

Sports

Brad Emons editor/591-2312



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Pitching strength lifts season hopes

By C.J. Risak
staff writer

If memory serves, there's little satisfaction to be culled from last year's baseball season for any of the three Farmington high schools.

North and Harrison did OK, if finishing 500 is acceptable. Certainly it was better than Farmington fared, with just two wins and a tie in 21 games.

The 1987 campaign commences Monday — if winter agrees to do part. All three teams are anticipating better tidings for this season. And all three teams are pinning their hopes on pitching, which seems to be the strongest element for each.

Such similarity should make for an interesting season. As for the Western Lakes Activities Association (WLAA) race, well, all three Farmington coaches agree that defending champion Westland John Glenn, a state semifinalist in 1986, is the team to beat.

Why? Pitching, of course; the Rockets have three hurlers returning.

Here's a preview of the Farmington schools.

NORTH FARMINGTON

The Raiders went 13-13 in 1986. If coach Irv Hertz has a large contingent of returnees, then North might be considered a challenger to Glenn for the Lakes Division title.

Alas, no such luck. "We've got some good athletes," said Horwitz, "but no experience. I figure we'll finish in the middle of the pack, third or fourth, unless we get lucky early."

baseball

As pessimistic as that may sound, the Raiders aren't talentless. They have enough to win their share of games without depending on luck, starting with senior lefthanded pitcher Riek Karcher and senior righthanded pitcher Rob Knapp. Horwitz calls Karcher "my big lefthander"; Knapp was all-division in '86.

There's more. Trent Hiner was all-Observer as a designated hitter a year ago. The senior slugger will play third base this season. Mark Taylor, a senior lefthander, adds depth to the pitching corps.

But then comes the drop-off. Not much experience left, and Horwitz has just five seniors. Jerry Haight is one of them; he'll play second base. Others with potential are junior shortstop Scott Simon, a part-timer last year; sophomore center-fielder Joe Sturtz, who played seven games in '86; sophomore catcher Gerry Hakala; and junior right-fielder Vane Hill, a transfer student.

The Raiders' shot at success hinges on how quickly they develop. "It's one of those things, I'm afraid to say something," said Horwitz. "If Karcher and Knapp throw well, we can have a respectable year. Still, I don't know if we can stay up with John Glenn."

FARMINGTON HARRISON

Harrison coach John Herrington

lost his two best everyday players to graduation — Brian Smolinski and Ken George — on a team that was just 13-13. Still, don't close the curtain on the Hawks' just yet.

Herrington has three experienced pitchers returning in junior righthander Jason Hicks, the team's top hurler last year; senior righthander Mark Schmidt, the No. 2 man on the pitching staff; and senior righthander Sam Rineer, who also filled in at third base and batted .356.

"Pitching-wise, we're OK," said Herrington, who guided the Hawks to the state finals in 1980 and 1985. "I don't know how well we'll hit the ball."

Rineer is the offensive anchor. Others Herrington figures to contribute are senior Gary Schwedt, a righthanded pitcher-first baseman; senior Mark Murray, a shortstop-outfielder-relief pitcher; senior Paul Cote, a catcher; senior Todd Kenyon, a second baseman; and junior Leo Devine, a shortstop who Herrington called "our steadiest fielder right now."

Still, there will be a lot of pressure on the pitchers to produce because it doesn't look like the hitters will consistently. "Our outfield is not experienced and we're not hitting the ball real well," said Herrington. "But we're looking real strong defensively."

"We'll be in the middle of the (WLAA) pack. I'd like us to do well in the league, then make a run in the tournament."

Harrison is the only Class B school in the WLAA, and Herrington figures the league race will go far in readying the Hawks for the state tournament. And should their bats heat up,



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Gary Schwedt gets in his cuts during an indoor batting practice for Farmington Harrison. When Schwedt isn't pitching, he'll be playing first base for the Hawks.

they won't be waiting for the Class B tournament to make their run.

FARMINGTON

Very little went right for Kevin Kamsman in his initial season as Farmington's coach. Sore arms decimated his pitching staff, and "we didn't hit very well as a team."

What's worse, the Falcons showed little interest in improving their

skills by playing summer league ball. Only three players extended their season beyond the high school campaign.

Still, Kamsman is hopeful that this season won't be a repeat of last year's disaster. "One thing I'd say about last year's record," he said. "It was bad from a won-lost record, and that's all people look at. But I had nobody quit, and we really hung together. We were in a lot of games

down the stretch."

Pitching controls the Falcons' fortunes. "If one or two pitchers go down, we have others who can fill in," said Kamsman. "Right now, I just hope our defense can do the job."

Leading the pitching staff is senior Steve Howell, a lefthander who was all-division at first base in '86; senior

Please turn to Page 4

Gunners, take aim! 3-point shot is here

GET OUT YOUR paint bucket and tape measure. The three-point shot is coming to Michigan high school basketball.

That's right, aspiring prep cage stars. No longer will you have to be overly concerned with mastering basic skills like dribbling in traffic. No more constant drilling on lay passes to big men posting up inside. Forget your growth (or lack of) problems. With the three-pointer, anyone can be a star.

If you can hit a shot from 19 feet, nine inches with semi-consistency — say about 40 percent — any high school coach will want you, even if you can't do anything else.

And why not? Do you think Steve Alford's defense or ballhandling skills were the deciding factor for Indiana in Monday's NCAA title game? Or was it his seven-for-10 shooting from three-point land last year?

THE THREE-POINTER first came to high school in 1985, when the Michigan High School Athletic

Association (MHSAA) allowed leagues to decide whether they wanted to use it. Last week, the rule was adopted by the National High School Athletic Association.

And what the national association approves, the MHSAA approves.

"More than likely, we'll have it," said Jack Roberts, the MHSAA's executive director. "Our council would have to take specific action not to accept the change, and I don't believe they've ever done that before."

The rule will be identical to that adopted by the NCAA prior to this season. A semicircle measuring 19-9 from the center of the basket will be marked on all floors; any shot scored from outside that arc will count for three points. Instead of two. The rule will be for both girls and boys basketball.

Roberts had not received the official wording on the three-point shot, so he couldn't be certain whether junior varsity and middle school programs would employ too.

THE ADOPTION of the rule did



C.J. Risak

not surprise Roberts — "I thought it was coming; I think most observers felt it was inevitable it would come to high school after the colleges adopted it." But the timing did.

"It just surprised me that it was this year," admitted the MHSAA director. His reasoning is the controversy that greeted the three-point shot's adoption a year ago.

The majority of the NCAA's coaches either didn't want the shot at all, or they wanted it at a more challenging distance. But opinion has so far been split on whether many college coaches would still like the line moved back, but it will remain where it is for now.

Roberts had mixed feelings on the

three-pointer.

"My personal preference is that I'm mildly opposed to it," he said. "I'm most concerned that it puts another demand on the officials. Secondly, it puts another demand on the facility — another line on a floor already covered with lines for volleyball and whatever else."

"Thirdly, I'm not convinced the high school game needed it as much as college. We don't have the packing in on defenses like they do in college."

YET COACHES whose leagues have used the rule for the past two seasons favored it. In the Observer & Eccentric coverage area, two conferences — the Tri-River League, of

which Redford Thurston is a member, and the Metro Conference, to which Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook, Avondale and Livonia Clarenceville are affiliated — employed the three-point shot.

"It helps your team all the way around," said Cranbrook coach Robert Rogers. "It's great if you have inside players and it's good if you have shooters — it gets them involved in the game."

Rogers' feelings echoed those of any three-point shot supporter. "It forces defenses to play you honest. They have to develop their man-to-man skills, or play a very good match-up zone."

The Cranes' coach also saw the shot as a potential game-breaker. His fellow Metro Conference coach, Clarenceville's Paul Clough, did not agree.

"I LIKE IT," said Clough. "But I haven't seen a team with good enough shooters to force (an opponent) to change. Most teams want to go inside still. Right now, it's just

fun. In two seasons of play, it hasn't been the deciding factor in any game I've been in or scouted."

The three-pointer will likely receive similar mixed feelings next season. But as exciting as it sounds, don't expect it to have the same effect as it had on college basketball. Clough is correct in saying few high school teams have shooters good enough to score from that distance.

It'll add glamour and fun and will decide a few games. But my bet is that fewer than 25 percent of the winning teams next season will attempt more than a half-dozen three-pointers a game.

That average could change in years to come. As for next season, the feeling here is most coaches would rather sit back in a zone defense and dare opponents to hit from three-point range rather than chase them all over the court.

So, shooters, don't occupy your time firing 20-footers all summer. Best keep your other basketball skills sharp, too; they may come in handy.

Engineers stumble in series finale to Compuware, 4-1

By C.J. Risak
staff writer

Nothing at stake? Don't tell that to Hennessey Engineers hockey coach A.J. Baker.

The Engineers could not solve the mystery of Compuware goalie Jim Dubke, and it cost them a shot at the North American Junior Hockey League playoff title as they fell 4-1 Tuesday at the Oak Park Ice Arena.

It was the second-straight runners-up finish for the Engineers, and it left Baker thinking about recurring nightmares.

"It was like déjà vu," the Hennessey coach said. "We forced Compuware to a deciding game last year with an overtime win, just like this year. We even had the same referee as last year."

"Same result, too."

That final similarity grated on Baker. "I hate these runners-up trophies," he said.

COMPUWARE'S 3-2 series victory means nothing in regards to the National Junior A Hockey Tournament, which starts Friday at the Oak Park Arena. Compuware will face Madison, Wis., at 7:30 p.m.; Hennessey

hockey

sey still makes the tournament, playing the tourney's opening game at 4:30 p.m. against Rochester, Minn.

The Engineers then play Madison at 8:30 p.m. Saturday, with Compuware facing off against Rochester at 6:30 p.m. On Sunday, the Engineers and Compuware will have their rematch in this round-robin tournament at 5:30 p.m. Rochester and Madison, both members of the U.S. Junior Hockey League, will play in Sunday's first game at 2:30 p.m.

The tournament's top two teams after round-robin play will meet for the national championship at 7:30 p.m. Monday at the Oak Park Arena. Tickets are \$5 per day for adults and \$2.50 for children and senior citizens.

The Engineers forced the fifth game with a 5-4 overtime win Sunday at the Plymouth Cultural Center. Larry Pilot scored three goals for Hennessey, but Tom Madden supplied the game-winner on a rare pen-

alty shot in overtime. The penalty shot was awarded when it was ruled a Compuware defenseman deliberately jarred his team's net off its mooring while the Engineers were threatening.

BRYAN KRIEGER also got a goal for Hennessey, and Matt Wiljanen and Lell Gustafson each picked up two assists. The Engineers led 4-2 with three minutes left in regulation, but Compuware rallied to tie it with two late goals.

Luck changed for Hennessey on Tuesday. The first period was played cautiously by both sides and ended up scoreless. Compuware took control in the second, going ahead 2-0 on goals by Dave Szymanski and Brant Ketzenberg. The Engineers cut that deficit in half with a power-play goal scored by Gustafson late in the period. Jeff Smith assisted.

Hennessey continued to apply the pressure in the third period, but Dubke met every challenge. "We had our chances, but we couldn't get it by him," said Baker.

Then, with six minutes left to play, Mike Jorgensen took a pass out from

Please turn to Page 2

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