market exists in high school athletics. Few (if any) high school athletes are a big enough draw to be worth investing large sums of money in promotion.

Second, the rule's cost limit is ridiculous. I mean, \$5? You've got to be kidding! Most high school kids spend more than that on burgers at McDonald's — two hours after dinner.

And third, the MHSAA has left so many loopholes in its rule that bypassing it is child's play. Deciding which route to take would be a more difficult decision.

For one thing, one sponsor's \$5 trophy can be a helluva lot bigger than someone else's. Who's to say they didn't get a great buy? Heck, the kid can even come back to pick up his trophy after his high school season. But — and this is just between you and me — if he sneaked it home before I'll bet he won't know.

A third alternative is even provided by — of all sources — the MHSAA.

"It is possible that an award (worth more than \$5) can be given," said McKenzie, "but it has to be given to the school and put on display in the school's trophy case. If it goes to the school, it can be half as big as the Empire State Building."

SO, CONCEIVABLY, Kobane could take his plaque to Livonia Churchill to be displayed in the trophy case, then reclaim it after graduation.

Kobane was offered other alternatives Sunday. One passer-by claimed that an acquaintance of his once won a golf tournament while in high school and so he could claim his prize, his coach suspended him from the team on Friday and reinstated him Monday.

That seemed pretty handy to Kobane. He didn't want to risk his eligibility. He didn't want to be a court case. He didn't want to change any rules. He just wanted to obey them so he could play golf.

Which, when all was said and done, made his decision simple. Play it safe and above board, follow the MHSAA's decree — whatever it might be — to the letter. If the plaque is worth more than \$5 (it isn't), don't accept it.

CONSIDERING HIS ultimate goal (to continue playing for Churchill), that was the smartest move. The MHSAA has resisted inflexibility. There is no room for exceptions. The only colors visible to the MHSAA are black and white. All rules must be interpreted the same way for everyone. No bending allowed.

Such rigidity, though, can result in structural cracks. And a lot can fall through those cracks. The rule regarding acceptable prizes is laden with holes. Some, like Kobane, will try to obey. But for practical purposes, it's unenforceable.

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