

Sports

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Thursday, March 3, 1988 O&E

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North within reach of 1st league crown

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

The boys basketball teams at North Farmington and Plymouth Salem have a great deal more in common besides being finalists for the Western Lakes tournament championship.

Either the Raiders or the Rocks, both of whom were unexpected survivors in the playoffs, will be crowned the 1988 winner when the title goes up for grabs at 8 p.m. Saturday in the Salem gymnasium.

The similarities between the teams and the roads they've traveled to get where they are extend beyond the fact they have passed the test thus far.

Both ballclubs had to deal with trying circumstances during the regular season, both have overcome unfavorable odds that made them decided underdogs entering the tournament and both have diverse, well-balanced teams.

In the case of North, the Raiders were dealt an emotional setback on Jan. 25 when teammate Matthew Leiter, a reserve forward, died following a loss to Westland John Glenn.

NORTH SCORED an uplifting victory over cross-town rival Farmington in its next game, but lost that edge until the final game of the regular season. That's when it all turned around for the Raiders, 8-11.

North toppled unbeaten Walled Lake Central to qualify for the playoffs and followed that with victories over Plymouth Canton and John Glenn. In a week's time, the Raiders had beaten the top three teams in the WLLA to get to the championship game.

"I've coached for 19 or 20 years now, and it's one of the toughest and yet most rewarding years I've ever

basketball

"I've coached for 19 or 20 years now, and it's one of the toughest and yet most rewarding years I've ever been through with a group of kids."

— Tom Negoshian
North basketball coach

been through with a group of kids," North coach Tom Negoshian said.

"No matter what the outcome is Saturday, seeing the development of these kids and going through adversity as a team and overcoming that is very rewarding."

"That's what high school athletics is all about right there."

In the case of Salem, the Rocks, 9-10, went through an early losing streak during which time they shuttled players in and out depending on who was healthy and available.

Senior guard Jeff Elliott missed nine games with a broken arm, center M.J. Ewald needed surgery to repair a broken nose and was out for three games and 6-foot-5 pivotman Bill Anderson was sidelined by mononucleosis for six games.

BUT THE ROCKS have put it all together in the playoffs, averaging a loss to Farmington Hills Harrison in the first round and handing WLC its second loss in a week in the semifinals, 75-61.

"It's helped from the standpoint of

making other players hungrier, and it gives us more depth," said Salem coach Bob Brodie of those players who were idle and the necessity of playing others.

"It's frustrating as the season goes on because you don't have all your players," he added. "But now we're starting to reap the benefits because we have players who didn't have a lot of playing time and are hungry, and we have depth on the bench."

Both teams have grown accustomed to the underdog role, and the fact both have made it to the championship round makes for the most extraordinary final matchup in the brief history of the WLLA.

The difficulty an oddsmaker would have is determining which of them becomes the underdog now. Based upon the records of the opponents they've beaten in the playoffs, Saturday's contest should be their easiest game, respectively.

"I think we're the underdog even in this," said Negoshian, whose team lost both regular-season meetings with the Rocks. "Hopefully, we'll use that to motivate ourselves and play even harder than we have the last two games."

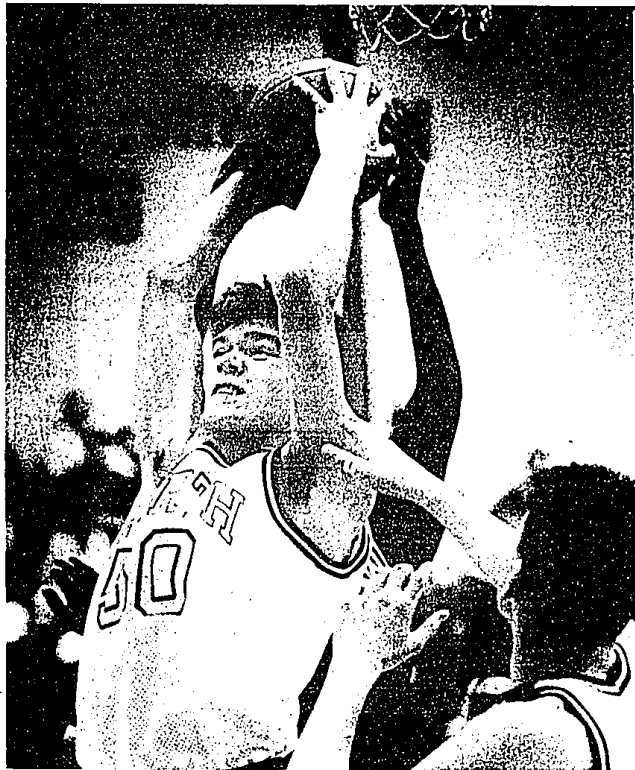
"WE'RE GOING to play as hard as we can for as long as we can and let the chips fall where they may."

Salem was the third-place team in the Lakes Division with a 5-5 record, and North managed to tie Farmington for fourth place after upsetting Central and then won the playoff tie-breaker.

The Rocks have beaten the No. 2 team in the Western Division (Harrison) and the Lakes champion (WLC), and the Raiders have eliminated the Western winner (Canton) and the Lakes runnerup (Glenn).

"It's a new season right now,"

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Jim Ratajeski's rebounding was a key to North Farmington's semifinal win over John Glenn, and the same kind of effort will be needed Saturday when the Raiders go for their first Western Lakes championship at Plymouth Salem.

Raiders settle for 2nd

By Steve Kowalski
staff writer

While the rest of Livonia Churchill's volleyball team celebrated the Western Lakes Conference championship Saturday at center court, Allison Merner sat on the bench, too sore to join her teammates.

But make no mistake, Merner was a key figure Saturday in Churchill's first-ever WLLA tournament championship held at Walled Lake Central.

Merner had 24 kills throughout the all-day tourney and in the championship match against North Farmington, recorded six more before suffering an ankle injury. Churchill led North Farmington 6-0 in Game No. 1 of the championship before Merner left with the injury. The Chargers went on to win the match 15-4, 15-8, convincing themselves they could win without Merner although they'd rather have her in the lineup.

"WE THOUGHT it might be over, but we decided to win it for her," said Churchill's Missy Donahue, who made seven of eight dig attempts in Game No. 2. "Coach (Mike Hughes) told us we had more than a chance to win, but we didn't know if we could do it."

Reserve Julie Rinder filed in capably for Churchill, serving 10 points in the championship match. To get to the final round, Churchill finished second at 5-1 in its pool and then defeated state-ranked Livonia Stevenson in the semifinals, 15-3, 14-16 and 15-8, by serving 14 aces.

North Farmington, which began the day losing to Stevenson in the opening match, placed second in its pool and beat Walled Lake Central in the semifinals. By the time both teams got to the final round, they were exhausted, both Hughes and North coach Sandra Lubieniec said.

"OUR MATCH with Stevenson is an inter-city kind of match that is very emotional, and North's match with Walled Lake Central was very intense," Hughes said. "In a way the championship was an emotional letdown for both teams. Overall, though, it was a nice day. I like those kind of days."

volleyball

Said Lubieniec, whose team finished the regular season at 30-0. "We ran out of gas. We played well all day long but the schedule wore us down. We played matches one after the other without having much time to rest. The legs were starting to go against Central (in the semis)."

Missy Bosseawen and Suzi Butcher were North's top hitters, collecting 26 kills throughout the tourney. Donna O'Brien had 23 kills and Debbie Weintraub had 26 service points.

One of the better serving performances of the day for Churchill came in a 15-1, 15-4 sweep of Farmington Hills Stevenson during pool play. Rosemary Hilly had eight points serving against Harrison. "Rosemary's good serving gave me an indication that we'd do well," Hughes said.

DEFENSE WAS critical for Churchill in its three-game win over Stevenson. Setter Sandy Brewe had 17 digs in the Stevenson match, along with seven service points. Merner collected seven kills for Churchill, now 30-8 overall.

The Chargers took commanding 12-2 and 10-2 leads in the first and third games, respectively, against Stevenson.

"That's been the character of our team," said Stevenson coach Lee Cagle. "It seems like in every game we've played this year, we've allowed the other team to put together a four- or five-point streak. We get into a panic mode and aren't able to shut it off with a simple sideout."

The Spartans, who dropped to 34-5 on the year, did have some respectable individual performances turned in by middle-hitter Sue Zatoraki (48 kills), Laura Brown (16 service aces), Rocky Cibor (59 assists), Trisha Koskowsky (14 sets). But the day belonged to rival Churchill.

Blue Dolphins.

Michelle McKenzie, the state champion in the 200-yard freestyle from Livonia Stevenson, Nicole Drake of Plymouth Canton, who was runnerup in two state-meet events, and Tracy Meszaros of Plymouth Salem led the Spartan contingent.

Like Craner, McKenzie is a prep All-American and a junior national qualifier. Meszaros was a state qualifier in the 200 individual medley.

They will be supported by teammates Heather Winicki and Elaine Danko, a state champion and state qualifier in club swimming, respectively.

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State title on line at OCC

North Farmington High School standout Cindy Craner will be among the swimmers attempting to defend the Michigan Stingray Swim Association's girls short-course state championship this weekend.

The meet begins Friday at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College and will continue through Sunday.

Craner, who led the Raiders to a fourth-place finish in the Class A meet last fall and is 0.8 shy of making the Olympic Trials, is one of several quality swimmers the MSSA will enter in the senior competition.

Like Craner, Mersey High School star Roberta Orr-Jones Caraher,

swimming

Kelly Sheridan and Maureen Lee have qualified for the junior nationals, placed among the top six in league and state meets and set high school records during their careers.

THE STINGRAYS, who also captured the national (boys and girls) long-course title last August, will defend their crown against area rivals such as the Livonia Spartans Aquatic Club, Clareville Swim Club, Oakland Livs Yers and Birmingham

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