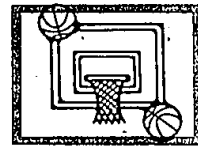


Sports

suburban life inside



Chris McCosky, Brad Emons editors/591-2312

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Senior power! Raiders claim district

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

North Farmington's Rick Anderson sat on the bench as the district championship medals were being passed out to his teammates.

"This feels great," he said. "This feels so great. THIS FEELS SOOOO GREAT!"

Ah, seniors. They can provide enough experience and leadership to take a little bit of talent a long way. Or, they can be royal pains in coaches' behinds. But after North Farmington's well-earned 52-55 victory against Milford Lakeland Saturday in the title game of the Class A district tournament at Walled Lake Central, coach Tom Negoshian had nothing but praise for his senior class.

"I just can't say enough about these seniors," he said. "I think we're 10-2 in our last 12 games this season. You have to credit our seniors for that. They stayed with our young players. A lot of times your seniors will quit on you once you're out of your league race (which North was early in the season). Not these guys."

The seniors, in particular Anderson, Mike Rudin, Jim Ragland and Paul

Warman, made all the right plays down the stretch to win for North its second consecutive District 30 championship — no other team has won that district in successive seasons.

THE WIN also earns North a rematch with powerful Southfield in the first round of the regional tournament at West Bloomfield (7:30 p.m. Wednesday). North shocked Southfield in the district finals last year.

The Raiders fell behind 13-4 in the first four minutes of the game but scrambled back to within three by the quarter's end. They fell behind 21-14 in the early stages of the second quarter. They led 32-29 by halftime.

Starting to get the idea? The Raiders never gave up.

The two teams raced neck and neck down the wire — the game was tied three times in the final quarter. The crowd began standing at the end of the third quarter and never sat down. The game's tempo was mercurial. Players on both teams played themselves into exhaustion.

But in the end, North was the team in control.

THERE WERE three series of plays in the final three minutes that broke Lakeland's back.

The first came with 2:52 left in the game. Ragland (a 6-0 point guard who scored 12 points, dished out six assists and grabbed seven rebounds) made a perfect pass through Lakeland's zone defense into the hands of Rick Karcher for an easy basket — North led 51-49.

After a Lakeland hoop, Rudin hit two free throws with 1:58 left to put North back up 53-51.

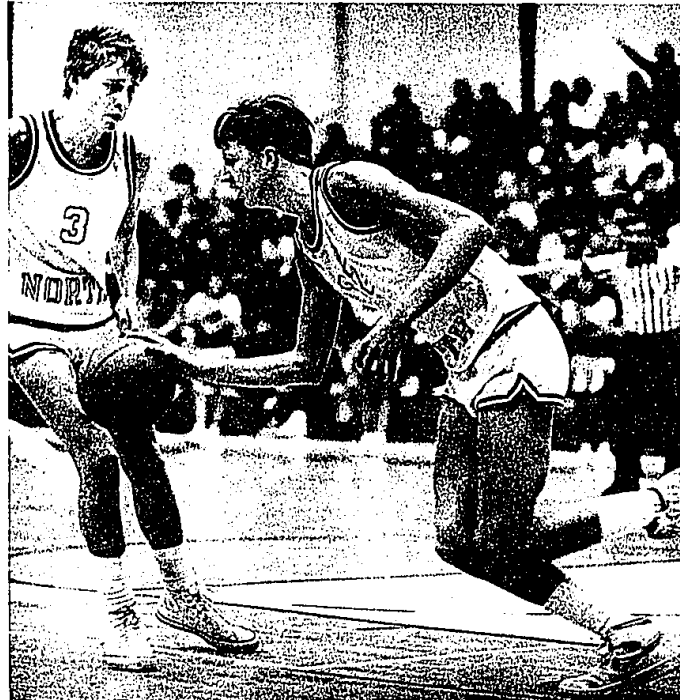
Following a missed free throw by Lakeland, Rudin and Anderson worked the backdoor play to perfection; Anderson scoring to make it 55-51.

North hit seven of eight free throws in the final 40 seconds to clinch it — Anderson hit three, Warman and Ragland two each.

Ah, those seniors.

As for Southfield, Negoshian said this: "Ralph Grubb (legendary high school coach whom Negoshian played for) once told me a story about districts — and he won 16 of them in a row. He said you've got to show up because you don't ever know what can happen in a state tournament game. We'll show up."

Good. North will enter that game with a 14-8 record.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Rick Anderson made the right plays at the right time for North in the district tournament Thursday and Saturday scoring 41 points in the two games.

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3rd quarter surge tips Vikes

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

Rick Anderson's suburban jam sparked North Farmington's 55-51 victory against Walled Lake Central Thursday night in the semifinals of the Class A district basketball tournament at Central.

The two Western Lakes teams were exchanging baskets at a rather dull pace until late in the third quarter — the time of Anderson's suburban jam.

A pair of hoops by Paul Warman perched North up 35-32, still a ho-hum affair and anyone's ballgame.

Then Anderson made a steal at half court and bolted to the hoop with two Central players in hot pursuit. Anderson (not exactly high enough) and slammed the ball onto the rim (not exactly clean enough). While the referees were whistling a foul on the play, Anderson's dunk was spinning around inside the rim.

It swirled through — the suburban jam (not to be confused with a city jam, which is slammed through the rim directly to the floor).

Despite the aesthetic differences, Anderson's jam had the same effect as any backboard-shattering city jam: It brought the crowd to its feet and raised the game's intensity level.

THE HOOP and subsequent free throw gave North an eight-point lead it would never completely relinquish.

"The kids were real uptight," said North coach Tom Negoshian. "Especially Rick. He played very tentative. But down the stretch he pulled the game out for us, that was winning time and he was there."

With two minutes left in the game, Central pulled within a basket, 46-44. Negoshian called time out and set up a special out-of-bounds play. As diagrammed, Anderson hit Chuck Howard with a perfect pass inside for an easy basket — a backbreaker for Central.

Howard, who scored 12 points on the night and led the team in rebounding, added two more free throws down the stretch. North connected on seven of eight free throws in the final 1:02 to help seal the win. (The team connected on just 16 of 29 free throws on the night, however. Central hit seven of 13.)

Anderson's 18 points led North. Warman added 13 and Mike Rudin a much-needed eight points.

Mike Kohler and Daran Edmonds each scored 14 to lead Central (11-11). Both players fouled out in the final quarter.

CC blitzes Stevenson at Churchill

By Brad Emons
staff writer

Redford Catholic Central got right to the point Friday night.

Switching from off-guard to the point slot mid-way through the second quarter, junior guard Lance Vaccarelli went on a tear and led the Shamrocks to a convincing 69-53 district basketball victory over Livonia Stevenson in the Class A championship game at Livonia Churchill.

It was CC's 11th district crown under veteran coach Bernie Holowicki, who made the change after Stevenson had pulled within three, 18-15, on a Chip Finnegan basket with 5:53 left in the half.

Vaccarelli, who flip-flopped positions with teammate Sean McClorey, scored a game-high 23 points. McClorey, bombing away from his new wing spot, added 13 and Brian Dugas, on the opposite wing on CC's new offensive alignment, contributed 12.

"I didn't like the way we were looking — their zone gave us problems early," said Holowicki. "We had fooled around in practice with Lance at the point so I just decided to try something different."

"I think it just broke the game open and we scored about nine or 10 straight points."

VACCARELLI, a 6-2 junior, poured in nine points during the final five minutes of the first half to lift CC to a 36-25 halftime lead.

In the third quarter, Vaccarelli hit four straight jumpers as CC increased its advantage to 19. The Shamrocks then coasted during the final period of play.

"That one spurt Lance really looked tough," said Holowicki. "When he got to the point position he started opening things up for Sean, Brian and even Paul (Tavanna) inside. We were able to penetrate more (against Stevenson's defense) with Lance." Stevenson coach Jim McIntyre was impressed by CC's outside marksmanship.

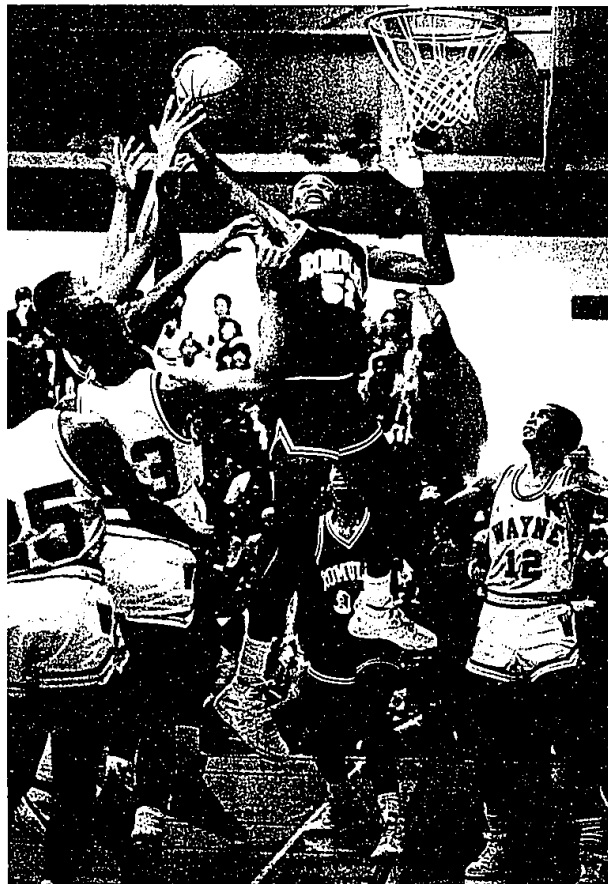
"In the third quarter Vaccarelli started slipping through the seams of our zone," he said. "And they started shooting well from the outside. They really didn't hurt us inside, but they made their outside shots count."

The win puts CC (16-6) against Detroit Mackenzie in Tuesday's regional at West Bloomfield.

"Mackenzie is one of the premier teams in the state," Holowicki said. "They're very talented. We're going to have to be up and play a good game."

ASKED IF VACCARELLI would be running CC's offense to start Tuesday's game, Holowicki said: "We'll probably practice on it more. The kids liked it."

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STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

All-American Terry Mills leaps high for a rebound in Romulus' thrilling 83-92 double-overtime win against Wayne Memorial Thursday night.

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Romulus-Wayne: Mills scores 37 in heartstopper

By Brad Emons
staff writer

Wayne High's basketball team turned in a David-like performance Thursday night, but couldn't quite slay Goliath. Wayne finally succumbed in the second overtime to 6-foot-10 Terry Mills and Romulus, 93-92.

Despite the loss, it may have been the Wayne's finest two hours of basketball in the school's history.

Conceding an average of five inches per man, the Zebras battled the state-ranked and giant Eagles tooth and nail for 38 minutes.

"I know Wayne's not that big, but I swear they look bigger when they're on the court," said a haggard Romulus coach Al Wilkerson. "Wayne is one hell of a team. Give them credit. They won 18 games this season."

"They play bigger than they are and they're very disciplined and well coached."

The nearly 2,000 fans who crammed into every nook and cranny in Wayne's new Alumni Arena almost witnessed of the upset of the season.

BUT IN the end it was Mills, one of the nation's premier big men, who made the difference.

He scored a game-high 37 points, including all of the Eagles' 11 points in the second overtime. He also added 14 rebounds and six blocks.

"We were just going to play our normal game with a few new wrinkles," said Wayne coach Chuck Henry. "We were going to him Mills, his slam dunks and blocked shots."

"We had our chances and our kids played well."

A goaltending call on Romulus' Keith Samuels with only five seconds left in regulation time sent the game into overtime at 72-all. (Alvin Allen got credit for the basket.)

In first overtime, Romulus jumped out to a quick four-point lead, but Wayne kept answering behind the play of 5-9 point-guard Spence Williams, who drove the Eagles crazy with his drives through the lane.

A MISSED Romulus free throw with

basketball

only 28 seconds remaining in the first OT set up a last second attempt by Wayne's Fred Horne, who missed from the corner at the buzzer.

"We had the shot and I thought it was going to be a storybook ending," Henry said. "We were going for the win or lose on a last-second shot. Our strategy was to run the clock down."

In the second OT, Mills reasserted himself by posting low, taking advantage of Wayne's pint-sized lineup after Mark Robinson (27 points), Mark Claiborne and Gary Hankerson had been banished to the bench because of fouls.

WITH 26 seconds to go, Mills made one of two free throws to put Romulus ahead, 91-90, but the Zebras turned the ball over just 10 seconds later and Mills earned a pair from the line with 11 seconds to go, upping the lead to three.

But as they had all night long, the Zebras came back with Boyce Jackson scoring with only five seconds to play.

Wilkerson, for some strange reason, stopped the clock by calling a timeout with only three ticks left. The Eagles, however, got the inbound pass in safely to Mills, who cradled the ball into his chest as the clock ran out.

"We made some critical mistakes, but anyone that plays basketball knows mistakes are part of the game," Henry said. "I thought we kept our mistakes to a minimum."

Wilkerson said his team's strategy was simple in the second overtime — get the ball to Mills.

"WE HAD to go to the money," said the Romulus coach. "We knew they had Robinson, Claiborne and Hankerson (fouled) out. They had no big people left. I think the difference is that we still had our star (Mills) and they didn't. 'Terry didn't shoot well, but he did it.'"

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