

Eagle's Kopicki eyes Celtics job

By C.J. Risak
staff writer

The phone call wasn't totally unexpected. Steve Kopicki knew some pro basketball team might call with an invitation to a rookie-free agent camp. His agent, Bob Fenton of Southfield, told him so.

And yet, knowing all this didn't lessen the shock when the call did come. Particularly considering the caller — the world-champion Boston Celtics.

"It's very exciting," the graduate of St. Mary's College of Orchard Lake said. "The call came out of the blue. I was ecstatic."

Kopicki, a 6-foot-11 forward, topped St. Mary's in scoring and rebounding in each of the past two seasons. Still, the team suffered through back-to-back losing campaigns. That, combined with its small-college stature, left Kopicki little hope any pro team would be interested.

"WHEN I GRADUATED from St. Mary's I was very much in limbo," he admitted. "There was some talk about possibly getting drafted in the late rounds, so I kept working out."

"That didn't happen, but my agent said I might get a shot with a European team."

Fenton was contacted by the Celtics a few weeks ago, so he sent a highlight tape. Apparently, the Celtics liked enough of what they saw of Kopicki to invite him to their rookie-free agent camp, which started Saturday and runs

through Wednesday. Kopicki hasn't any idea what the Celtics liked about him. "I really don't know what they expect of me," he professed. "I just have to be myself. I've got to believe going into camp that I've got everything to gain and nothing to lose."

"It's a big boost to my career, as far as advancing it."

KOPICKI is attempting to follow in his older brother's footsteps. Joe Kopicki starred at University of Detroit, then went on to play with the Washington Bullets and Denver Nuggets. He also had tryouts with Atlanta and Indiana. Joe played last year in Spain, and plans to return this fall.

"We've been working out together every day," said Steve. "He's got his little pointers, he's been to a few pro camps."

Kopicki flew to Boston Saturday with another local product, trying to earn a spot with the Celtics. Redford Catholic Central and U-D grad Greg Wendt, a 6-6 forward drafted in the sixth round. They included 15 other rookies and free agents, each with hopes of making the team.

Should it not work out for Kopicki, he thinks he can catch on with a team outside this country. Teams from Spain, Italy and Australia have expressed an interest. And if that doesn't work, at least Kopicki will have something to remember.

"How many can say they got a tryout with the world champions," he said.

Domke's optimism rekindled

THE SMILE that in the past always seemed to dominate Tim Domke's face was back.

How ya doin', coach?

"Super," was his stock answer. It was reassuring to find out it still is.

The last year hasn't been easy for the St. Mary's College basketball coach. Correction: basketball coach and athletic director. Update to previous correction: basketball coach, athletic director and dean of students.

Such a string of titles sounds formidable. And, as Domke discovered in the last year, the tasks were as tough as they sounded.

It was last summer that Domke was promoted to dean of students, a job he was honored to get and one he figured he could handle. With all his other duties, he knew it would be rough. What he didn't know was just how rough.

THINGS BEGAN to slip away from Domke at just about the time of his promotion. An illness — which he is still reluctant to talk about — hospitalized him for a large part of last summer.

The illness, combined with his new duties, forced Domke to rely heavily on second-year assistant coach Rich Zelenki to handle the basketball program. Zelenki did a commendable job recruiting impressive talent, but other problems cropped up.

Scheduling conflicts arose. What the Eagles ended up with, particularly in the early portion of their

schedule, was as treacherous as a blindfolded walk through a minefield.

Road dates at Indiana State, St. Bonaventure and Youngstown State — all NCAA Division I schools — combined with games against Wayne State and Saginaw Valley State made winning seem farfetched. Only four of St. Mary's first 17 games were at Dombrowak Fieldhouse.

"IF WE'RE .500 at Christmas," Domke said early in the season, "we'll be very fortunate."

The combined effect of these events — Domke's illness and new duties that limited the time he could devote to the team, the difficult early-season schedule, the loss of important players and the team's youth — kept the Eagles in a tailspin.

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An experienced team might have survived. St. Mary's had one senior.

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overcame any obstacle. By season's end, his trademark was severely tested. A campaign that had started with such promise, based on a recruiting class figured to be the best in school history, had crashed.

Such a series of catastrophes would cause others to consider retirement. But Domke's like a cork; you can push him down, keep him submerged for awhile, but sooner or later he'll bob back to the surface.

Summertime's an ideal remedy for problems like a disastrous basketball season. Domke seems to be healing, a process accelerated by another fine recruiting season from Zelenki.

BUT THE RECOVERY isn't complete. Domke's optimistic about the upcoming season, certainly, but his is a restrained optimism.

For one, he isn't as involved in the program as in past years when he literally was the program.

"I did about 2 percent of what I did before in recruiting," he admits. "I'm trying to do my best as dean of students. And Rich has done a great job (recruiting)."

If Domke learned anything from last season, it's to rely more on his

help. Namely Zelenki, who has now been elevated to co-coach. "He deserves it," Domke says.

And yet, it seems Domke is reluctant to part with his basketball responsibilities. He harbors no fears or jealousies toward Zelenki. He's convinced his former assistant can handle the job.

IT'S JUST that Domke still loves the game, and he can foresee his coaching involvement gradually decreasing. Particularly if St. Mary's goes ahead with plans to join a new athletic league, called Southern Michigan Athletic Conference.

That would mean adding at least three more sports to St. Mary's program. Which, in turn, would further burden Domke in his role as AD.

Not that it's a responsibility Domke is dodging. More than anything, he'd love to see St. Mary's end his sports program to include soccer and baseball and, yes, women's sports.

His goal is simple: more sports means more publicity for St. Mary's. That would increase public awareness in the school, which should lead to higher enrollment. And, in an upwardly spiraling cycle, that should put more dollars into the sports budget.

Bigger budget, more scholarships. Which translates into more quality basketball players. Should such a goal be realized, Domke won't be concerned with who's on the schedule. His Eagles won't be manhandled by the Indiana States and St. Bonaventures; they'll be beating them.

sports shorts

HARRISON SOCCER PRACTICE

Practice for the Farmington Harrison boys soccer team will begin at 8 a.m. Monday, Aug. 11, at the high school. Any Harrison boy grade 9-12 may attend.

The team has a new coach, Glenn Breuban replaces Harry Swysan.

HARRISON GIRLS BASKETBALL TRYOUTS

Any Farmington Harrison girl (grades 9-12) interested in playing girls basketball next fall should report to the Harrison gym at noon Aug. 11. Tryouts will be held from 12-2 p.m. Monday through Friday, Aug. 11-15.

For more information, call coach Chris Lessnau at 561-4855.

FARMINGTON GIRLS SWIM PRACTICE

Ross Bandy is the new girls swim coach at Farmington High. He is inviting all girls interested in swimming with the Falcons to attend a team meeting at 2 p.m. Monday, Aug. 11, at the Farmington pool. Bandy was the Farmington boys swim coach last year.

COACHES SOUGHT

The Farmington Public School District is accepting applications for non-teaching coaching positions for the 1988-1989 school year in the following sports:

The bad news is that St. Mary's College lost four players — including two starters — from a basketball team that suffered through its poorest season.

Gone are forwards Steve Kopicki, the team's leading scorer and rebounder, Gary Pederson and Mike Belczak, and guard Erich Hartnett. Kopicki's co-guard, and Pederson with this fall.

Hartnett, a junior from Plymouth Salem, and Belczak, a junior from Redford St. Agatha, have transferred. Hartnett's going to University of South Florida and Belczak's headed to University of Michigan-Dearborn.

Now for the good news: The players recruited by co-coach Rich Zelenki are billed as more-than-

able replacements. Not as future help, mind you, but as immediate contributors.

THAT'S BECAUSE five of the recruits linked by Zelenki are experienced collegiate players. Earlier this year, Jon Bow and Mo Seward of Delta Community College and Clarence Jones of Scholcraft College were signed.

Zelenki has added two other JC standouts: Bradley Turner, also out of Scholcraft, and Dave Lysteria of Michigan Christian College.

"We've always had a lot of success with junior college players," said St. Mary's coach Tim Domke. "They've all had good high school careers, but for one reason or another weren't picked up by major colleges. They bring in a different perspective. You get a better player,

more mature and more experienced."

Bow, a 6-foot-5 forward, averaged 18 points and 11 rebounds while earning all-Eastern Conference first-team honors for DCC. He was also all-state, all-region and DCC's most valuable player.

Seward, a 6-5 forward, complemented Bow well, averaging 13.4 points and 13.1 rebounds while earning all-conference honors at DCC. Both players will have two years of eligibility remaining.

JONES GARNERED 16 points and seven assists per game as SC's point guard. His signing, combined with the addition of Gregg Spraggins — a Michigan Christian transfer who becomes eligible this season —

and the return of Lance Davis makes guard a strength for the Eagles.

Turner was a highly regarded 6-7 forward while at SC. He collected 17 points and 12 rebounds per game for the Ocelots before joining Jones as an academically ineligible last January.

Lysteria, a 6-4½ forward, helped MCC post a 26-3 record last season with 14 points and seven rebounds per game. He was selected to the NJCAA all-tournament team.

Zelenki has also signed Brandon Neely from Detroit East Catholic. The 6-10 guard averaged 17 points and six assists a game in leading East Catholic to a Class D state title. Neely earned Class D all-state and all-Catholic League first-team honors.

LEGAL NOTICE CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

The Department of Housing and Urban Development has advised the City of Farmington Hills that it is entitled to an additional \$55,000 of federal money for the 1986-87 Community Development Block Grant Program Year. These funds have been authorized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development under Title 1 of the Housing and Development Act of 1974 and 1977 as amended. This money will be used for the Housing Rehabilitation Program. On or about August, 1988, the City of Farmington Hills will request release of funds from the U.S. Department of HUD and comments will be accepted through August 20, 1988.

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Publish August 4, 1988

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