

Here's to our heroes forever unsung

UNSUNG HEROES. Sounds funny. It seems to imply that there are heroes people sing about. Tell you what: If I ever sang a song about a hero, the guy would probably sue me for defamation of character.

But there are sports figures out there who deserve notice. Who deserve attention. Who deserve to be sung about.

And I'm just the guy to name their tune.

Granted, some of the subjects of this ballad would rather not be. Such modesty is just one more impressive element in their character.

So here goes: an O&E listing of fall's unsung heroes, listed by sport.

FOOTBALL — So many choices, but one that really deserves the title:

Icy St. Mary's dumped

What started out with such promise has suddenly soured.

St. Mary's College of Orchard Lake won six of its first seven games this basketball season. But then came a nine-game stretch of games against teams like Ball State, Eastern Michigan, University of Detroit, Saginaw Valley State, Northern Indiana, Oakland University, etc.

The result is probably not too surprising. SMC has lost four straight, the last two at EMU Saturday and at SVSC Monday.

The one element lacking in each of the last two Eagle defeats was shooting. In Monday's 76-70 loss at SVSC, SMC hit just 41.9 percent of its floor shots (26-of-62). The Cardinals, by comparison, earned 55 percent of their shots (28-of-50).

In Saturday's 77-68 loss at EMU, the Eagles hit 21-of-54, just 38.9 percent. The Hornets made 24-of-48, 50 percent.

WHEN A TEAM that relies on its outside shooting is missing, victories are hard to come by. Oddly enough, SMC's three-point shots have been falling. The Eagles made nine-of-14 against SVSC and six-of-11 vs. EMU for a combined 60 percent.

In the loss to the Cardinals, SMC started sluggishly and trailed 34-25 at the half. The Eagles regrouped and, behind the scoring of guards Greg Spraggins (18 points) and

Ryan O'Rourke, a junior at Troy. What an athlete. He plays one half of football for the Colts in a game that was already a rout when he made his appearance, and eight weeks later his name was still in the news.

All sorts of players are labeled "franchise" or "the key," as if their teams couldn't win without them. But O'Rourke did more off the field to affect Troy's football fortunes than most of his teammates did on it. All this from a kid who transferred out of Birmingham Brother Rice, which led to a lawsuit and all sorts of other football fun.

SOCCER — Got to go for a name player here. And what better soccer name is there than Ya Mok? Detectors often claim that soccer is a



C.J. Risak

game played by foreigners, and that's why it can't get a following in this country. Well, this all-Eccentric sophomore forward (21 goals, 13 assists) from Southfield puts that claim to shame with his half-of-a-game name, Ya Mok!

Honorable mention for best soccer name: Oakland University's Ender Hissoglu and Gray Halzel (the latter sounds like a conflict in colors).

SWIMMING — There are a lot of high school sports where coaching is more organizing than actually teaching (golf and tennis, for example). That isn't the case in swimming, and exceptional coaching was one very big factor in Livonia Stevenson's superb showing at last weekend's state finals.

So this well-earned, pat-on-the-back goes to the coach who guided the Spartans to their third-place finish: Doug Buckner.

What a job he did. And what's more amazing is that he still found

time for other activities. Stevenson faced a tough challenge from North Farmington for the Western Lakes' title, and the very week of the league meet Buckner was up north, deer hunting. Strange antics, but he knew what he was doing — the Spartans won easily.

GOLF — This is a personal choice, and since this is a purely subjective listing, it fits right in. Erica Zonder of North Farmington, OK, so girls golf is a springtime sport. But Zonder bucked that trend by playing for North's boys team. And playing well; she was consistently among the top five scorers on a very good Raider team.

But what impressed me was her intense attitude. She played her first-ever O&E women's tournament last August and had a two-under-par 34 after nine holes. But her game and six-stroke lead deserted her over the back nine. She shot a 43 and finished second with 77.

She handled her bitter disappointment like any fiercely competitive golfer would. "That's the way it goes," she remarked with a shrug.

OUTDOORS — This belongs to a man who has single-handedly rewritten the laws governing hunting and fishing: Coleman Young. That's right, his honor the mayor.

Remember, it was Coleman who boasted to the media about the fish he caught and then laughed when asked if he had a license. And it was Coleman who refused to take guns out of the hands of Detroiters because they need them for protection from the great white suburbanite hunters, who are trained to use automatic weapons by the Ku Klux Klan on weekend excursions into the woods.

The man obviously has a firm grasp on problems facing outdoorsmen everywhere.

TENNIS — History can be cruel even to the best of athletes. Winners are remembered. Who finishes second is quickly forgotten. Bloomfield Hills' Lahser unfortunately belongs to the latter.

The Knights' four singles players all reached their Class A match finals. Two (No. 3 Nicole Ashare and No. 4 Beth Rauti) won titles. And their No. 1 doubles team made it to the semifinals. Still, Lahser couldn't win. The Knights finished second by a point to perennial champ Grose Pointe South. It was the second-straight year Lahser came home with the runners-up trophy.

CROSS COUNTRY — Geez, another coach has to be honored here. And what better name than that of Bryan Westfield of state champion

— for now, anyway — Ann Arbor Pioneer.

Westfield did what any coach with a team bordering on greatness would have done: He went after the last piece of the puzzle. That piece happened to be Rachel Mann, formerly of Plymouth Canton. Mann trained with Westfield's Ann Arbor Track Club last summer, then she and her father moved in with another Ann Arbor family.

She competed with Pioneer this season (ignoring an MHSAA rule regarding transfers) and was the team's fifth-best runner, placing 59th at the state finals. If Mann's eligibility holds up, then Westfield will have brought new luster to the cliché, "Win at any cost."

GIRLS BASKETBALL — This goes to all the girls who have valiantly toiled at Farmington Harrison. The Hawks have a streak going; unfortunately, it's one in futility. They haven't won a game since Alice Short finished her career, something like 81 losses in a row. Short, by the way, is returning for her senior season at Northern Michigan, which she led in scoring last year.

Rebuilding a program is never easy, but my hat's off to any girls who can stick with a season full of disappointment after disappointment.

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