

Post-season blues

Tourney bids elude Montana State ace

By C.J. Risak
staff writer

The highs and lows associated with college basketball... just ask Tom Domako.

The 6-foot-8 Montana State senior from Livonia (Stevenson) had enough of both in the last weekend to make a career. On Friday, the Bobcats advanced to the finals in the Big Sky Tournament with a 58-46 victory over Idaho.

Then on Saturday, heartbreak: Domako stole the ball and scored the game-tying basket with less than a half-minute left as Montana State had regular-season champion Boise State on the ropes. But after a lineup, the Broncos got an uncontested layup and edged the Bobcats, 63-61.

Domako finished with 16 points and a certainty that, although the lightly regarded Big Sky probably wouldn't get two teams into the NCAA tournament, Montana State — with a 19-11 record — would go to the National Invitational Tournament.

HEARTBREAK NO. 2 — no invitation was forthcoming.

"I thought for sure that we were going," Domako said. "That's what made it such a disappointment, because we were so sure. I had heard that the Big Sky runner-up was just about assured of getting an NIT bid."

"Then you look back at our loss to Boise State. We were two points from an NCAA berth, and we don't even make the NIT."

It was a bitter — and difficult to comprehend — disappointment for all Montana State supporters. The Bobcats got invited to last year's NIT and lost to Washington in the first round in overtime, but the game drew a crowd of more than 8,000. The NIT, which relies heavily on big games, apparently wasn't impressed.

college sports

THE DISAPPOINTMENTS continued Sunday when Boise State defeated Michigan in the NCAA tournament. It could have been Montana State meeting the Wolverines.

"Now that would have been funny, if we had played Michigan," said Domako. "They wouldn't have had to scout me. I've played with all those guys at summer camps."

It's going to be an interesting game, because I'll know everyone on the court."

Of course, Domako would like to be one of those still playing. For the past two seasons, his team has qualified for post-season play. This year, it was Domako who carried the bulk of the offense.

Switching from power forward to small forward, Domako topped the Bobcats in scoring with a 22.6 points-per-game average over the regular season. He also had 5.6 rebounds, three assists and 1.8 steals, while connecting on 49.5 percent of his floor shots and 82.1 percent of his free throws.

DOMAKO FINISHED his career as Montana State's No. 2 all-time scorer. On Monday, the anguish of not making a post-season tournament diminished somewhat when he was named honorable mention All-American by UPI.

"When I first came here," Domako recalled, "I just wanted to play as a freshman. I did that, averaging 16, 17 minutes a game."

The following season he was a starter, and he has been ever since. One good reason is his shooting range; he holds the conference record for

three-point field goals, averaging about two per game.

But there's more. "My game has improved this year because teams have keyed on me, and I had to find ways to score," he explained. "I think that helped me a lot."

"Last year (when Montana State was 21-7), we had five guys on the floor who could put it in the hole. I didn't know how easy I had it. This year, if I got by one defender, there might be another."

FINDING WAYS to score meant bettering other skills. "I could always shoot," he said. "The biggest things I've improved on are putting the ball on the floor, learning how to post up and the mental part of the game."

"I really hadn't posted up much this year because I was playing power forward, and I had bigger people guarding me. This year, I'm at small forward."

The difference was the size of the opponent. "When we played Idaho, a 6-foot point guard guarded me. When that happens, you learn how to post up real quick," said Domako.

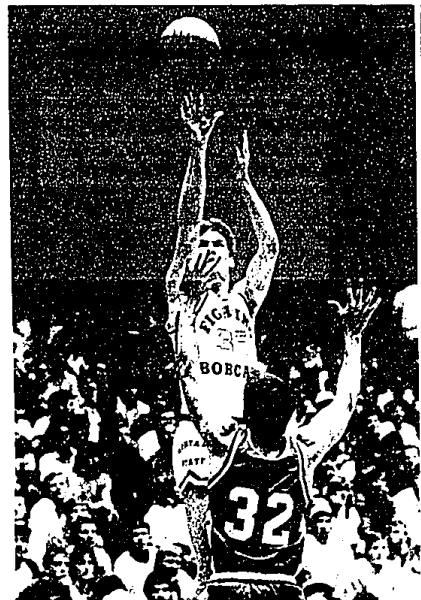
He learned his lesson fast. Idaho used six different players in trying to check Domako in the Bobcats' regular-season finale, but he still scored 33 points.

Although his college career is over, Domako is hoping for a shot with the pros. He's been invited to a tournament featuring the nation's top 64 seniors in Portsmouth, Va., April 6-9. Every NBA general manager will attend.

A good performance will earn Domako a spot in a second tournament for the top 40 seniors, in Chicago, just before the NBA draft.

"I have confidence in myself," he said. "I think I can play with anybody."

And Domako doesn't want to be disappointed again.



R. DEAN HEINRICHSON

Tom Domako, a Livonia Stevenson product, finished the year as Montana State's top scorer en route to honorable mention UPI All-America honors.

New hysteria invades our households

THIS IS THE START of the greatest sports season of all, I pleaded emphatically.

The object of my sermon was unimpressed.

I should have stopped right then. Deep down, I knew I had little chance of convincing her. But something urged me to try. "Don't give up," this inner voice insisted. "You can do it. Logic and patience will win your point."

I listened, and I reloaded.

"I understand how women feel," I said softly, trying hard not to sound patronizing. "For decades, sports did not exist for them. All they were allowed to do was watch and cheer males playing games women knew nothing about."

"A woman's athletic opportunities were pathetically limited. I know that."

IF I WAS making any headway, it didn't show. She seemed as unconvinced as ever.

I could feel the anxiety surging within me. I was becoming more and more obsessed with the idea that I could make her understand my point, even acquiesce to it.

Stubbornly, I plodded on. "Look, when I was in high school, we didn't have a varsity female sport until my senior year, when we got swimming. I know what you're thinking, but trust me — it wasn't that long ago."

"In the mid-70s, about the only high schools to offer girls basketball were in the Catholic League. Title



C.J. Risak

IX's adoption was like your Emancipation Proclamation."

The calmness with which I originally had approached my task was melting under heated agitation. Then, suddenly, I sensed something... could it be?

Yes! A response! She looked at me, her blank boredom replaced by a vague interest. I stopped for a moment, plotting my next move. It became clear to me my best strategy would be a blitzkrieg. Talk fast and feverishly, and let tone substitute for content.

"BUT TITLE IX stopped woefully short," I claimed, my voice rising a few octaves. "Women got their sports to play, but there was no one to create interest. It was appeasement, nothing more. Just another Munich Pact."

I stopped to catch my breath, realizing she had no idea what appeasement was, where to find Munich, or how to make a Pact. But I plunged on anyway, before her attention waned.

"Women have missed all that is essential in sports," I preached.

"Sure, it can be fun to shoot baskets or toss a football or kick a soccer ball around. But..." I hesitated for emphasis — "that is not what males call sports."

It was an important point, but confusion, like a shadow, fell across her face. I was starting to lose her — I had to be quick and convincing.

"Males, you see, view football-tossing or soccer-ball-kicking or basketball-shooting not as sport, but as diversion. Fun, exercise — nothing more. It isn't intense, it doesn't carry a winning-is-everything determination."

"Real sports are found right here!" I proclaimed loudly, pounding the floor. She was startled by my outburst, leaning slightly backwards and blinking.

"SPORTS ARE found in living rooms, not on playing fields. They are meant to be watched, studied, admired, and discussed endlessly. This..." I stepped quickly to the television and slapped the cabinet top — "...is where real sports, the games that matter, are found."

I dropped to my knees. "Today marks the start of the NCAA basketball tournament. This could be the real beginning of womenkind's..." I didn't know if that was a word or not, but it seemed to fit — "entry into a domain too long dominated by males."

"There's no doubt women can play sports, almost any that men play. That was easy. But how many women like to watch sports? Five? May-

be 10? And that's not just in Detroit's no-name and western suburbs, but all of Michigan. Throw in Ohio and Indiana, too."

It was getting difficult to tell whether her interest was subsiding or not. She may give in to my way of thinking yet, I theorized, based just on my performance. I continued.

"Women go to football games and never talk strategy or ridicule officials or recall turning points. They say stuff like, 'That tight end has a cute butt,' or 'I hear the quarterback drives a Ferrari.'"

IT WAS SET UP, now for my big pitch. All or nothing.

"You could be a pioneer, a trendsetter," I said calmly. "It's in your hands — the future of women and sports."

She looked at her hands and the remote control she was grasping, but made no move to punch the numbers on it. "ESPN is on 33," I said, trying to prod her. "For the next four days, they will have basketball on nonstop. Nonstop! Think of it! A crash course in overindulgence of sports, and you don't have to leave the living room."

She looked at me with doubt in her eyes. "You'll be the Madame Curie, the Amelia Earhart, of women and sports. A hero for all time! All you have to do is switch the channel and allow yourself to be swept up, to be tutored as it were, in basketball appreciation."

Like a gambler risking a fortune he had spent months accumulating, I was going for broke.

I busted. She paused, looking at me with disinterest as I knelt before her, begging like a dog. My pleas went unheeded; she refused to surrender the remote, instead turning back to the TV and the more absorbing drama of Sesame Street.

I was crushed by my 18-month-old daughter, who learned early in life to cling to the controls and refuse to give them up without crying — and never get caught up in basketball hysteria.

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