

Sports

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Hawks gain share of first

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

To say Farmington Hills Harrison was ready for its showdown with Western Division basketball leader Plymouth Canton would be an enormous understatement.

Rarely is there as great a point swing in games involving the same teams as occurred Saturday night when the Hawks battered Canton en route to a 69-53 victory.

That was in contrast to the 17-point, 81-64 victory the Chiefs chalked up when the teams met last month at Canton.

"To tell you the truth, neither game is really a true indication," Harrison coach Mike Teachman said. "If we played eight times, I think there would be one game like that for them, one for us, and six games within three points."

BUT THERE was little doubt the Hawks were on the money Saturday. From the start, they were in control and held an amazing 31-7 lead at one point in the first half.

"They just beat us, from pillar to post," Canton coach Tom Niemi said. "They played an outstanding game and took us out of what we do well."

Harrison's victory creates a tie for first place in the division, both with 6-2 records. The Hawks improved to 11-4, while the Chiefs slipped to 12-3.

"Every game is a must win in the next week — just as it is for anybody else that's in the race," Niemi said.

Harrison came up with its most impressive win of the season in the rematch, but Teachman said the earlier loss to Canton wasn't the source of its motivation.

"Having a young team, I didn't play up that Canton game," he said, afraid that strategy might backfire. "I emphasized the following four games, and going into this one I felt we were playing as good basketball as anyone in the league."

"After the first Canton game, we said the next four were real important. Quoting Bobby Knight, he wanted to be in position to be in position."

THE HAWKS were led by Chad Burgess and Jason Lichtman, both of whom scored 17 points, and Bryan Wauldron, whose 14 points included a first-quarter dunk that fueled Harrison's momentum.

Matt Littleton, who made three of his four triples in the second half to rally the Chiefs, scored 16 points to pace Canton, and Brian Paupore added 12.

The big difference between the two games, however, was rebounding. In the first meeting, Canton had 17 offensive rebounds to Harrison's five defensive. The Hawks out-rebounded Canton 29-10 on their defensive boards Saturday.

Burgess got all nine of his rebounds off the defensive glass, Wauldron seven of his eight.



THOMAS ARNETT/staff photographer

Jason Lichtman controls the ball for Harrison while Canton's Brad Carey gives chase. Lichtman's shooting sparked the Hawks to a 69-53 victory that gave them a share of the division lead.

"You know what that means? They're not going to get any more easy shots," Teachman said, recalling the Hawks were hurt by Canton's multiple chances in the first game.

HARRISON JUMPED on the Chiefs right away as Burgess and Lichtman, who connected for three first-half triples, made their team's first two field goals from three-point distance.

Wauldron's slam made it 12-3, and the Hawks ran off six straight points to lead 18-5 after one quarter.

"We came out with some kind of intensity," Teachman said. "We're really, really have improved, and that's what we've built the whole season on."

Rocks fall short against Rockets

Plymouth Salem never had the lead Saturday night against Westland John Glenn, but victory was never far out of sight either.

The Rockets trailed by five or six points all game, but couldn't muster enough momentum to overtake the Rockets, who took home a 65-60 Lakes Division basketball victory.

The game, which saw Salem drop to 4-4 in the division and 6-9 overall, had been postponed from Friday

due to last week's snowstorm. Glenn is 5-2 and 10-5.

The Rockets got within three points in the final minute but were forced to foul. Glenn made the free throws to regain a five-point lead and then went to a delay game.

"The kids played hard, but it was just a matter, at the end of the game, of who could get a few breaks," Salem coach Bob Brodie said. "It could have gone either way had they not made their free throws."

layup after four big points from Dave Foxworthy. Canton's comeback had put it in position to make a run and, surprisingly after the lopsided first half, possibly salvage a win.

"But it didn't happen," Niemi said. "The ball didn't drop; we had 3-4 guys hitting the boards and didn't come away with it."

Lichtman responded with a layup, converted a three-point play and came back with a fast-break basket to boost Harrison's lead to 58-45.

"We needed somebody because, at that point, we were playing not to lose," Teachman said. "But this group has come a long ways. And (Canton) put a lot of pressure on us and we handled it."

Other fighters want to avoid boxer's punch

By Steve Kowalski
staff writer

Kermit Fitzpatrick, a super heavyweight at the Livonia Boxing Club, has trouble finding anyone crazy enough to spar against him.

And those that do challenge the 6-foot-1, 235-pounder from Highland Park don't always come back.

Greg Owens, who is helping train Fitzpatrick for a possible berth on the 1988 U.S. Olympic team, remembers the last guy he brought in to the Livonia Club to challenge Fitzpatrick.

The challenger, who hailed from the well-known Kronk gym in Detroit, stood 6-7 — until he met Fitzpatrick's right hand.

"He was at least 6-7, and when Kermit hit him, his whole body folded over the top rope," Owens said. "After the fight, he said, 'I'd come back.' I haven't seen him since."

"I've got to start bringing poor fighters in to spar against Kermit."

JUDGING BY his performance last month, it's no wonder it takes a professional to stay in the ring with Fitzpatrick.

He won the Michigan Amateur Boxing Federation Tournament in January, defeating Jonathon Hittles, the nation's sixth-ranked super heavyweight — by unanimous decision. The win qualified Fitzpatrick for the Regionals, held March 4th and 5th in Detroit.

If he wins the five-state regional competition, he will advance to the AFB Nationals held April 3rd in Colorado Springs, Colo. To make the Olympics, Fitzpatrick would have to win the AFB Nationals and then win a five-man box-off next summer.

In fact, it is still a long road to the Olympics, but then again this is a man who is used to traveling long and winding roads. In June, Fitzpatrick, 27, graduated from the Police Academy in Lansing and became a state trooper for the Michigan State Police.

HE PATROLS the roadways near New Baltimore on the midnight shift. The rest of his time is spent either training for the Olympics or sleeping.

Fitzpatrick, 20-4 lifetime, has been boxing competitively since 1984. He took a five-month sabbatical from the sport earlier this year while training at the academy, and the lay-off has meant even longer hours lately in the gym.

"Sometimes I feel sorry for myself," said Fitzpatrick, jokingly. "It's a hectic schedule, but my wife (Gertrude) is supportive. At 27, I'm getting real old for a boxer. I've got to get out and do it. Right now all I



Kermit Fitzpatrick

want is the Olympics. It's all I think about. It's been my dream to make the Olympics."

Beating Hittles was the first step toward that dream.

"It's been a long lay-off," Fitzpatrick said. "I wasn't sure how I'd do. It was a good fight, I mean this guy has fought them all, including Mike Tyson. Of course, he lost to Tyson."

Before entering the academy, Fitzpatrick was a member of the 1985 U.S. Amateur Boxing Team that toured Yugoslavia. Among his honors are the Motor City Championship in both 1983 and 1987. He also won the Ohio State Fair in 1986 and he was national runner-up for the Golden Gloves title in 1986.

A 1979 GRADUATE of Highland Park High School, Fitzpatrick played football and earned a teaching degree while at Western Michigan University. From September 1984 until last February, when he entered the academy, Fitzpatrick trained at the Adam Butzel Gym on Detroit's West Side.

He started training at the Livonia Club in June after graduating from the academy and, according to Owens, is one of the club's most dedicated boxers.

"Kermit works hard. He has to work hard, because he has set very lofty goals, he has a full-time career and a wife," Owens said. "He seldom misses a workout."

Fitzpatrick doesn't have the greatest talents for a super heavyweight, so he has to outwit his opponents to be successful.

"For his weight, Kermit is not tall, and he doesn't have real long arms, so he has to stay inside and keep pressure on the opponent," Owens said. "The key to winning for Kermit is making the other fighter fight his fight. If he stays outside, he would probably lose."



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Jill Watson has high hopes for an Olympic medal. Watson and partner Peter Oppgaard practiced with coach Rita Lowery at the Birmingham Ice Arena.

High hopes for her first Olympics

By Marty Budner
staff writer

RITA LOWERY's life revolves around figure skating.

She's a former professional ice skater who's now coaching. She married a former Canadian champion. And Lowery, who lives in Bloomfield Hills, has a daughter who's a professional skater.

But, for all of her worldly experience involving more than 25 years of coaching, Lowery has never felt the personal passion of Olympic competition.

That is, until this year.

When young proteges Peter Oppgaard and Jill Watson step onto the ice Tuesday, it will be Lowery's first up-close experience with the Olympics.

Lowery has coached Oppgaard, 28, and Watson, 24, the past four years. Their daily practices at the Birmingham Ice Arena have been strenuous and diligent.

All that preparation promises to climax around 8 p.m. Tuesday when the finals of the Pairs Figure Skating competition will be held at the Calgary Saddledome in Calgary, Alberta — site of the 1988 Winter Olympics.

It's certainly a moment Lowery and her students have been anticipating.

Oppgaard and Watson are three-time national champions who are picked to finish among the medal winners in Calgary. Sports Illustrated predicted a third-place finish for them behind two Russian couples.

LOWERY TRULY believes they have a legitimate shot at the gold. But she's also a realist. Subjective judging, one mistimed jump and

figure skating

unyielding pressure all are integral parts of Olympic skating competition.

"We're waiting for (the Olympics), and yes there's pressure," Lowery said before she left for Canada on Thursday morning. "But I think there's more pressure just waiting for the Olympics to begin."

"Once you get there things settle down a little better. After your first practice you become more relaxed. And to come back with a Gold Medal would be phenomenal."

"The U.S. hasn't had anyone with a (gold) medal in (figure skating) for a long time," she said. "We were the first ones to get a medal at the Worlds in the last four years when we placed third last year. That was a step in the right direction."

Lowery says the key to Watson and Oppgaard's medal chances rests with their short program.

Olympic Pairs Figure Skating competition is divided into a short program (an approximate two-minute skate, which counts 25 percent of total score) and long program (an approximate five-minute skate, which counts 75 percent of total score).

While the short program counts less in overall scoring, it is crucial because it sets up placements for the final long program (the short program in Calgary was held Sunday evening).

"IF THEIR (Watson/Oppgaard) placing is well after the short, that's good," Lowery said. "Then the draw is better after that."

"I feel, naturally, they can win the gold. But everybody has the same chance — especially among the top five or six (pairs). They're all very good."

"It's just who will skate well that day," she said.

Watson, a petite blonde from Bloomington, Ind., and Oppgaard, a lean, handsome skater from Knoxville, Tenn., are relative newcomers to Olympic competition. Watson skated and finished sixth in the 1984 Olympics in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia.

While this is their first Olympics as a team, they are not new to world-class competition. They know what pressure is all about.

"Pressure is what you make it, really," Watson said. "I think for us it involves personal pressure because you just want to go out and give your best performance."

Much for their long performance will be primarily from Puccini's "Madame Butterfly." The most exciting elements of their routine center around at least two points where he flings her high into the air, plus, a dangerous swoop move out of a death spiral.

"It seemed so far away. It seems like time just flies," Watson said. "It's kind of like you're in a dream or something, you can't really believe it's here yet. But the main thing now is just to keep things in perspective."

Lowery is hoping their "perspective" ends in gold.