

# Sports

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suburban life inside



(F10)

## Mercy's gear shift puts Captains to sea

By Chris McCosky  
staff writer

"We came into this tournament as underdogs, but we came out of it Mercy."

So said Farmington Hills Mercy basketball coach Larry Baker after his team handed Waterford Kettering its first loss of the season, 44-39, Thursday night in the Class A regional final at Plymouth Salem.

The win gives Mercy its sixth consecutive regional crown — no team in the history of girls basketball in the state of Michigan has matched that feat.

Thursday's game was breathtaking. Both teams took after each other like alley cats. Several times Mercy appeared ready to bury Kettering — each time the Captains came scratching back into contention.

In the end, Kettering had the ball with under a minute to play trailing by a basket. With 16 seconds left, Julie Nickman put up a short jumper that went in — and out.

**THE PROSPECT** of defeat overwhelmed the Captains and their large and unruly throng of fans. The final 14 seconds were ugly in contrast to 31:46 of brilliant basketball.

While Kettering came unglued, Mercy's Yvette Malson — a cool customer in the face of serious pressure throughout the game — nailed four free throws, including a technical foul. Missy Duczynski added another free throw to lock up the win.

"The two teams are very similar," Baker said. "They do a lot of the same things we do better. They are quicker

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and that forced us to change what we normally do. We had to be the deliberate team and we had to be the team that broke the press."

The Marlins (19-5), thanks largely to the patience and court savvy of Malson, Michelle Fryatt and Duczynski, were able to handle the Kettering press — the same press that destroyed Birmingham Marian in the semifinals.

Mercy made numerous turnovers (10 in each half), but most occurred on the offensive end and usually as a result of rushing to the basket after breaking the press.

**MERCY, WHO** trailed only once in the game (18-17 with 3:28 left in the first half), took the upper hand in the second half thanks to a shrewd coaching decision.

Baskets by Terri Nalodka and Fryatt put Mercy ahead 29-23. Kettering has made a name for itself this season with its press and pesky zone defense. Baker, with 3:30 left to play in the third quarter, ordered his team to hold the ball outside, forcing Kettering to come out of its zone.

"That was (assistant coach) Jim McKee's idea. He'd been after me to do that since Missy (Duczynski) picked up her third foul."

The move produced an added bonus. The Kettering players stayed back in the zone and were consequently slapped with a technical foul. Duczynski

hit the free throw.

On Mercy's ensuing possession, Kettering coach Charlie Shires was slapped with another technical foul for arguing. Duczynski hit both free throws and Mercy had a nine-point lead.

A LESSER team would have been through for the night. Kettering, however, didn't win 22 straight games by quitting.

"I think Charlie (Shires) would be the first to admit it, we played a tougher schedule than they did, but an undefeated team has to be very good, especially in the final quarter," Baker said.

Lisa Kline, who led all scorers with 15 points, scored eight fourth-quarter points to help bring Kettering back. Her basket with 5:01 left made the score 34-33.

Duczynski, who led Mercy with 12 points, sank two clutch free throws and Nalodka added another basket to extend Mercy's lead to 39-33.

Kline scored again with 2:20 remaining to pull the Captains within three. They stole Mercy's in-bounds pass and had a chance to pull within one, but Margaret DeMatteis came up with a leaping steal and sank a free throw at the other end.

"You have to give Margaret a lot of credit. She gave us another money basketball game tonight. Not thrilling, but how many mistakes did she make? (Not many.) And she had as much right as anyone to make mistakes."

**DEMATTEIS** HAS stepped into the starting role replacing injured Terri Ford and played near-flawless basketball through the district and regional tournaments.

There were other standouts for Mercy.

• Malson scored 10 points and played another strong floor game.

• Michelle Fryatt was again assigned to shadow an important player and did a superb job. She frustrated Salem's Dena Head on Tuesday and bothered speedy all-state guard Kristi Lyons Thursday. Lyons scored 11 points, five from the free throw line.

• Jean Wassenberg came off the Marlin bench and scored nine points, most at crucial stages of the game. In the second quarter she scored five straight points, seven in the quarter, to help Mercy to a 25-20 lead at the half. Then in the fourth quarter, with Mercy clinging to a three-point lead, she followed up her own missed free throw with a left-handed half-hook shot to extend Mercy's margin.

• Nalodka, turned in still another rugged inside performance both on the glass and on defense. With Duczynski in foul trouble, her performance was doubly important for the Marlins.

"THIS IS a game that all 15 players feel real good about," Baker said.

Wednesday, the Marlins will make their sixth straight appearance in the state quarterfinals. The game (which will start at 7:30 p.m.) is hosted by Waterford Mott, 1151 Scott Lake Road. The likely opponent: No. 1-ranked Flint Northwestern, whose regional final was Saturday night.

Mike Rodin contributed an important six rebounds to the cause and Jim Ragland played a solid floor game.

• Artis Slater led Lathrup with 20 points.

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"I set up a play and it didn't work," Teachman said. "But Karoly had the presence of mind to realize the play was stopped and he quickly reversed the ball."

Karoly got the ball to Hoskow who fed Sarcevic on the baseline. Sarcevic made no mistake.

George led the Hawks in scoring, canning 15 points in 18 minutes of court time.

Tom Larkin led Kettering with 16.

**N. FARMINGTON 58, SOUTHFIELD-LATHRUP 55:** Rick Anderson scored 28 points and grabbed 10 rebounds to lead North Farmington to victory in its season opener.

Paul Wahman added 15 points and six rebounds.

North exploded to a 16-8 lead after a quarter and never trailed. The final score was as close as Lathrup got to the Raiders.

Mike Rodin contributed an important six rebounds to the cause and Jim Ragland played a solid floor game.

• Artis Slater led Lathrup with 20 points.

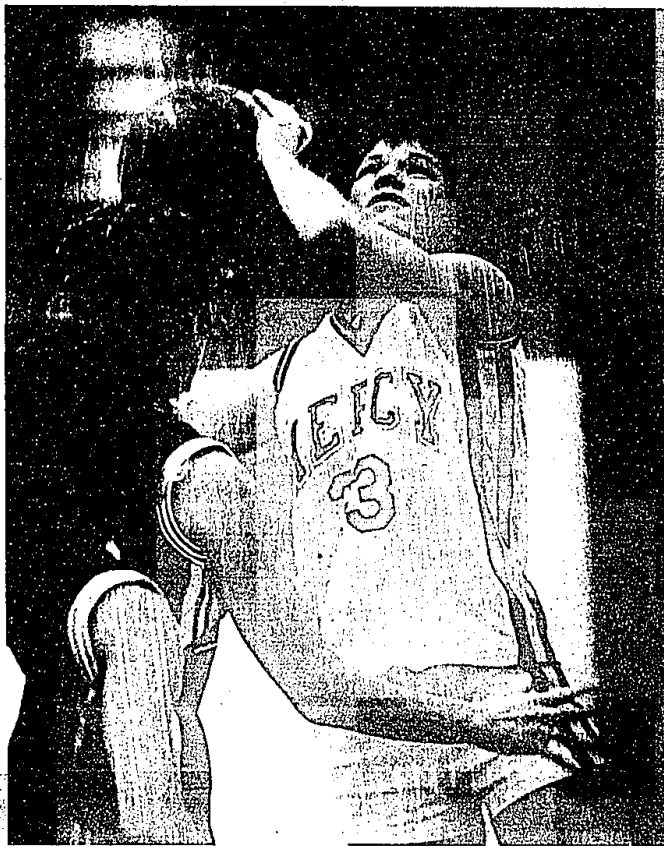
**FARMINGTON 63, REDFORD UNION 53:** The Falcons kept their victory and outscored the Panthers 14-11 in the middle as Farmington, led by Bruce Kratt's 29 points, routed host Redford Union Friday in a non-conference opener.

With 42 points total in the second and third quarters, the Falcons could afford to be outscored by the Panthers 14-11 in the final eight minutes. Tony Racka and Kyle Mutz both sent in 11 points for Farmington.

"They out-quickened us at the guard spots, and they were very accurate from the outside," said Tip Smathers, in his debut as RU coach.

RU was led by Dennis Bushart, who canned 10 points. Gary Walters chipped in with 12.

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Jean Wassenberg came off the Mercy bench to spark a pair of rallies. She finished the game with nine points in the Marlin win Thursday.

## Baker displays his mettle in Mercy's regional win

I WONDER if Larry Baker gets enough credit.

I wonder if his name is mentioned when outstanding girls basketball coaches are discussed.

I wonder if the Farmington Hills Mercy boosters and the Farmington Hills community really appreciate what a truly outstanding job this man does.

I wonder if I knew what a dedicated and driven coach he really was until the recently completed regional tournament at Plymouth Salem.

Certainly his career record at Mercy is to be marveled at: He's 234-50. He's won two state championships, 10 regionals and a bunch of district and league titles.

But the common assumption is, he wins because he always gets the best players. Mercy's ability to draw players from wherever it wants gives the school a decided advantage and it should be successful.

**WELL, MAYBE** in some years Mercy had superior talent and the importance of Baker's role as coach was lessened.

But not this year.

This year, Larry Baker had to coach — seriously take off the coat, get out the chalk board and get to work.

Baker has always been a hard worker. He runs his own skills camp at Oakland Community College over the summer. He takes his players up north to individual and team camps during the summer.

Then during the season he works harder. He, along with assistants Mike King and Jim McKee (who have played no small role in the success of the Mercy program), are unrelenting scouters, game film watchers and prepractice workaholics.

Still, I get the feeling that he moved his work level up an extra notch 'til this season — up another level for the regional.

**MY FEELING** is that Baker ap-



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proached this regional tournament as a personal challenge, almost as if he felt his coaching credentials were being threatened.

The first game of the tourney was against Fred Thomann and Plymouth Salem. Thomann is regarded as the best coach in the state. Where Baker is mistakenly perceived as a coach who wins only because of the talent he gets, Thomann is justifiably hailed for producing winning teams without the benefit of blue-chip talent.

Thomann's team embarrassed Mercy earlier this season and Baker couldn't rest until he avenged that defeat.

For three weeks, the man feverishly prepared his team to do battle against Thomann's team. For three weeks he drove himself, his assistants and his players to the brink of exhaustion and beyond to come up with a plan to beat Salem.

The end result was a marvelously constructed game plan and confident execution by his players — and a victory.

Baker did not outcoach Fred Thomann, nor did he enter into the game with that intention. He simply conditioned his team to perform at a level higher than it had performed all season.

**AS IMPRESSIVE** as that win was, Baker was never better than Thursday night.

Against previously unbeaten Waterford Kettering Baker completely shifted gears with his team — with only one day to prepare.

Instead of being a pressing defensive team and a running offensive team, he instructed his players to slow the tempo against the faster Kettering team and he had his team well schooled on how to break the vaunted Kettering press.

Another coup for Baker was having his team play straight man-to-man against Kettering. This was a total surprise to the Captains. Mercy had played mostly press and zone this year. But Baker knew that Kettering had faced almost exclusive zone coverage all season. He hoped a man-to-man would confuse and slow Kettering — and it did.

Again, perfect game plan, perfect execution — but Kettering forced Baker to make changes throughout the game.

With a suggestion from McKee, Baker had his team draw Kettering out of its zone at a very strategic time in the game. This frustrated Kettering and earned Mercy three technical foul free throws and possession of the ball.

**IF BAKER** felt this regional tournament was a test of his coaching mettle, he responded with an A effort.

Mercy's next hurdle, barring a major upset, will be against Flint Northwestern in the quarterfinals.

Northwestern has been the dominant Class A team in the state for the past two years. They are No. 1 this year and heavy favorites to win their third consecutive state title.

They are coached by Roger Zoll, a nice guy who works hard. But, in terms of basketball X's and O's, the man couldn't carry Baker's chalk board.

Ironic, isn't it? Baker will be up against the type of coach so many people perceive him to be.

It's kind of sad in a way. At least the readers of this column and the knowledgeable fans of the sport will know the real story.