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Deepest low for Observerland hoops?

Teams depart early from state tourney

Putting the basketballs back on the shelf.

THE 1985-86 Observerland boys basketball season, which officially ended Wednesday night, earned itself a rather dubious distinction.

The season came to a close quicker than any other in recent history. The norm in Observerland is to get at least one team into the regional finals. Garden City reached that plateau last year, Plymouth Salem the year before, Redford Catholic Central the year before that.

This year only three teams escaped district tournaments. North Farmington and Plymouth Salem, two teams unranked in the area for most of the season, along with Catholic Central.

All three were bumped in the first round.

The point is obvious: The level of play in Observerland remains a cut (or two) below state-class teams. In other words, don't look for any area teams in next year's preseason top 25 in the state.

HOWEVER, just because the teams can't compete at the state level, doesn't mean we can't have some fun in our own area. That's just what happened this season.

The competition within the Western Lakes was intense, even though in the end, the favored teams — Farmington Harrison and Westland John Glenn — came out comfortably on top. The two out on quite a show in their championship match. Out of 17 games I covered this season, it was easily the most entertaining (of course, I didn't see Wayne vs. Romulus in the districts).

There were no sure bets in Western Lakes games this season. There were few sure bets in any Observerland games this year. In any case, Pete (give me parity or give me death) Roselle would have thoroughly enjoyed Observerland hoops this season.

Let's tie up all the loose ends and put this season to bed, once and for all.

THE FIGHT: Yes, there was a bit of a non-basketball related skirmish during the Romulus-Plymouth Salem regional game Wednesday night.

Brad Emons, who covered the game, reports that it was a lot of barking and not much biting. The fight started when Salem's Tom D'Angelo was pestering a Romulus player after a missed shot. The two bumped and exchanged words. The benches emptied, but no punches were thrown.

"The only scary thing was when Terry Mills came storming off the bench," Emons said. "I thought he might do some damage, but nothing happened."

Mills did some damage when play resumed, however. He rattled the backboard with a thundering two-handed dunk.

THE OVERACHIEVERS: 1. Plymouth Canton, 9-5 before Christmas, 10-6 after. 2. Wayne Memorial. They were the best team in the area (by far) and the tallest player was 6-2. 3. Livonia Churchill. Don Albertson may have put forth his best coaching effort of his career. His young team finished with a 12-9 record and was darn near impossible to beat at home. 4. Plymouth Christian. This team finished with a best-ever 17-4 record. Two years ago, the same group of players were 5-15.



Chris McCosky

The underachievers: 1. North Farmington. Perhaps this is unfair because the team started just two players with any extensive varsity experience. In the later part of the season, North was one of the top teams in the area — as was expected of them all along.

A lack of experience wasn't North's only problem. It was frustrating to watch the team waste the ability of Rick Anderson.

Anderson, arguably, was the best basketball player in Observerland this season (the coaches from the Mid-American Conference think so, anyway). He averaged between 10 and 15 shots per game with North. He rarely got the ball in a good position to score. Someone with his shooting ability should be taking 20 to 25 shots a game.

ANOTHER THING about Anderson. How come the guy never gets to the foul line? He's a 90 percent or better free throw shooter, but it seemed the only time he'd get to the line was to finish off a three-point play.

If it was frustrating for me, imagine how Anderson and North coach Tom Negashian must have felt.

More underachievers: Plymouth Salem comes to mind. They were a 12-11 team very typical of Observerland basketball. The Rocks were both very good and very bad this season.

They were one of the biggest teams in the area, but their big men (with the exception of Mike Hale) were relatively passive players. Injuries played a big role in keeping Salem near .500. At one point, the team played without three starters.

ALL-EXCITEMENT TEAM: These are the guys I most enjoyed watching this season. 1. Farmington's Bruce Kratt. 2. John Glenn's Steve Hawley. 3. CC's Paul Tavana. 4. Harrison's Ken George. 5. Canton's Tyrone Reeves.

It should be noted that I didn't see any of these guys play this season: Cordeil Robinson of Elgin, Mark Rogers, Mark Robinson or Spence Williams of Wayne, or Dennis Bushart of Redford Union.

All-Blue Collar team: These guys are hard-working and under-appreciated. 1. Mike Hale of Salem. 2. Rod Sarcevic of Harrison. 3. Paul Makara of Salem. 4. Ken Gendy of Churchill. 5. John Sheridan, Garden City.

Most improved players: 1. Joel Miles of Canton. 2. Will Lund of Harrison. 3. Kyle Mutz of Farmington. 4. Andy Gratz of Glenn. 5. Chip Finneran, Livonia Stevenson.

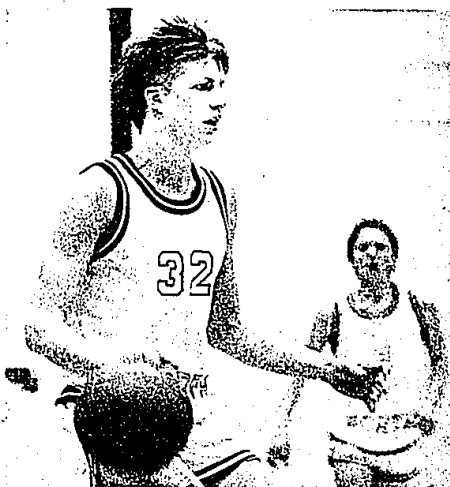
Lastly, I would be remiss if I didn't extend one last appeal to the Western Lakes athletic directors to reinstate the post-season league tournament.

You have the opportunity to stage a tournament to rival the highly-publicized PSL and Catholic League tournaments. Don't waste the opportunity. Listen to the coaches. They have put together a feasible plan. Talk to either Fred Thomann or Mike Teschman.



Was it parity or mediocrity? More than one critic of Observerland basketball asked that question this season. Teams like Harrison

and Salem (above) could be both very good or very bad at any given time.



Rick Anderson (left) and Bruce Kratt (right) were among the area's elite players this season. But like their teams, North Farmington and Farmington, respectively, the two had their ups and downs.



photos by RANDY BORST/astor photographer

College coaching vacancies keep rumor mill churning

By C.J. Risaak
staff writer

PERHAPS EVERYTHING was calm for too long.

For want of a better term, the recent spurge of collegiate basketball coaching vacancies is often just referred to as cyclic. That makes it sound as if, every couple of years or so, there will always be a sudden rash of openings. Like the changing of the seasons, supposedly.

The effects these possible changes will have locally can't yet be determined. But that doesn't mean loads of possibilities — some plausible, some definitely possible, and some totally ridiculous — aren't being scrutinized.

The first opening came at Eastern Michigan Unruh Jim, when coach Jim Boyce resigned in January. Assistant coach Ben Braun assumed command, and Braun continues to be a top prospect. His recruitment efforts — Brian

Nolan of Muskegon has committed, while Brad Soucy of Allen Park Inter-city Baptist and North Farmington's Rick Anderson are close to it — have helped solidify his chances.

Others submitting their applications are Charlie Parker, the Wayne State coach; Bill Morris, formerly of Hillsdale College and now at Fort Hayes State; and Bernie Fine, an assistant coach at Syracuse.

THE NEXT OPENING brought rumors that Oakland University's Greg Kampe might be departing. Bowling Green State coach John Weinert announced in January he would retire at the end of this season. Kampe, who played under Weinert, admitted he had applied for the job, but has since withdrawn his name from consideration.

WUSA's Parker, who was an assistant at BG under Weinert, is also interested in that job. So is Eldon Miller, who is leaving Ohio State.

Is this getting confusing? Well hold on, 'cuz there's more to come.

OU's Sue Kruszewski submitted her resignation as women's basketball coach earlier this month. Kruszewski, who coached the Lady Floreers to a 42-40 record over three years, cited burnout as her reason for leaving.

OU athletic director Paul Hartman is hoping to have a new coach by April 9, the signing date for high school players. As yet, no favorite for the job has emerged, but the possibilities . . .

Like Ed Kavanaugh, the highly-successful Schoolcraft College and Livonia Ladywood women's coach, Kavanaugh has guided SC to the Eastern Conference championship and Ladywood to the Class B state crown in the last year. So is he interested? "Not at all," said Kavanaugh, squashing that potential rumor quickly. "I'm happy where I am."

NOW TO THE MOST intriguing of

candidates: the current Oakland Community College mens basketball coach, Fred Thomann. Or at least he was the top man through Saturday.

Thomann coached boys' basketball at Plymouth Salem for 12 years, piling up a 227-49 record, before resigning after the 1983-84 season. He still coaches Salem's girls' team. And when an old friend, OCC coach Tom McPhillips, asked if he'd like to assist him prior to this season, Thomann agreed.

Little did he know what it would entail. Just before the end of the regular season, McPhillips was hospitalized.

Thomann was called on to take over. It wasn't an unpleasant task. OCC was one of the Eastern Conference's top teams. But it wasn't easy, either, particularly on short notice, with key tournament games ahead, and with Thomann committed to coaching the Salem girls track program.

OCC has since won the state junior college title and reached the NJCAA

Division II semifinals under Thomann's tutelage. With McPhillips' return in doubt, the question was apparent: Would Thomann take the position on a full-time basis?

"WE HAVEN'T made any kind of a decision on it," said OCC athletic director Pin Ryan Thursday. "We're going to wait until the season is over."

Asked if Thomann would be considered for — or would consider — the job, Ryan replied, "I don't really know, that's what I'm saying. At the end of the season, we'll sit down and talk about it."

Thomann was no more revealing. Clouding the picture further was his background: He was the only high school coach considered for the EMU post before Boyce was selected, and he has shown an ability to coach women's basketball, too.

Which means he could be a candidate at EMU (again) or OU, as well as OCC

— couldn't he?

"I haven't had time in the last three weeks to think about any openings," said Thomann. "It's been hectic. I've been tied up with OCC Thursday through Sunday for the past three weeks."

"I can honestly say I haven't given it much thought."

Still, Thomann could be considered at any of the three positions, although he said he had "not submitted my name for any position."

AND YET . . .

"The thought enters your mind," Thomann admitted. "I interviewed for the Eastern job when Boyce got it, and they asked me to interview. Now, in retrospect, I can understand why they were not going to hire a high school coach, especially after the Gerry Fausch thing at Notre Dame, when he couldn't do the job."

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