

Sports

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(F1C)

Hawks fend off feisty Falcons



Chris McCosky

Prep athletics: innocence lost

THINGS AREN'T ALL peaches and cream in the world of high school sports. It may appear as such to the naive eye. Prep sports paints itself a handsome exterior: the purity of competition, the innocence of playing for school and community pride, the lessons learned through both victory and defeat, and the satisfaction of doing the best you can.

Beneath that exterior, though, the foundation is beginning to crack. There are sinister forces at work here — forces that operate under the guise of concerned parents and coaches.

The intention of this column is not to point fingers at any one coach, parent, player or athletic program. The intention is to toss out issues and stir up constructive debate.

This column contains no remedies for the issues it raises. It contains evidence, it is hoped, that will incite those in power to take an introspective look at high school athletics.

SCENE ONE: Sally plays basketball on her middle school team. She's a very talented player. Varsity basketball coaches from both the public and the private high school regularly attend her games. Both coaches have made it known they'd like very much for Sally to attend their school.

Both high school coaches spend time talking to Sally's parents about the benefits of their school.

"Our basketball program has produced many college players," the private school coach tells the parents. "If she comes here, I can guarantee her a college scholarship."

Said the public school coach: "The reason the private school team wins all the time is that they come here and steal all of our players. I think it is disgusting to have to put this kind of pressure on Sally. But I feel that if I don't, we'll keep losing kids to the private school."

Sally, meanwhile, has become increasingly popular among her friends at school. Because of all the attention, she has become somewhat of a celebrity. Consequently, Sally's ego has grown disproportionate to her ability. This begins to cause problems for her, her coach, teammates and family.

FINALLY, SALLY'S parents decide it would be best if their daughter attends the private school. Sally cries because all of her friends go to public school.

Sally is miserable at the private school and is unproductive during basketball practice. The coach benches her until she's ready to contribute.

Sally's parents sit in the stands wondering why their daughter isn't playing. They argue with the private school coach and eventually pull Sally out of the school.

After losing a season of eligibility, Sally is ready to resume her basketball career.

The problem is Sally's two-year sabbatical has made her a stranger on the public school team. Girls whom she played with at middle school have grown and improved and are now stars on this team. Sally doesn't fit in.

Sally's basketball career is shot. Forget about the scholarship.

These kinds of things are happening right now in Observer & Eccentric land.

SCENE TWO: Coach Jones has won five consecutive league championships, two state titles and has coached 250 more wins than he has losses.

His team will not win the league title this year, and Jones can't handle the grumbling in the stands. "He's lost it... Why isn't he playing so-and-so... The kids don't respect him... His offense is totally archaic... He's got to go."

After a particularly galling loss, a parent steps from the stands to talk to coach Jones. Apparently, the parent's kid didn't play much during the game. The coach and the parent exchange heated words.

Coach Jones resigns the next day. The team is still looking for a replacement.

SCENE THREE: Coach Doe has had the best team in the area for nearly 15 years. The area rankings always list the team No. 1. The team rarely loses league contests.

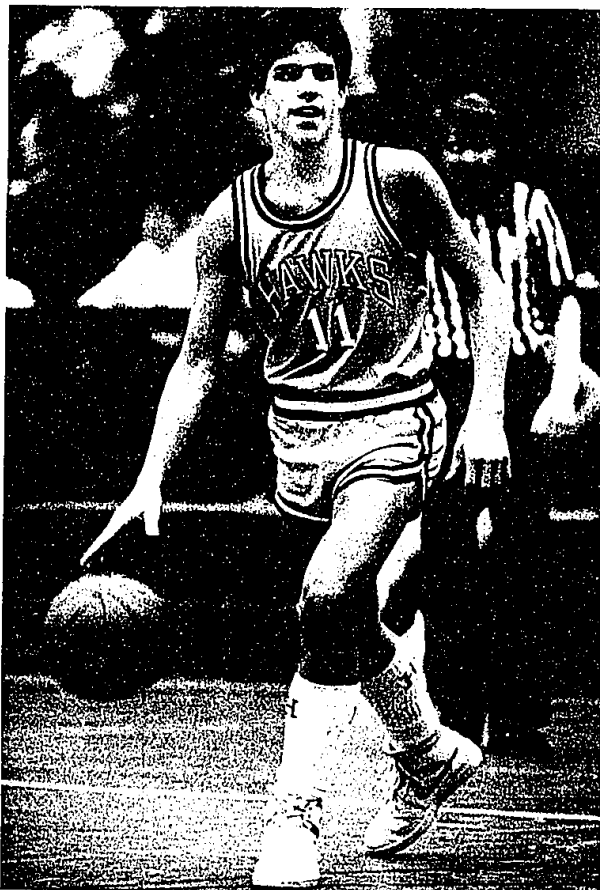
Coach Smith's team, also very good, plays in a neighboring region. Smith repeatedly loses contests against Coach Doe's team. Coach Doe steadfastly refuses.

Coach Doe's athletic director, in an off-the-record statement to the press, confides that Doe is obsessed with his win-loss record and will not jeopardize it against Smith's team.

More and more, good teams shy away from scheduling good teams. Lost is the sports axiom that it is more productive to lose against the best than beat the worst.

THIS SPACE does not permit any more scenes, although there are a good many to discuss — like the basketball player who quit the team because he was ashamed of the way his father carried on in the stands.

Nevertheless, recruiting at the middle school level is a reality. Overbearing, power-hungry, know-it-all parents are forcing good coaches and players out of the game. Some coaches do pad their schedules with powder-puff games to maintain win streaks and winning percentages. The luster of high school sports is fading.

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

The Farmington basketball team went for a frustrating ride up a down escalator Tuesday night in a rock-em, sock-em 64-53 loss to Farmington Harrison.

"I don't know if we were so much ripe to be beat," said Harrison coach Mike Teachman. "But I do think Farmington was ready to beat us."

Was it even? The Farmington students painted their faces and jammed into the Falcon gym. The pep band was out in full force. The intensity was at goose-bump level. And the Falcons, losers of three of their last four games, were hungry.

With 1:11 left in the first quarter, Scott Bissell's two free throws gave Harrison the lead for the first time in the game. The Hawks never gave back the lead but the Falcons were within two points four times — twice in the final quarter. Harrison's largest margin was nine points.

In other words, the two neighboring rivals battled each other from start to finish.

"FARMINGTON PLAYED us tough," Teachman said. "They had their fans out and their kids were pumped, but we overcame it all. Good teams win on the road."

Five consecutive points from Mark Stevens, and key hoops from Bruce Kratt and Craig Petersmark pulled the Falcons to within two points, 53-51, with 4:50 left in the game.

At that point, Teachman deployed his troops in a diamond-and-one defensive scheme. He assigned Jeff Hoskow the task of stopping the inflammable Kratt one-on-one.

Farmington had eight possessions in the final 4:30 of the game and fired 10 shots. Only one of those shots was triggered by Kratt. Only Ron Jones' put-back shot at the buzzer scored.

Meanwhile, the Hawks rattled off 11 points to secure victory.

"THEY PLAYED Bruce man-for-man and the others just couldn't hit the shots," said Falcons coach Richard Roy. "You can't win if you don't hit your shots."

Poor shooting has plagued the Falcons during the two-week skid. The team has hit less than 30 percent of its shots the last two games. The Falcons must 21 of 55 against the Hawks (38 percent), but hit just four of 14 final quarter shots.

For Harrison, Bissell, Ken George and Rod Sarcevic were the offensive

basketball

stars. Bissell led all scorers with 16 points. Sarcevic (13 points, 11 rebounds) and George (14 points), hit the shots that broke the Falcons' back.

George, held in check for three quarters, scored eight points down the stretch. Sarcevic saved his baskets for the crucial stages of the game. Three times Sarcevic hit shots to extend the Hawk lead from two to four points.

Will Lund also played a big role for the Hawks scoring seven points and grabbing 10 rebounds.

KRATT, WHO didn't start the game, ignited the team with 14 points. Tony Hacks played a strong game for Farmington, also, chipping in eight points. Petersmark was also a factor. His muscular 6-2, 220-pound frame kept Harrison away from the glass. The majority of the Hawks' points were scored from the perimeter.

Kyle Mutt, one of the team's leading scorers, was limited to just eight points.

"They took Kyle out of the game pretty well," Roy said.

Teachman saw it different: "He took himself out, really. He stayed pretty much on the perimeter and that was fine with us."

The win keeps Harrison unbeaten at 11-0. The Hawks are 9-0 in the Western Lakes. Farmington drops to 4-5 in the conference, 6-6 on the season.

NORTHVILLE 60, N. FARMINGTON 52: After a long absence, Northville returned to its remodeled gym triumphantly.

Northville's aggressive zone defense stifled North Farmington's perimeter game. Leading scorer Rick Anderson was checked on just eight points — the first time in nearly two years he hasn't scored in double figures.

Paul Wahrman poured in 22 and Rick Karcher added 12 for North.

Northville (7-2 in the Western Lakes, 8-3) put four players in double figures. Don Norton scored 19, Mike Hillinger 12, Matt Hinds 11 and Kirk Morrison 10.

Northville assumed command of the game with a 17-7 outburst in the second quarter.

The Raiders are now 3-6 in the conference, 5-6 on the season.

Ken George scored eight of his 14 points his Harrison team to a 84-53 win at Farmington in the final quarter Tuesday night helping.

File photo

Size of racquet crucial to Yellen

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

The oversized racquet could make a big racket in the future of racquetball. At least that is the opinion of some of the area's top players who use one. The oversized version has just begun to make its way into the market.

Right now, just a few players are using them.

Two inches longer in length and a wider head are the main features of the oversized racquet, heralded as making the game easier to play by manufacturers and players alike.

And as in tennis, they also predict the larger racquet will become a fixture in the sport.

Only one concern has cropped up — that a larger racquet means a heavier racquet.

BUT MIKE YELLEN, three-time champion of men's professional racquetball and spokesman for oversized-racquet maker Ektelon, said added size doesn't mean added weight.

Yellen, who's from Southfield, said the standard racquet weighs 245 grams. The oversized graphite model Yellen uses, the Ektelon Toron, weighs the same.

"A couple of the complaints people have made is that since it's an oversized racquet, it weighs more," he said. Yellen switched to the larger model during the summer. "Size is not an indication of weight."

Because the racquet is two inches longer, players are able to generate more power in their shots. And with the wider head, difficult shots are said to be easier to reach.

"I know people are saying, 'It's not the racquet playing the tournament,'" Yellen said. "But the oversized racquet offers the benefits to help me play better."

STILL, for a person who's won three consecutive championships, it would seem that Yellen would rather flit than switch and stick to his smaller racquet.

Not so.

"The reason I switched was that I was pretty involved with testing it," Yellen said. "I was ready for a change. A couple of sales people suggested that 'why should I switch...? I see some benefits in it to improve my game.'"

The move hasn't hindered Yellen in his quest for a fourth consecutive title. Currently, he's battling with two players on the pro circuit for first place on the Racquetball Manufacturer's Association Men's Pro Racquetball Tour.

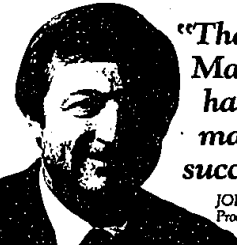
OTHERS WHO use an oversized racquet on a regular basis give it rave reviews.

Fred Lewerenz from Farmington Hills said he was the first to use the oversized racquet in Michigan and in some out-of-state competition. "In the U.S. National regionals in 1984, I was the only one using it," Lewerenz said.

Lewerenz, who is an original inductee in the Michigan Racquetball Hall of Fame, has won nine Michigan state titles and five U.S. regional championships. He sees the oversized racquet becoming popular.

"It's just like the oversized racquet in tennis. It takes some time to adjust. There's not a tennis pro today who's not using at least a medium-size racquet."

Johnny Linden of Franklin is matter-of-factly in his assessment of the racquet. "I love it," Linden said. Linden plays with an oversized racquet at the One-on-One Athletic Club in West Bloomfield. "What it does for my swing is slow it down and gives me more control. I'm less erratic with it."

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