

Sports

Chris McCosky, Brad Emons editors/591-2312



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Region title eludes Rocks

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

Mike Hale's eyes were swimming in tears. He tried to speak but the words refused to leave his throat. His immense heart probably got in the way.

Rick Taylor wore an angry expression on his face as he walked out of the locker room. The last thing he wanted to do was discuss the basketball game with reporters. Yet, the first thing he had to do was discuss the game with reporters.

Bob Brodie, the ever-calm Plymouth Salem coach, remained ever-calm afterwards. He was proud of his players; they had done all he had asked them to do. They had achieved, in fact, more than he had a right to expect.

Also, Plymouth Salem did not win its first Class A regional basketball championship since 1974. A dead-eyed group from Ann Arbor Pioneer carried off the prize Friday night with a wild 83-74 victory before a large and rowdy crowd at Eastern Michigan University's Bowen Field House.

THESE ARE two things you should know about this game before we go any further: Pioneer about the basketball with uncanny proficiency and Salem missed free throws with uncanny deficiency.

Pioneer made 31 of 55 shots from the perimeter (56 percent). The team hit nearly 60 percent in the second half. Senior Keith Wade scored 32 points on the night, making 11 of 18 shots from the floor and 10 of 14 from the free-throw line.

"We said before the game that Pioneer would have to beat us from the outside," Brodie said. "They didn't beat us, they waxed us. It was just unbelievable how well they shot. It didn't matter what we did to try to stop them, and believe me, we did everything."

Now, about Salem's problems at the free throw line. The Rocks could connect on just 18 of 32. They missed six critical free throws in the fourth quarter. Two of those were front ends of one-and-

one opportunities.

"No question, the free throws killed us. We made a great run at them, had all kinds of opportunities to close the gap, but the things we did weren't effective because we couldn't hit the free throws," Brodie said.

THERE WAS reason for Salem's misfirings and it wasn't that both hands were around its neck — it would be foolish to label the Rocks as choke artists.

Consider:

The Rocks were forced to play catch-up basketball from the second quarter to the final buzzer. Taylor, Salem's sharpshooting 6-7 center, picked up three fouls in the first six minutes of the game and spent a lot of time alongside Brodie.

Pioneer led by six at halftime, by eight after three quarters. With less than six minutes left in the game, Pioneer led by 13, 64-51. A team with a propensity to choke would have done so at that point. Salem chose to come alive.

HALE PROVIDED the initial spark. He dove to the floor to rescue a loose basketball and came up swinging with Pioneer Corey Taylor. It was Hale's third skrimish in three games at Bowen Field House dating back to last year's regional loss to Romulus. This one lit a fire beneath the Rocks.

Salem ran off a 15-7 spurt in the next three minutes to cut the lead to seven, 73-66 with 3:13 left. In so doing, the Rocks spent a huge amount of energy and fatigue began to show.

In a six-second span, Salem missed two free throws and seven close-range shots. Finally, with 2:16 to play, Taylor banked one in to close the gap to five.

It was Salem's last gasp, however. Pioneer scored two unanswered baskets, then hit four free throws in the closing seconds to secure the win.

BRODIE TALKED afterward about the free-

ned fourth quarter and about the fatigue it brought his players.

"Early on, the tempo of the game was slow and I thought that was to our advantage," he said. "But as the game wore on, and we had to play catch-up with them, we were forced to up the tempo. We are not a good pressing team. We made our run but the fatigue factor did set in. We are not in poor shape but our big guys certainly had to play a full game today."

Pioneer coach Harry Hayward said, "Our last three games have been frenzied. This wasn't anything new to us. We did throw the ball away one too many times. We weren't as under control as we would have been. But we prevailed through it all. Hey, tournament games are never easy to win."

This was Pioneer's first regional tournament win in 14 years. Supplementing Wade's 32 points for Pioneer were Donald Vann with 17 points and George Freeman with 14. Pioneer, 15-8, will play Battle Creek Central Wednesday in Charlotte in a Class A quarterfinal game.

DWARFED BY Salem's defeat was a 35-point, eight-rebound performance by Rick Taylor in just 21 minutes of work. At one point, Taylor had made 16 consecutive shots from the perimeter (11-for-11 Wednesday night and his first five Friday). His two-game output was 59 points and 17 rebounds. Nice way to cap a prep career.

Same for Hale. After scoring 26 points Wednesday, he tallied 23 Friday.

The Rocks finish with a 22-3 record, something to marvel at considering this same group of players, minus Taylor, accumulated 500 records the past two seasons.

"The first thing I told the kids was, 'You can't measure the success of the war by one battle,'" Brodie said. "This was a great season for us. These guys have stayed together for three years. They deserved the success they had this year."



BILL BRUESLER/staff photographer

Plymouth Salem's Rick Taylor closed out his prep career with a 35-point performance Friday night, but the Rocks lost to Ann Arbor Pioneer in the regional championship at EMU.

The big splash

State champs propel 1987 select team

By C.J. Rieck
staff writer

all-area swimming

BEST IN THE STATE. That is as difficult a goal to accomplish as any in sports. By season's end, only one team in each class can lay claim to the title. And in sports like swimming, at best only nine individuals (not including relays) can make such a boast in Class A.

This year, two of those are from Observersland. State champions are not common to this area; last year, Plymouth Canton's Andy Flowers captured the diving title, and in 1985 North Farmington's Brian Gols was a champion in the 100-yard butterfly.

This year, two swimmers finished first in their events. John Kovach of Redford Catholic Central churned to victory in the 100 freestyle and Mike Tumej of North took top honors in the 100 fly.

Fittingly, the two seniors led the Observer's all-area boys swim team for 1987. Their state meet heroics weren't limited to one event apiece; both also placed in the top six in the 200 free.

Other Observer-area swimmers did well, too. Three relays and three other individuals scored at the Class A state finals, and Redford Thurston's Dan Hayes took a third in the 100 fly at the Class B meet.

Livonia Stevenson coach Doug Buckler was named the Observer's coach of the year after guiding the Spartans to a Western Lakes Activities Association championship and a 13-1 dual-meet record.

Now for the Observer's top swimmers, in order of event.

STEVENSON, 200 medley relay: Joe Saunders, Steve Taormina, Chris Morasky and Jeff Albert combined to finish eighth in the state meet consolation finals (1:40.80). The Spartans splashed 13.4 dual-meet records.

Now for the Observer's top swimmers, in order of event.

JIM VLK, Farmington, 200 freestyle: A senior, Vlk displayed his talent at the WLLA championships, winning both

the 200 (1:46.60) and 100 (48.5) free events. Both were season bests, and qualified him for the state meet. Vlk missed by .07 of a second, of placing in the top 12 at state in the 100 free.

JOHN JENSEN, Westland John Glenn, 200 Individual medley: Jon, a senior, narrowly missed qualifying for the championship heat at state meet with a prelim time of 1:58.88 (the sixth-place qualifier went 1:58.52), a season's best in Observersland. Jensen finished eighth at state in the 200 IM in 2:00.07. Jensen was second to Tumej at the WLLA meet in the IM and won the 500 free in 4:51.67.

CHRIS MORASKY, Stevenson, 50 freestyle: This senior Spartan enjoyed a fabulous state final, scoring in all three events he swam. The WLLA champion in the 50 free, Morasky turned in a season-best 21.84 in the consolation finals at state to move up from 11th to eighth. Morasky also finished 12th in the 100 free at state, recording a season-best 48.38 in the prelims.

"He's an exceptional swimmer," said Buckler. "He had shoulder problems for three years and still swam, and did a great job. Without these problems, he probably would have been one of the best swimmers in the state. And I think he is one of the best swimmers in the state."

MARK MILLER, John Glenn, diving: Miller riled as the area's best diver, scoring a season-high 258.0 points. He finished second (to Walled Lake Central's Bruce Smith) in the WLLA meet, scoring 330.30 points.

MIKE TUMEJ, North Farmington, 100 butterfly: Tumej qualified second in the state prelims in 5:17.4, then shaved that time to 5:11.17 at the state title. A four-time all-area selection, the senior also finished second at the state meet in the 200 free (1:42.67). Tumej holds WLLA records in the 200 IM, 200 free and 500 free.

"He never lost a league meet race in four years," said North coach Loue Balogh. "He's the hardest worker I've ever coached. He has the desire and self-motivation that makes a great swimmer."



Mike Tumej, North Farmington; Bruce Goins, N. Farmington; Jim Vlk, Farmington

JOHN KOVACH, Redford Catholic Central, 100 freestyle: Kovach's state-meet performance stunned local observers. His 1:51.17 in the 100 free, putting him in an unfavorable outside lane. But Kovach beat the odds, going 48.91 to win the title. He also placed fourth in the 200 free (1:43.43). Kovach owns team records in five events and league marks in two.

His coach, De Lott's Yager, sounded similar to Tumej's coach in his praise: "He's the hardest working swimmer I've ever had. He's at the top three places at state every year."

RON ORRIS, Plymouth Salem, 500 freestyle: Orris qualified for state meet in three events, including the 500 free with a season-best 4:52.5. Orris placed second in the WLLA meet in the 500 (4:54.38) and was third in the 200 IM (2:03.62). He scored at state meet as a member of Salem's 400 free relay team, which placed 11th. And best of all for coach Chuck Olson, Orris is just a freshman.

"He's one of the top freshmen in the state," said Olson. "He's very versatile, a great competitor with leadership capabilities. He's got the right light for Salem swimming with Ron Orris."

JOE SAUNDERS, Stevenson, 100 backstroke: Saunders was the outstanding swimmer at the WLLA championships, winning two individual events in record times: the backstroke (55.14) and the 100 fly (52.23). At state, the junior placed 12th in the 100 back and was third in the 100 fly (51.80). Saunders was undefeated in dual meets in the backstroke this season.

"He's a great kid," said Olson. "An exceptional athlete and a hard worker. I'm looking forward to working with him next year."

STEVE TAORMINA, Stevenson, 100 breaststroke: This senior team captain led the top 10 state meet four straight years. He's the reigning WLLA champion in the 100 breast (1:03.78). Taormina also took third in the league in the 100 fly (54.92) and scored at state on Stevenson's medley relay.

"He is a true champion swimmer," said Buckler of Taormina. "I'm going to miss him a lot. Steve is one reason swimming has gotten better at Stevenson."

CATHOLIC CENTRAL, 400 free-relay: Matt Hopburn, Dan Cotnar and John Kovach teamed to finish fourth at the state meet in a season-best 3:14.48. The Shamrocks were also Catholic League champions in the 400 free relay.

Kovach's exploits are well-documented. Teal, a junior, was the league champ in the 50 (22.4) and 100 freestyle (48.5). Hopburn also took a third in the league in the 100 free (48.7) and 100 back (58.6). Cotnar, a senior, qualified for state in the 50 free (22.8) and recorded a personal-best 51.0 in the 100,

even though he didn't swim competitively until his sophomore year at CC.

DAN HAYES, Redford Thurston, at-large: Hayes, a junior, transferred in to Thurston this year from Pinckney, Pa. He made his impact immediately on the Eagles' swim program, earning Most Valuable Performer honors and setting TR-League records while winning the 100 fly and 200 free. He finished third in the Class B state meet in the 100 fly (52.88).

BRUCE GOINS, North Farmington, at-large: Goins, a junior, led off the Raiders' 400 free relay at state meet with a 52.3. That was just one of his many contributions during the season. Goins placed third in the 50 free (22.98) and fourth in the 100 fly (55.07) at the WLLA meet, and swam the 100 back throughout the season for North.

ANDY JACOBS, Catholic Central, at-large: Shamrock coach De Lois Yager called Jacobs "the most underrated swimmer in the area. He swims all strokes well and is only a 10th grader." Jacobs' best times were in the 200 IM (2:03.0) and the 100 fly (55.7).

PHIL BOCKETTI, Plymouth Salem, at-large: Bocketti was a valuable resource, particularly on the Rocks' relay teams. The senior co-captain swam a 49.3 split on Salem's 400 free relay at state meet, which finished 11th (3:19.0). He also swam a leg on the record-setting 200 medley relay (1:52.03), which placed second in the WLLA meet. Bocketti was fifth in the WLLA in both the 200 free (1:51.38) and 100 fly (55.27).

DON HARWOOD, Salem, at-large: The good news for Salem opponents is that Harwood, a senior co-captain, is the last of four brothers. Harwood has excelled for the Rocks, finishing second in the 100 back (57.44) and swimming on the 400 free relay team that was first in the WLLA (3:22.27) and 11th at state (3:19.0). Harwood also swam the 200 IM (2:06.2).

JOHN IRVINE, Salem, at-large: A junior, Irvine also swam on the WLLA champion 400 free relay team for Salem, and went 49.5 in his leg at state meet. Irvine placed third in the 100 free (49.6) and fourth in the 200 free (1:51.17) in the WLLA meet. Times that prompted team coach Chuck Olson to call him "the team's most improved swimmer." Indeed, Irvine slashed nine seconds from his 100 free time and 18 from his 200 free this season.

Honorable mention: Farmington Harrison: Scott Farabee, Brian Fitzpatrick, Jeff Bolla; Farmington: Brad Moore, Adam Krause, Scott Hawkins, G.T. Hall; North Farmington: Andy Graestain, Andy Fritz, Steve Tumej, Lou DeBarber; Plymouth Salem: Kevin Tusch, Kevin Koleski, Jeff Hester, Dave Miles, Geoff Taylor, Jon Hogwood, John Kim, Mike Hill; Plymouth Canton: Dean Roberts, Bryce Anderson, Bill Richter, Kevin Corley, Jim Walker, Brent Swartzwalter, Tom Horst; Livonia Stevenson: Bob Battico, Chuck Montgomerie, Greg Johnson, Doug Coleman, Mike Gonsky; Livonia Stevenson: Geoff Hutchison, Jeff Peterson, Scott Stachowiak, Jeremy Frazier, Leonard Frassetti; Bruce Madison; Westland John Glenn: Alan White, Dan White, Mac Birm, Mark Chery; Warren Memorials: Jim Davis, Jeron Bradley, Mark Mikula; Catholic Central: Jim Kovach, Alex Altner, Bill Mathews; Redford Thurston: Joe Burnett, Gordon Christian.



Joe Saunders Stevenson



Steve Taormina Stevenson



Chris Morasky Stevenson



Bruce Goins North Farmington



Dan Hayes Redford Thurston



John Irvine Salem



Jeff Albert Stevenson



Mark Miller John Glenn



John Irvine Salem



John Kovach Plymouth Salem



Ron Orris Plymouth Salem



Jon Teal CC



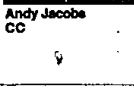
Matt Hopburn CC



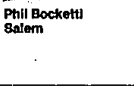
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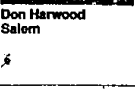
Dan Hayes Thurston



Andy Jacobs CC



Phil Bocketti Salem



Don Harwood Salem