

Sports

Chris McCosky, Brad Emons editors/591-231



(F1C)

Gaining the Kalamazoo perspective

Chris McCosky

The state of O&E girls hoops address.

NOTHING LIKE a weekend in Kalamazoo to put things into perspective.

If you just see girls basketball played within the Observer & Eccentric coverage area — if you only see the Mercey, Plymouth Salems, Ladywoods, Marians and Rochesterers of the world — your perception of things becomes somewhat narrow.

You know Salem, Ladywood and Mercy are good basketball teams, you know that the players on your All-Area teams are good, but if that's all you see you can't honestly judge how good.

State championship weekend in Kalamazoo clears up any and all doubts.

For example: Teams like Mercy and Salem (throw in any number of other area teams like West Bloomfield, Southfield, Plymouth Canton) were strong teams in our area this season, but they were a cut below the level of Detroit Martin Luther King, Flint Northwestern and Grand Rapids Ottawa Hills.

ROCHESTER, when all components were functioning, was a solid team within the Eccentric area. On good nights it could muscle up and knock off a team like Trenton (who despite its 22-2 record was a cut below Salem and Mercy).

But Rochester, a team that was among the state's final four in Class A, was in over its head in Kalamazoo. I don't think Rochester could have won the state championship in any of the four classes.

I know the Falcons couldn't overtake the two finalists from Class A (King and Northwestern), or Class B (Ladywood and Divine Child), or Class C (St. Martin DePorres and Westland).

An argument could be made for Rochester winning in Class D, but I was impressed with overall team strengths of both Potterville and Ewen Trout Creek.

Gaining total perspective can be painful.

LADYWOOD, TIE No. 1 ranked team in Observland and easily the best team in the entire O&E coverage area, proved it belonged among the state's elite — an accomplishment thought impossible after graduating two all-stars a year ago.

Ed Kavanaugh's Ladywood team has become a standard of excellence within our area — you can gain a measure of perspective without the trip to Kalamazoo by seeing the Blazers play.

But the Blazers didn't handle their victory well Saturday night. Instead of accepting their state title graciously and with class, some team members took the opportunity to jeer members of the media — namely, Mick McCabe of the Detroit Free Press, whom the Blazers obviously felt didn't give their team enough credit during the season.

While McCabe was writing his story in the open press box at Western Michigan's Reed Fieldhouse, members of the Ladywood team shouted up at him, "Mikey, look who won" and other similar taunts. It was childish behavior unbefitting of a champion.

But that's a digression. Let's get back to perspective.

THE KALAMAZOO weekend opened my eyes not only to the level of our area teams, but to the level of our individual players as well.

We have some legitimate all-state, blue-chip level players in our coverage area: Dena Head (Salem), Sue Laliberte and Jenny Nadeau (Ladywood) and Missy Duczynski (Mercy).

But, in all honesty, the bottom four or five players on our first-team All-Area teams would have great difficulty cracking the starting lineup for King, Northwestern or Ottawa Hills. There's not one player on the first team All-Eccentric basketball team who could start for King. That's not a knock on any of the players, it's just testimony to the skill level of King's players.

LaTonya Thomas (ber of the Vinnie Johnson-like moves inside) is the most visible member of the King team, but there are a pair of sophomores on the team (Denise Kirby and Marline Ferguson) who would be unanimous All-Area, all-suburban choices — and they are considered role players for King.

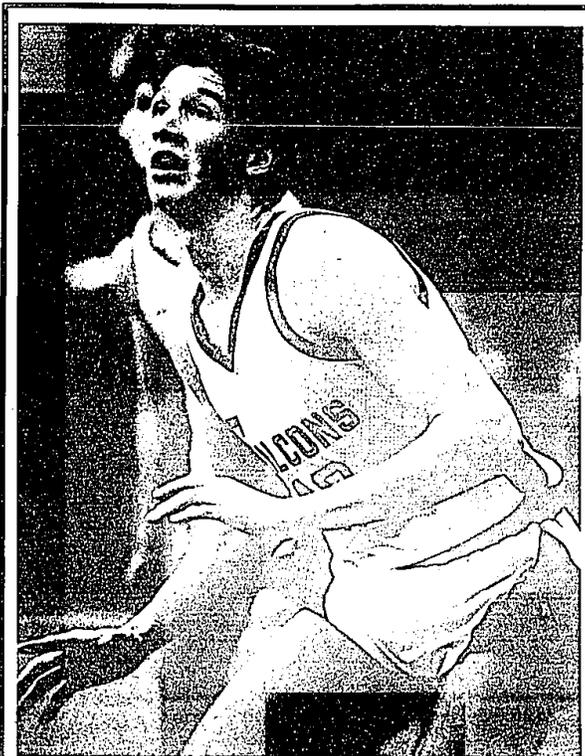
These teams (King, Northwestern and Ottawa Hills, even Class C DePorres) are five and six players deep with All-Area-level talent.

THERE IS one phase of the game where the O&E area is superior — coaching. The level of coaching in our area is superb and not enough people recognize it. Fred Thomann (Salem), Kavanaugh, Mike Greene (West Bloomfield), Larry Baker (Mercy), Joe Clifton (Athens), Bob Blohm and Rob Neer (Canton), Greg Grodzicki (North Farmington) — these are first-rate teachers of the game. It would be frightening to imagine what any of those coaches might accomplish with a team like King.

Those that view this column as an essay in criticism on O&E girls hoops are missing the point.

It's not that girls basketball in this area is horrible — in some cases it's very good. But when you see the absolute elite, you realize how much improvement is still needed.

And recognizing room for improvement is positive in its own right.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Soaring Falcons

Kyo Mutz and the rest of the Farmington boys basketball team are off to one of the best starts in the team's history.

The Falcons topped Franklin Tuesday. That and all the area hoop action is on Page 6C.

Hawks grab tourney title

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

volleyball

The Farmington Harrison volleyball team avoided the worst possible scenario and nearly pulled off the best possible at the first Harrison Invitational Volleyball Tournament Saturday.

"The biggest thing we had hoped to do was make it to the finals," Harrison coach Ron Shortt said. "You just dread the idea of hosting a tournament and not at least making it out of pool play."

The Hawks did far better than advancing out of its pool. They made it to the finals of the 10-team draw.

Dearborn stopped the Hawks' with a 15-6, 15-2 victory in the final match.

"The kids are real happy with the way they performed," Shortt said. "I'm not dissatisfied at all. Defensively, we played exceptionally well, but Dearborn was more powerful."

AFTER BEING drubbed in the first game, the Hawks gave Dearborn a serious battle in the second. After falling behind, the Hawks scratched back to a 12-12 tie before bowing out.

The Hawks had advanced out of pool play with a 7-1 record in games played — that earned them a No. 1 seed. They outpointed Warren Cousino (also 7-1), Dearborn (6-2) and Waterford. Ketterling (5-3) also advanced out of pool play.

In the semifinals, Harrison survived a stiff test from Ketterling, 15-13, 15-13. In the second game, the Hawks fought back from a 12-4 deficit to win.

Dearborn edged Cousino in its semifinal match 15-13, 8-15, 15-12.

Harrison was led all day by the all-around skills of Janine Whittemore and Jennifer Hughes. Diana Raddata was a consistent and powerful player at the net and Heidi Reyst did a credible job setting the Hawk attack.

Shortt also got solid play from Theresa Spier, sophomore Katie Doll and Jalmo Reed.

Other area teams involved in the tournament were Redford Union (4-4 in pool play) and Farmington (0-8).

The Hawks 4-1 start on the season is their best ever.

GARDEN CITY captured its own five-team tournament with a 15-8, 10-15, 15-3 win against Walked Lake Western on Saturday.

Both teams earned 3-1 records on the day in the two-out-of-three round robin format.

"The first game of the day we lost 6-15 to Livonia Churchill," Garden City coach Tom Teeters said. "We kept our composure and pulled together. I'm aware pleased with the fact that we didn't lose our cool despite the bad game than anything else that happened."

Missy Ward, Dentse Kokowicz, Marla Evans, Nikki Stubbs and Mary Herbert played well at the net for the Cougars. Miki Gorak set well and sophomore Amy Thompson was strong on defense and in the service corner.

Walled Lake Central was 2-1 in the tourney, Churchill 2-2 and Livonia Ladywood 0-4.

NORTH FARMINGTON bolted out of pool play with a 7-3 record and seeded No. 1 going into the semifinals of the six-team Mount Clemens Invitational Volleyball Tournament Saturday — but lost a tough two-setter to perennial Class B power Richmond, 17-19, 11-15.

"We had a couple of mental breakdowns and we let that match slip away," said North coach Sandy Fabler-lecki, whose team led 15-8 in the first game. "But, we didn't fall apart. From 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. I saw the parts of the team come together and improve and that's what you hope for."

L'Anso Creuse North, a team North split with in pool play, beat Richmond

Please turn to Page 3

North makes impact on WLAA Relays

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

It didn't take long for the new teams to make their mark in the Western Lakes boys swim league.

In the first event of the Western Lakes Activities Association Relays Saturday at Plymouth Salem, Westland John Glenn set a meet record in the 400-yard medley relay.

In the second event, North Farmington set a meet record in the 400 freestyle relay.

But some things do remain the same. Livonia Stevenson, for the second consecutive season, won the meet, outpointing Plymouth Salem 256-237.

North Farmington — which along with Glenn and Livonia Franklin joined the league from the Northwest Suburban League — placed third (170). See statistical summary for complete results.

"I didn't know anything about those two teams," Livonia Stevenson head coach Doug Buckler said of Glenn and North. "I figured it would be us and Salem all the way. Then Glenn loaded up that first relay I said 'Holy smokes, here we go.'"

JOHN GLENN'S medley relay team of Allen White, John Jensen, Dan Kozar and Scott Wiltshire bested Stevenson's 1983 meet record of 3:59.91 with a 3:57.41.

North Farmington's 400 free team of Dan Mannisto, Craig Burland, Mike Battil and Mike Turney eclipsed Salem's 1983 mark of 3:24.37 with a 3:23.42.

The same foursome — each one an All-Area swimmer last season — set a meet record in the crescendo relay, swimming a 4:24.08 and shattering Stevenson's 4:33.72 set last year.

A fourth meet record was set in the 200 freestyle relay: Northville's Darras Mikalons, David Wayne, Jeff Balbridge and Doug Buell went 1:33.07, topping Churchill's 1984 mark of 1:34.41.

"I have to be honest," Buckler said. "I did not expect the meet to be that fast this early in the season."

THE MEET, as has been the case in each of its four years, boiled down to a

battle between Stevenson and Salem. The Rocks trailed the Spartans by as few as three points through nine events.

"I haven't had a good opportunity to really examine the sheets, but I'm sure Doug could have done better," said Salem coach Chuck Olson. "But, it was a nice meet for us. I was pleased."

Stevenson garnered three first-place finishes, four seconds and placed within the top three in every event.

The Spartans' Brian Cantoni, Steve Taormina, Tony Albert and Jeff Albert captured the 200 butterfly relay in 1:43.18.

Mike Verport and Chuck Morningstar took diving honors for Stevenson with 372.16 points, nipping Plymouth Canton (357.55).

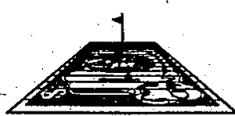
The Spartans clinched the meet with a first in the 200 medley relay — Tony Albert, David Adzema, Joe Sanders and Chris Morasky going 1:48.10.

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