

Sports

Dan O'Meara editor/591-2312

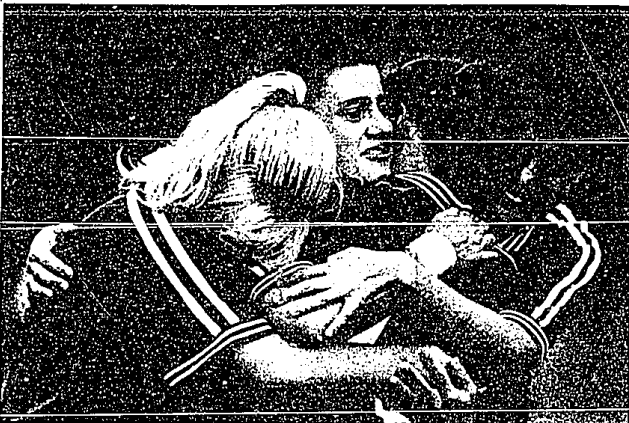
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Monday, June 4, 1990 O&E

Mercy marevulous in regional shootout



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Mercy players celebrate their victory over arch-rival Birmingham Marian in the championship game of the Troy Athens soccer regional.

For the second week in a row, the Marlins won 1-0 in a sudden-death shootout.

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Two teams with only a goal difference between them in three previous encounters? Better pack a lunch, cancel any evening dinner plans and count on a shootout.

On Saturday, Catholic League rivals Birmingham Marian and Farmington Hills Mercy even needed more than the standard number of penalty kicks to settle their Class A regional championship match. The Marlins won the shootout 4-3, beating the Mustangs 1-0 at Troy Athens High School to advance to the state quarterfinals.

Mercy (13-1-4) meets Rochester Adams on Wednesday at Sterling Heights Ford II High School. Marian finishes 12-1-3.

Evenly matched? The Bobsey Twins couldn't have done better with mirrors than Mercy and Marian.

After 30 minutes of overtime, both teams were in a scoreless deadlock. In the penalty kick shootout, both teams were tied 3-3, forcing a sudden-death situation.

Marlin's senior midfielder Anne Seutins rectified the problem. She hit a low shot to the right corner of the net on Mercy's sixth penalty shootout attempt. Mustangs freshman defender Stephanie Storen's shot then sailed over the bar.



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Goalkeeper Renee Larnell runs toward midfield to celebrate with teammates.

beat then No. 1-ranked Farmington, 1-0, last week in the district final on penalty kicks.

Saturday's game against Marian could have went into Sunday. Each team had an equal amount of opportunities. That was due mostly to the windy and rainy conditions.

The Mustangs opened the match with the wind at their backs and dominated. The team had six clean cracks at the net, including two shots from Ferguson.

Marlin's netminder Renee Larnell was equal to the task, saving all six shots. Mercy didn't have one shot on goal in the first 40 minutes.

"I really don't like to play against the wind because the ball is hard to judge," said Larnell, who took full control of the penalty area during

the match. "I'm really happy we go out of the first half."

"WE REALLY didn't get into the match in the first half," said Marlin coach Morris Lupence. "We played better against the wind than we did with the wind."

With the second half came the rain. This time Mercy enjoyed the weather conditions. The Marlins had five shots on goal, the most dangerous one coming in the last seconds of regulation.

Time had expired on the field clock, but the referee didn't blow the whistle. As some Marian defenders let up, sophomore forward Tania Macloce walked in alone in and unleashed a wicked, point-blank shot on goal. Marian goalkeeper Cheryl Feldman turned the shot away.

In overtime, the match went at a break-neck pace. Both teams put up a formidable charge on the goal. Macloce again looked to have the best chance for Mercy in the second OT session, sending a half volley from 10 yards out that Feldman was able to grab.

The match was physical. Players from both sides received yellow caution cards.

Most of that was result of three previous equally tight encounters. In the regular season, both Mercy and Marian battled to a pair of 1-1 draws. The Mustangs beat the Marlins 4-3 in the Catholic League final.

Fittingly enough, it would take a shootout against Mercy to decide the season series. Marian went undefeated during the regular season, playing with squad that was young (no seniors were on the team).

Despite the loss, Lupence was quite philosophical. He commended Mercy and Kimes for their effort as well as that of his own team.

"It was a tight game. That's soccer. I told them (his team) anyone can win in a shootout. When you lose in a shootout, I don't consider it a defeat."

Farmington catches CC in district championship

By Brad Emons
staff writer

Trailing 7-1 in the bottom of the sixth, Farmington High was definitely behind the eight-ball during Saturday's Class A district baseball championship at Southfield.

But Mark Vellucci, Farmington's No. 8 hitter, belted a clutch two-run double and eight was just enough for the Falcons, who made a rousing comeback to stun Redford Catholic Central, the Catholic League A-B Division champs, 8-7.

"Just before he (Vellucci) stepped up he said, 'Coach, I feel real confident,'" recalled Farmington coach Kevin Kansman.

With a sudden burst of rain threatening to halt play, the left-handed hitting Vellucci delivered a shot to the base of the left field fence off CC reliever Steve Ross, scoring Eric Miller, who had singled, and Brian Viechio, who had doubled.

"I knew the wind was blowing out," Vellucci said. "The pitch was on the outside of the plate — I believe it was a curve — and I decided to go with the pitch. My power is to the opposite field anyway. I knew I could pop it out. It was just an unbelievable feeling."

THE FALCONS, who ran their overall record to 21-3, mobbed each other near home plate to celebrate a rare district title.

"I hope this game takes the pressure off," said Kansman, whose team advances to the regional Saturday against Plymouth Salem (17-10) at Wyandotte. "This is a big day for Farmington. Hopefully this will teach us that we're never out of it in any type of situation."

The Falcons, however, appeared down and out until the sixth, when they struck for five runs, chasing CC

ace Steve Boryk, who had given up only four hits and one run over the first five innings.

Miller started the rally with a single. Viechio, who was pinch hitting, and Vellucci, each drew walks.

With the bases loaded, Boryk plunked pinch-hitter Eric Messner, forcing home a run. P.J. Green then delivered a bloop two-run double down the left-field line, cutting the deficit to 7-4.

That brought Ross, the winning pitcher in the semifinals against Livonia Churchill (11-5), out of the bullpen.

Green scored on a groundout and Chris Schmidt, the winning pitcher, helped his own cause with an RBI single, making it a one-run deficit.

"BOYZE PITCHED a good game, but he had a little wildness," said CC coach John Salter, whose team bowed at 22-10. "Maybe he got a little tired. He threw roughly 120 pitches. We just told Ross to throw strikes, but we gave them life in the sixth."

Miller raced in from third on a passed ball in the second inning to give the Falcons a 1-0 lead, but CC got a run back in the third when Boryk scored on a fielder's choice.

CC took a 2-1 lead in the fourth on consecutive singles by Matt Fennelly, Joe Vondracek and Mark Clary. The Shamrocks then exploded for five off Schmidt in the fifth, the big blow being a two-run homer by Fennelly. Brett Welting also added a two-run single during the surge.

But the Shamrocks failed to add any insurance runs in the sixth and seventh as Schmidt persevered, running his record to 6-4.

"They came back, but we have nothing to be ashamed of this season," Salter said. "It's disappointing to lose when you have a six-run lead,

but we've won a couple like that, too. Farmington is a good club and they swing the bats well."

THE DAY ALSO started well for the Falcons, who took five innings to mercy Livonia Franklin, 11-1, in the opening semifinal.

Farmington struck for seven runs in the first, thanks to a pair of two-run doubles by Schmidt and Vellucci, coupled with two Franklin errors and two hit-batsmen by starter Tad Dennis, who lasted just one-third of an inning.

Kevin Van Ord added a two-run single in the third. The Falcons' Dave Wilson homered in the fourth, while Miller contributed an RBI single.

Franklin scored its only run in the third on a single by Scott Marinkovich and three walks.

Schmidt, Young and Miller, the winning pitcher, combined to hold the Patriots to three hits.

"After the first, we didn't do badly, but one bad inning has killed us all year," said Franklin coach Gerry Quinn, whose team finished 8-13 overall.

In the second game, Churchill put up a fight before bowing to the Shamrocks, 11-5.

It was 1-1 until the top of the fifth when CC struck for seven runs, highlighted by Wheeler's run homer. Clary, Boryk, Vondracek and Pirorello also knocked in runs during the uprising. CC added two more in the sixth.

AND SPEAKING of assault, junior lefty Mike Thomas, the Churchill starter, took a vicious line-drive shot from Don Churchill first baseman Jason Gabel, who socked a pair of two-run homers and walked twice. Gabel set a pair of school records for the Chargers this season including best average (nearly .500) and RBI (31).

"Jason's just not a home-run hitter, he can also spray the ball," said Osterland. "When he makes contact, the ball jumps off his bat. He's just an outstanding offensive player."

Bob Melster added two hits for Churchill, while Clary had two for CC.

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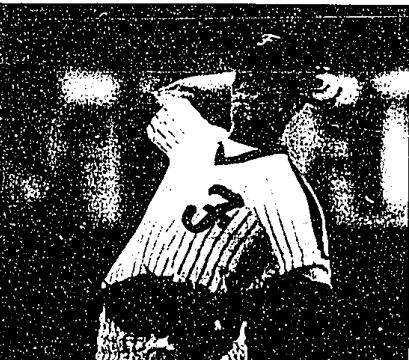
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DOUG RUSSELL/staff photographer

Kevin Young was on the mound in the first game with Franklin. The Falcons won the district title 8-7 over Catholic Central.