

# Rocks destroy Trenton

By Dan O'Meara  
staff writer

When coach Fred Thomann and the members of his Plymouth Salem girls basketball team established their list of goals for the 1987 season, one was a return trip to the Class A semifinals.

The Rocks wanted another shot after getting there last year and being stopped short of a chance for the big prize by Detroit Martin Luther King. Salem more than earned that opportunity Wednesday night with a surprisingly easy 55-32 decision over an outmanned Trenton ballclub in the quarterfinal contest at Southfield High School.

"One of our goals was to get to the Final Four, and now we're there," Thomann said. "We've played the favorite role so much this year, it becomes difficult with the expectation of always winning."

"Now it's a situation in which we have four great teams. We're one and we're happy about that."

SALEM WILL face Detroit Cass Tech, champion of the Public School League, in the 8 p.m. game Friday at Grand Valley State College. Cass Tech, 21-1, eliminated Sterling Heights Stevens 54-41 Wednesday. "There was little doubt the Rocks, 25-1, would be moving on in the state tournament when they opened up a 19-4 lead at the end of the first quarter."

Dena Head scored 15 of her game-high 28 points in the first half, and Salem's 37-11 lead at halftime made the last two quarters a matter of merely finishing up.

"The Rocks will make their third appearance in the semis, having also been there under former coach Bob Blohm in 1980. A victory Friday would send Salem into the state final for the first time, however."

"We're really excited because we're able to go," senior Keri McBride said. "This is the best type of basketball you can play."

"WE'VE WORKED really hard to get this far," Head said, "and we're looking forward to our next game."

Salem wasted no time setting a pattern for the evening when they scored the first six points and jumped in front 17-2 on Barb Krug's hook with under two minutes left in the opening quarter.

The Trojans played a diamond-and-one with a player shadowing Head, but Salem exploited a weakness in the Trenton defense by lobbing the ball over the defenders' heads for alley-oop layups.

Head slipped behind the defense



BILL DRESLER/staff photographer

Junior guard Jill Estey contributed four points and 10 assists to Salem's lopsided 55-32 triumph over Trenton in quarterfinal play Wednesday.

and got things started that way. Krug and McBride got into the act later as Salem's lead continued to grow.

"With the defense they were playing and trying to double team Dena," Thomann said, "we were able to isolate our post people 1-on-1 and dump the ball inside. That helped us spread the game apart."

THE ROCKS had at least a two-inch height advantage at every position across the front, and that not only is reflected by Salem's scoring success inside but also in its rebounding.

Salem dominated the backboards 30-11, and Trenton had no more than a couple of second shots all night. Head collected 12 rebounds and Krug six.

But the Rocks really didn't need their height on the defensive boards early since their perimeter defense confounded the Trojans. Trenton attempted only three shots in the first quarter, and it turned the ball over without taking a shot on five of its first seven possessions.

Furthermore, Salem held a team that brought a 21-3 record into the contest to just 17 points through three periods, an outstanding defensive statistic regardless of the apparent mismatch.

"Our ability to do that and play the kind of defense we do is the reason we're in the situation we are right now," Thomann said.

"WE TOOK on a good Ladywood team and defended them pretty well. We did the same with a good Mercy team and Trenton tonight. We've had a number of good defensive games now."

While the Trojans had their offensive troubles, Salem was 9-of-12 in the first quarter and shot 58 percent for the half. Trenton was 4-of-12 during the half and went 0-for-9 in the third quarter.

Krug took a lob pass from Head for the first basket of the second period, and Jill Estey, who had 10 assists, Stacy Sovine and Head combined to give Salem a 27-4 lead.

The second half opened with Head scoring Salem's first nine points for a 46-12 lead that cemented the outcome. Trenton nearly doubled its score in the last five minutes to make the score more respectable than it actually was.

Krug added 10 points and McBride six. Trenton's Pattie Tott scored 12 points and Julie Mans nine.

"For us, it was a matter of working through the game," Thomann said. "It was a good one for us to play after playing Mercy and Ladywood so tough."

# Mercy made strong bid for title after poor start

By Dan O'Meara  
staff writer

The first half was merely an aberration.

The real Plymouth Salem-Farmington Hills Mercy girls basketball game showed itself in the second half.

The Rocks were the team in control through two quarters of last Saturday's regional final at Southfield High School. And that gave the illusory impression of an expected Salem romp.

But maintaining the history of quality games between the schools, the Marlins turned the tables in the second half, and the fans didn't go away disappointed.

Especially the Salem following, which saw the Rocks regroup for a 41-34 victory and a berth in the Class A quarterfinals.

SALEM COACH Fred Thomann could relax and ponder that accomplishment after the Rocks weathered the second-half storm.

"This is what you practice for and plan on," he said. "Tonight we got an excellent performance under pressure."

"Both teams did a tremendous job of that."

Dena Head, who had 10 points by halftime and finished with a game-high 24, and Jill Estey accounted for all of Salem's first-half points. The Rocks' 16-9 lead was relatively small, but seemed larger considering the way Mercy struggled through the first half.

Salem's man-to-man defense denied the Marlins many good shooting chances, and Mercy made only three of 18 field goals until Patty Chapp popped a three-pointer at the buzzer.

"OUR DEFENSE in the first half was sensational," Thomann said. "For a half, that was as good a defensive effort as we've had."

"We obviously never got on track, and we grew more and more tentative, afraid to make a mistake," Mercy coach Larry Baker said. "That's a real difficult thing to push through."

The second half began on a completely opposite note. The Marlins looked like a different team, more confident on offense, more determined on defense.

"Even though we had them pretty easy in the first half, they hung in there," said Thomann, crediting Baker for preparing his team well.

Thomann also noted the first game, which Salem won 56-54 in September, was similar. In that game, the Rocks jumped out to an early lead, but Mercy made its

comeback in the second quarter that time, and the game was tight until the end.

"THIS TIME they dominated the third quarter, and it took a good effort on our part in the fourth to get the game back under wraps," Thomann said.

Mercy threw a press at the Rocks right away and then fell back into a man-to-man defense that was just as effective as Salem's was against the Marlins earlier.

"At the risk of boasting, I know no outfit has defended Salem as well as we did tonight," Baker said. "The kids executed the defense to perfection."

The Rocks shot just under 50 percent in the second half but had only 16 attempts. Meanwhile, Mercy's shooting improved considerably to 10-of-21.

The Marlins took their only lead, 21-20, after outscoring Salem 12-2 in the first six minutes of the second half. It was a new game and one that looked headed for the wire again.

"THE KEY thing was the mental change the kids made," Baker said. "They took the challenge. Like the saying 'No guts, no glory,' they were willing to risk a missed shot."

"They put themselves in a position to win the game against one of the best teams in the state and, without question, the best player in the state," he added.

Sensing the urgency of the situation and change in the flow of the game, the Rocks rallied their forces, with Head leading the charge, and

actually began their comeback before the third quarter was out.

Head gave the Rocks a 25-23 lead going into the finale and then scored nine points in the decisive fourth quarter.

The Rocks might have had a bigger lead at halftime if not for some missed opportunities. But, with the game on the line and time running down, Salem went to work and prevented another nail-biting finish.

"NOT UNTIL the fourth quarter did we kick in offensively," Thomann said. "We did what we had to do."

While the Rocks won a regional title for the fourth time in the last five years, Mercy saw its streak of seven straight regional championships end.

"You'd like to see it go on interminably," Baker said, "but the key is we kept the tradition alive."

"I told (the players) during one of the timeouts they were playing like champions, and they finished the game like champions. It could have gone either way."

"They were sobbing in the locker room, but I told them they should hold their heads up."

That the Rocks won such a big ballgame obviously made for a happy Salem camp. But it also was their second tournament win in which they were pressed into producing results. Salem had eliminated Livonia Ladywood in the regional opener.

"Being able to play these kind of games and be successful has been invaluable," Thomann said.

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