

Sports

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Thursday, November 21, 1985 O&E

(P)10



C.J. Risak

Davidson finds new 'net' worth

FACE IT: What prompts me to write about athletes and the public — that's you — to read about them is that we once were, or wish we still were, or pray we could be, as talented.

The prowess displayed in any athletic endeavor never fails to amaze onlookers. Their desire to follow the careers of these athletes is what keeps me working.

But one misconception should be corrected. It is generally believed that athletes survive on skill alone, that their speed and/or their uncanny ability to twist a ball through a hoop is what makes them superior.

That's not true. It is true that those physical skills can start them on a ladder toward athletic success. But the higher they climb, the less difference their skills make. Once an athlete reaches the upper echelons of athletics, say college-level, ability alone won't cut it.

IT TAKES intelligence. Call it mental toughness if you will, or gamesmanship, or a winning attitude. Call it whatever you wish, but realize that the drive to succeed is as important as the physical skills.

Kelly Davidson provides a case in point.

A year ago, Davidson played her tennis matches on skill alone during her senior season at Farmington.

Harrison. She was tired. She had played tennis endlessly, it seemed, traveling all summer from one USTA event to another.

Her ability was never in doubt. But her outlook was. Davidson was suffering from a malady that's become increasingly familiar in the world of sports: burnout.

"I was sick of it," she said. "I barely played (last summer), compared to what I usually did. I was going downhill, and I was never home, all the travel and stuff."

DAVIDSON PLAYED one national tournament the summer of 1984 between her junior and senior years at Harrison. She didn't play again until the high school season that fall.

"High school is different," she said. "There was no pressure, and that's what I wanted to get away from."

Davidson was all-state and finished among the top four singles players in the Class A tournament three straight years, although she never advanced past the semifinals. When her senior season ended, she was almost ready to give up her tennis career.

But Wayne Jackson, who worked with Davidson at the West Bloomfield Racquet Club, convinced her to consider attending the University of Alabama and playing tennis for Crimson Tide coach Karl R. Gaiser.

Davidson visited Alabama, as well as the University of Arizona and Michigan State.

She opted for Alabama.

WHAT CHANGED her mind?

"The school, the team, the whole athletic department, the coach," Davidson said. "I took that year off and it helped. I feel much better now."

"Last year, I was not good — especially my attitude. I feel a lot more confident now."

Davidson credits Gaiser with her mental rejuvenation. "Before, when I started losing, I'd really get down on myself, especially if I thought I was playing bad. And that would just make it worse."

"This year I'm different. I have a more positive attitude, which Karl is helping me with."

Davidson's improved outlook has helped her overcome some other obstacles at Alabama, including skills that slipped somewhat after her self-imposed exile.

"I'm getting there," she said. "I'm getting back in shape. She has us run, lift weights and do aerobics. There's more conditioning here than in juniors."

THE COMPETITION is tougher, naturally, which hasn't surprised Davidson. And yet her talent is evident, even though she only played No. 6 singles this fall. She lost just one of 10 matches, winning two tournaments and losing in the finals of another.

"Gosh, and I have talked about it," Davidson said. "She wants me to play at No. 3. That's what I want, too, at least for this year."

But before Davidson's bumped up, Gaiser wants her to lose weight. She's dropped eight pounds since starting at Alabama and wants to lose another 12.

Once in shape — mentally and physically — Davidson's future appears unlimited.

"Karl says I could play No. 1 singles," she said. "But it's all in the mind, it's all mental."

And Davidson is just discovering how important, how positive, that realm can be to an athlete.

The quest for K'zoo begins

By Chris McCosky staff writer

It's been a pleasurable year in Observant high school girls basketball. Plymouth Salem and Plymouth Canton gave us a thrill in the Western Lakes, Ladywood and Mercy did their thing in the Catholic League. Teams like Garden City, North Farmington and Livonia Churchill provided some surprises. And we applauded the individual brilliance of Stevenson's Kelly Kowalski, Salem's Dena Head, Redford Union's Marie Becker, Livonia Franklin's Tracy Leckie, Garden City's Denise Kowalczyk and many others.

Now the fun starts. Teams from across the state start out on the road to Kalamazoo Thursday as the state district basketball tournaments commence.

Six tournaments will feature Observant teams, four Class A districts and one each in Class B and Class C.

AT PLYMOUTH CANTON

Plymouth Salem has kept a pretty good lock on its district title. The Rockets have won it five times in the last six years.

The Rockets (17-3) and ranked No. 2 in Observant will again be favored to escape the district.

The journey will open at 7:30 Thursday night with Canton (19-2, ranked No. 3 in Observant) playing Northville (12-7). Northville has administered one of Canton's two defeats this season.

Salem will open at 8 p.m. Saturday against Livonia Stevenson (8-14). The winner between Canton and Northville will play Livonia Churchill (13-8) at 7:30 p.m.

It's likely that Canton and Salem, the divisional champions in the Western Lakes, could meet for a third time this season in the district championship (7:30 p.m. Monday). But as Salem coach Fred Thomson pointed out last week, if other team spends too much time thinking about a rematch, there won't be one.

The winner will stay at Canton for the regional tournament and play the winner of the North Farmington district in the first round.

AT JOHN GLENN

This is a bit of a new twist for Westland John Glenn. Gentry, when the Rockets host a district, they have to contend with Canton and Salem.

This year, the Rockets (13-7) have to contend with Garden City (14-4) and champions of the Northwest Suburban League.

— In the first round, 7 p.m. Thursday night. On Friday, Livonia Franklin (8-11) will play Wayne Memorial (9-11) at 7 p.m., followed by Redford Union (9-9) against either Glenn or Garden City.

The championship is set for 7 p.m. Monday.

This tournament is packed with strong individual players: Leckie, Becker, Kowalczyk, Dena Hawkins from Wayne and Jenny Olson from John Glenn.

The winner advances to the Woodhaven regional and play the champion from the Dearborn district.

AT NORTH FARMINGTON

It may take a stick of dynamite to pry Farmington Hills Mercy from this district title.

The Marins have won 11 consecutive district championships dating back to 1973.

This year's Mercy edition is 14-5 on the season and seeking its first prize of the season — the team failed to win either a division or Catholic League title.

The journey opens at 7 Thursday night with North Farmington (12-8) taking on Novi.

Mercy will take on wireless Farmington Harrison at 8 p.m. Monday, Farmington (2-18) will play the North-Novl winner immediately following.

Championship game is set for 7 p.m. Tuesday.

The winner advances to the Canton regional.

AT SOUTHFIELD

Redford Bishop Borgess will take its first winning streak in three years — two straight — into this district. The 2-17 Spartans drew Southfield — the team favored to win the journey — in the first round, 6:15 Friday night.

Detroit Henry Ford will take on the winner from Friday at 8 p.m. Monday. Detroit Redford and Detroit Cooley will play at 7:30 p.m.

The championship game is slated for 7 p.m. Wednesday, the winner advancing to the Southfield regional against the Ferndale district champ.

AT SCHOOLCRAFT COLLEGE (Class B)

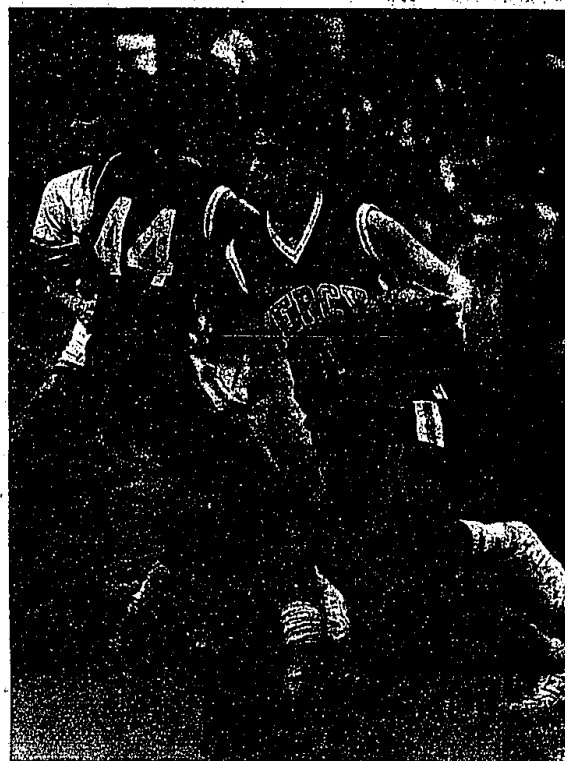
Livonia Ladywood (19-1) hasn't lost a district in recent memory and should it lose this one — it may make the national press.

Royal Oak Shrine and Clarenceville (8-10) will open the journey tonight at 8 p.m.

Followed by Clawson vs. Ladywood.

On Saturday, Detroit Benedictine will play the Shrine-Cville winner at 6 p.m. and Redford Thurston (13-7) will take on either Clawson or Ladywood.

Please turn to Page 3



Micholite Fryatt (No. 11) hopes to drive Mercy to another in a long series of district basketball championships beginning tonight.

CC hopes to avert Troy's giant killers

By Brad Emons staff writer

Underdog. Cinderella. Giant killers. Those are only some of the terms tossed around the last few weeks about Troy High's football team.

And even though the Colts have beaten three undefeated teams in a row, they continue to be cast in the role as spoilers for Saturday's state Class A semifinal matchup with Redford Catholic Central. (Game time is 1:30 p.m. at Allen Park High School).

For the third consecutive week, CC will be the favorite, something coach Tom Mach and his team have no control over.

"I'm not surprised about Troy," the Shamrocks' coach said. "Our scouts said they're a real good team. They thoroughly outplayed Sterling Heights Stevenson (a 17-6 win last week) and deserved to win."

"The only thing I've been told is that they're good."

TROY, unbeaten since losing to Berkley, 14-7, in the second week of the season, is not a big, imposing football team like CC.

"They play a 3-2 (alignment) stunting defense," Mach said. "They have two good linebackers and a good safety."

"Their five down linemen are not big, but they're physical and quick."

"Offensively, they have a good quarterback who throws the ball well. They'll do a lot of passing."

Troy's mainstay on offense is quarterback Kurt Schra, who has completed 81 of 166 passes for 1,307 yards and 17 touchdowns. His favorite receiver is John Locker, who has 47 catches for 733 yards and 10 TDs.

John Schra is Troy's top running back, averaging 1.3 yards per carry. He has scored six TDs.

But the hero last week was safety John Hayes, a 6-10, 165-pound senior who Mach alluded to earlier.

LAST WEEK, Hayes scored his first two TDs of the year and made a key interception late in the game to preserve the win for Troy.

But CC came up with a few surprises of their own last week, unleashing a passing attack that hadn't been seen all season.

Quarterback Mark Stieve enjoyed his best outing of the year in last week's 21-0 bludgeoning of Grosse Pointe North, completing 11 of 18 passes for 103 yards. He threw a pair of touchdown passes to Ken Wandzel.

"We've got to shut them down on offense," said Troy coach Jeff Keller. "I think they're confident now after putting three TDs on the board last week."

Mach's attitude about throwing the football may be changing.

"The field conditions dictate a lot of things," he said. "Sometimes a muddy field gives you the opportunity to throw."

"Our quarterback is doing a good job and our receivers are catching the ball well."

BUT EVEN THOUGH CC surprised North with a passing game, Keller predicts a defensive battle.

"I expect a low-scoring, defensive game," he said. "I think it will be hard-hitting because of the league they play in (Catholic League), and I expect they will execute very well."

Much of the Shamrocks' 10-1 record can be attributed to their defense, which has allowed only 69 points all season.

While such stars as Nick Varajon, Kevin Tulley and Wandzel get a lot of recognition for their defensive play, Mach says that everybody contributes.

He mentions the unsung heroes — John Forsythe and Mickey Redding and safety Pat Nolan.

"Mickey has been starting at tight end and defensive tackle all year," Mach said. "He's been doing a great job all year along with John."

And Pat has been an excellent safety all year. He intercepted a pass and recovered a fumble against North."

Allen Park High School is at 18401 Champaign. Fans should take Telegraph Road (south) to Ecorse Road (east) to Pelham Road (south) to Champaign (east).

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