



Chris McCosky

Maligned Lady Hawks don't deserve the abuse

IT'S TIME WE tackle the big question. Right away. I want to wait until the end of the season to do this, but I've been fed by some very disturbing, very aggravating occurrences.

Should the powers-that-be sack the Farmington Harrison girls basketball program?

Yes, the team has lost a state-record 72 consecutive games. A win this season does not appear likely. The team has lost by scores of 65-2, 64-2 and 105-15 this season. Coaches throughout the Western Lakes Activities Association feel playing Farmington Harrison is a complete waste of time. Others think it is dangerous and counterproductive.

Recently a columnist in a Northville newspaper made the following assumptions about the Harrison program:

- That the Hawks should be renamed the pigeons.
- That the Hawks are playing to lose so that they can own the national record for consecutive losses. "Why would anyone want to practice, and then play a game where the object is to lose?" the columnist asks. Later, "any athlete worth her salt would be appalled that the Hawks are now playing to lose, rather than to win."
- That something called "the Western Lakes Activities Association director" should end the Hawks' season now, "before the record is set."
- That the Hawks are "somehow damaging women's athletics on the whole."

THIS WAS THE single most uninformed, inaccurate, absurd piece of journalism I've seen since a local columnist berated the cheerleaders at a private Christian school for wearing below-the-knee-length skirts. The Hawks are playing to lose? Give me a break. That's like saying General Custer intentionally got massacred at Little Big Horn so he could get into the history books.

The person who wrote this column has never seen the Hawks play and never talked to anyone involved with the Hawks program.

I have seen the Hawks practice. I have been to the Hawks' practices. I have talked on numerous occasions to the coach and the athletic director. Here, then, are some truths about the Harrison girls basketball program.

• There are 10 girls on the varsity team and 11 more on the freshman team. Those numbers are up considerably from past years. There is one senior and five juniors on the varsity. The other 15 players are underclassmen.

• All 21 players, not to mention the 50-plus players in the East Middle School basketball program that feeds into Harrison, have one singular goal: to turn the Harrison basketball program around.

• To achieve that goal, the current varsity team practices Monday through Friday 2:30-4:30 p.m. and 7-8 p.m. Monday and Wednesday nights.

• It was the girls' idea to practice the two extra nights, said coach Jim Neve, who is equally committed to turning things around. "We work on our offense and defense and conditioning during the day, then we just work on individual skills at night."

• Fifteen of the players will attend a basketball camp next summer, and Neve is trying to organize a summer basketball league for the lower division teams in the area.

THESE ARE not the types of things associated with teams whose sole intent is to lose. But the Hawks still have much to overcome.

You think the team is maligned by the out-of-town media and league coaches? You should see how it is treated at Harrison. Neve says his

girls basketball team is treated like a "second-class" citizen. He's being conservative. The team is treated like dirt. The Hawks must share their after-school practice time (and space) with the pom-pom squad, the cheerleaders, the soccer team, the boys basketball team and even the football team.

Then there is the abuse dished out by some of the students. "It's terrible," said team captain Maryann Cundy. "We get ripped on all the time from kids in class. They always ask why did we get beat so bad. What am I supposed to say? We want to make that work for us, though. That's part of the reason we want to win so bad."

Like every team member I have talked to, Cundy does not view herself or her team as losers. The negative forces serve only to bond the team to its goal.

CUNDY is also a perfect example of the type of basketball player Harrison has had the past three seasons. She never even thought about playing basketball until her sophomore season. The first time she stepped onto a Western Lakes court, she was competing against players who had been playing since the fifth and sixth grade.

This year's Harrison team is the equivalent of a freshman team in terms of basketball experience. The two previous teams were worse.

That, happily, is starting to change. There are players in the program now with the potential to be outstanding basketball players. Laura Blalock, a 5-10 sophomore, and Lanelle Schumaker, a 5-11 ninth grader, could provide the Hawks with a formidable inside game in a couple of years. Darel Pazel is another promising 5-10 freshman. The freshman team is 3-2. The leaders of next year's team will be point guard Lesley Devine, Kris Waldmann, Blalock and Tracey Radke. Karen Najarria, a freshman, has played on the varsity all season.

These players are all raw and need a great deal of work. But they have proven that they are willing to do the work. And already there have been signs of improvement.

"THESE GIRLS have learned so much. I wish people could be here and see it," Neve said. "Leslie Curtis came in here and could not shoot the ball to the basket from four feet away. Now, she can make four of 10 from the free throw line. Now that may sound dumb to some people, but to me and to Leslie Curtis it means a great deal. It makes her very happy that she can see that much improvement. It makes her work that much harder."

"I wish you could have been on the bus ride home with us last Thursday (after a 71-23 loss to Walled Lake Western). You would have thought we won the game. The girls were happy because we played with them against their first team, for two solid quarters. The attitude here is great, and I know that we will win a game. Soon."

The bottom line is this: There are enough girls now to have a program. The girls in the program seem genuinely committed to playing basketball. They want to play basketball. And they have as much right to keep on playing basketball as any team in the country. People forget that North Farmington and Bishop Borgese recently had winless seasons, and both of those teams have managed to turn things around.

"When I heard they were going to cancel the program, I got really mad," said Cundy. "I was so excited to play my senior year, and I was really sad when they said they were going to cancel it. I felt like they gave up on us."

Get off these girls' backs and let them play.

Community college sports?

Continued from Page 1

There are a lot of kids out there who find academics through athletics," argues Pin Ryan, athletic director at OCC. "A whole new world opens up for them. So many kids come in here and get adjusted and go on."

"Kids who either lack ability, grades or money — that's where we help."

Mary Gans, Schoolcraft's AD, agrees. "So many of these kids may not have gone on in school without athletics. And we are paid back. We're paid back in dollars — tuition and state aid. We're paid back in salvaging students who might not have gone on (for an education) otherwise. And we're paid back in recognition for the school."

GANS SAID tuitions of incoming athletes help defray the cost of the program. Many of those athletes receive financial grants, but those come from fund-raisers, not from

the school's general fund. In addition, any state aid the athletes qualify for brings more money into the school.

"Our athletic program is virtually self-supporting," estimated Gans.

But recognition? How can sports that attract such little attention provide any recognition for the school? Basketball players at the University of Michigan pay off their scholarships by attracting thousands to games. And U-M is constantly and extensively covered by the media.

"How much ink does OCC's athletics get compared to other programs?" queried Ryan.

And yet, neither the publicity nor the money an athletic program generates is the main purpose for community college sports, according to Gans and Ryan.

The student-athlete is.

Next: the community college athlete.

Engineers 3rd in tourney

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

The Little Caesars Junior Invitational Hockey Tournament served a dual purpose last weekend.

Not only did it showcase the state's Junior A-level hockey, it also served as a preview to the Plymouth-based Hennessey Engineers' North American Junior Hockey League home opener Friday against the Detroit Falcons.

Compumare, one of the four teams in the NAJHL, won the Little Caesars tournament with a fight-filled 8-3 win Monday night against Oshawa, a Canadian Junior B team.

"There was a huge brawl," said Engineers' coach A.J. Baker. "I tell you, Compumare won the game, but Oshawa won the fight."

Mike Bovack, who tallied six goals and four assists in four tournament games, led Compumare in the finale with a pair of goals. Livonian Matt Wiljnan also scored.

Baker's Engineers took the tournament's bronze medal, beating the Falcons 5-2. The Falcons had defeated the Engineers earlier in the tournament 6-3.

"The difference was our goalie," Baker said of netminder Doug Brown. "The first night he was incredibly nervous. They scored a couple of weak goals early that were the difference in the game. He played extremely confident on Monday. He got in the way of a lot of shots and he was controlling the rebounds."

ON MONDAY, the Engineers got goals from Larry Piliut, Dan Prunty, Chris Belhart, Bryan Krygier and Mark Harmes.

"I really wanted to be in the finals," Baker said. "The Falcons were tied by the Senior Team (Hussey) 7-7. We had to beat Oshawa and we would have been in."

But Oshawa hammered the Engineers 8-3. There were 63 penalties called in the game; the Engineers were assessed 72 minutes, Oshawa

88 minutes.

A pair of Engineers were named to the all-tournament team: J. Jewitt, who scored three goals in the tourney, and defenseman Todd Tamburino.

Plymouth native Steve Dawson of the Falcons, Brent Westfall of Oshawa, Bovack and Jim Dubke of Compumare were also named to the all-tournament team.

Here are the tournament standings: Compumare, 4-0; Oshawa, 1-2-1; Engineers, 2-2; Falcons, 1-2-1; Junior B All-Stars, 0-3; Mason Seniors, 1-0-2.

The Engineers are 4-2 on the season and 2-0 in the NAJHL.

ENGINEERS NOTES: They are expecting a big crowd at the Plymouth Cultural Center for Friday's opener (game time 8:20 p.m.). Not only is it the Hennessey Engineers' first appearance in their new arena, but they are playing the Detroit Falcons, a team with numerous local ties.

Six Falcons are from the Plym-

outh-Canton community: Steve and Brian Dawson, Tom Yawkey, Tony Esser, Billy Pye and Sean Wordon. The question is: Who'll have the largest contingent of fans at the game, the home team or the visitors?

"I think we'll have a strong following," Baker said. "I've been around here long enough where people know about us. I think it'll be a real good game, though. Of the four teams in the league, these two are the closest match."

Another reminder that the Engineers are featuring Score-O between the first and second periods. Prizes include Ted Wing tickets, autographed sticks and dinners for two at area restaurants.

The NAJHL got some good news out of Chicago last week. The erstwhile Chicago Patriots, who were to be the league's fourth team, have been replaced by the Chicago Cougars. The Patriots lost two coaches within a week of the season opener with the Engineers.

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