

## Sports

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## N. Farmington still gymnastics power

By Dan O'Meara  
and Steve Kowalski  
staff writers

Judging from its current talent level, North Farmington should continue a tradition for excellence in girls gymnastics despite losing one of its all-time greats.

Heather Kahn competes for the University of Pennsylvania now after leading the Raiders for three years. She was the No. 2 all-arounder in the state two years ago.

"It will be real hard to replace her consistency," veteran coach Jeff Dwyer said. "She was real steady; she was a rock. I never had to worry about Heather."

North returns three other all-arounders from a team that finished third in the Western Lakes Activities Association, and the Raiders have a pair of newcomers who are expected to make the team that much stronger.

Senior Jameelah Gater fills the void left by Kahn as the team leader, and sophomores Michelle Tsai and Elyse Turner have a year of varsity experience after playing key roles last year.

Gater was seventh among WLA all-arounders, finishing fifth in her best event — floor exercise — and seventh on vault and bars. She missed going to state in the former by one place.

"She's a very good dancer, and that always helps with her scores," Dwyer said. "She'll definitely be the leader this year. She's one of those girls who has an influence."

Tsai has added more tricks and is a more-mature competitor, according to Dwyer. Turner was a diver on the North swim team and got a late start.

"She's just getting back into shape, but I expect the same and more from both of them," Dwyer said. "They'll contribute in every event, and we're going to need both of them."

Senior Cara Pool also returns and will help North in vault and floor exercise. She's capable of scoring in the high 8s on vault — her best event, Dwyer said.

The Raiders could be a better team with the addition of senior Michelle Wolfe and freshman Annie Jud. Both are all-arounders.

Wolfe is a club gymnast who Dwyer, her former club coach, has tried to recruit for the high school team for three years.

"I can't say she's a replacement for Heather, but she is near that level," Dwyer said. "She's very strong on bars. She's polished. She'll definitely work every meet."

Jud's family moved to Farmington Hills from Ohio. She broke a little finger in practice last month but will be ready for the start of January competition. Jud is another club gymnast.

"I expect a lot from her, too," Dwyer said. "She's tough — again she's polished. It depends how things go, but she has the potential to be one of the top three girls in every event."

Juniors Stephanie Wagner and Debbie Hersh are among eight other returnees. Wagner works every event but floor exercise, and she scores best on vault and beam. Hersh also is strongest on beam and vault.

The other returning gymnasts are juniors Michelle Zahorsky and Jenny Kahn (no relation to Heather) and sophomores Jenny Kaplan, Erin Krell, Maria Myerson and Shari Silver. Zahorsky and Kahn compete on floor and vault, the others beam and floor. Other first-year high school gymnasts are sophomores Candy Falcione and Jodi Bernstein (floor) and freshman Cera Brown (floor and beam).

Dwyer expects the Raiders to face tough competition from defending WLA champion Plymouth Salem and runner-up Plymouth Canton again this season.

North had a triangular meet in December, scoring 131-plus to defeat Ann Arbor Pioneer and Livonia Cheneville. The Raiders resume competition today with a home meet against Berkley and Northville.



JOHN STORMZAND/staff photographer

Suzy Takla is one of four Farmington seniors who return for the '92 season with three years of experience in high school gymnastics.

"We lost Heather but gained two pretty strong gymnasts," Dwyer said. "The other three are definitely more experienced — Jameelah, Michelle and Elyse."

"Salem and Canton will be real tough, but I think we can at least be competitive with them. Last year we didn't have enough depth, and this year we have a little more."

## FARMINGTON HIGH

The Falcons will pin their 1992 hopes on four-year senior gymnasts Nicole Gervatowski, Sheri Vitale, Suzy Takla and Carrie Hoffer.

Third-year coach Alicia Herpick has 19 girls on her team and better depth, but Farmington will rely heavily on the above-four.

Gervatowski is the top all-arounder, having qualified for the regional last year in that capacity. Bars and beam are her best events.

"If she stays away from injury, I don't see why she can't qualify for state in something," Herpick said.

"She can put out an above-average routine any night, but that isn't up to her standards. She has high standards for herself, and that's where her strength is. She wants to do well."

Vitale competed on vault and beam at the regional and is good on floor exercise,

too. She will do the all-around for the Falcons.

She hates bars but we need her and her ability, Herpick said. "I hope she can place at conference and qualify for regional at least in three of the four events. If Sheri wants it bad enough, she can go and get it."

Takla was a regional qualifier last year on vault, an event in which she is improved. Her floor exercise also is going to be a lot better, according to Herpick. Hoffer qualified on vault, too, and is strong on floor and beam.

"Takla has improved a lot, but I'm curious to see how she's going to handle

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JOHN STORMZAND/staff photographer

Sheri Vitale returns to compete as an all-around gymnast for coach Alicia Herpick's Farmington team.

## St. Mary gains semifinal berth

The backcourt assault continued to carve up opponents for St. Mary's College of Orchard Lake as it reached the semifinals of the National Catholic Basketball Tournament last weekend with wins over Cardinal Stritch (from Milwaukee) and Mount Mercy College (Oscar Rapids, Iowa) in Dubuque, Iowa.

The Eagles, seeded second in the 16-team tournament, opened by pounding Stritch 93-59 on New Year's Day. The outcome was never in doubt; St. Mary's led 33-27 at the half and coasted to the victory. On Thursday, it was closer but the Eagles prevailed, topping Mount Mercy 77-67.

The two wins upped St. Mary's record to 11-4 and came with frontcourt starters Kevin Niecefield and Marvin Morrison out with injuries. Niecefield, a 6-foot-7 senior, has a fractured foot; Morrison, a 6-8 junior, has a separated shoulder. St. Mary's met Xavier-University (La.) in Saturday's semifinals.

The Eagles' points were generated from their guards. Senior Jeff Suspect hit 12-of-19 from the floor against Stritch to finish with 27 points. He also had five assists and four steals.

JUNIOR POINT guard Jimmy Bolden collected 20 points (on 9-of-14 shooting), nine rebounds, seven assists and five steals, and senior Garth Howard got 14 points and four steals. Brian Smith finished with 13 points.

Only senior Mike Meyer reached double-figures in scoring for Stritch (which fell to 3-8); he had 20 points and 14 rebounds. Stritch made just 25-of-71 shots (35.2 percent). St. Mary's was 41-of-90 (45.5 percent). Stritch also committed 33 turnovers to 20 for the Eagles.

St. Mary's did not shoot well against Mount Mercy, converting just 30-of-71 shots (42.3 percent), but it was good enough. Bolden, from Detroit Country Day, continued his stellar play with 19 points, 11 assists, six rebounds and two steals.

The Eagles led 35-31 at the half and never trailed. Mount Mercy got to within 63-62 with three minutes left, but Suspect and Howard followed with three-pointers that ended the threat. St. Mary's defense limited Mount Mercy to 25-of-68 shooting (36.8 percent).

Howard added 17 points and seven rebounds and Suspect got 18 points and three assists for St. Mary's. Junior Fred Russell and sophomore Brian Koscielski each contributed eight points for the Eagles, with Koscielski grabbing 10 rebounds and Russell nine.

Tommy-Jack's 10 points led Mount Mercy, which fell to 4-6. Jason Furler had 14 and Greg Kearney and Matt Fink netted 10 apiece.

By Dan O'Meara  
staff writer

Viewers watching the Peach Bowl football game on television New Year's Day saw East Carolina University fans displaying signs and shirts that proclaimed "I believe."

The Pirates made it their rallying cry at mid-season after they defeated Syracuse, but it has personal as well as collective meaning for ECU team member Zaim Cunmulaj of Farmington Hills.

The former North Farmington player was not highly recruited out of high school and spent two years at Grand Rapids Junior College before getting a scholarship offer from the Pirates last year.

Not only did Cunmulaj prove he could play Division I football, but he became the starting nose tackle on the best team in East Carolina history.

The Pirates won 11 consecutive games — a school record for single-season victories — following an opening loss to Illinois and finished as the No. 9 team in the final Associated Press poll after rallying from a 17-point deficit to beat North Carolina State 37-34 in the Peach Bowl.

"IT'S LIKE THE Cinderella thing," said Cunmulaj, who flew home Wednesday night and was in Grand Rapids to visit former North

"Our coach said 'Someone out here has to make a big play.' We called a twist between me and the tackle. I went outside and there (the opposing quarterback) was. I happened to get him."

— Zaim Cunmulaj  
E. Carolina nose tackle

and GRJC teammate Rob Zeno Thursday.

"I can't believe I had a year like that. It was an incredible year. There was no way I thought we would make the top 40. Being on that team was unbelievable to me."

Cunmulaj made a key play late in the New Year's Day game when he sacked the NCS quarterback for a big loss and crippled a Wolfpack drive. NCS gained much of the yardage back on the next play but still was forced to attempt the game-tying field goal from a significant distance.

"Our coach said 'Someone out here

has to make a big play.' We called a twist between me and the tackle. I went outside and there he was. I happened to get him."

"A couple of my good friends said I won the game for us, but it was a team effort. Our quarterback (Jeff Blake) played a great game to bring the team back."

North coach Jim O'Leary already was quite proud of his former player, but he was beaming all the more after seeing Cunmulaj make that play.

"HE SHOWED A lot of people they were wrong, and (Wednesday)

was the culmination of all that," O'Leary said. "The people at North Farmington are real proud of him."

Cunmulaj's success at East Carolina has been gratifying from the standpoint he has been able to demonstrate his true ability to any doubters.

"I went to Northwood after high school and they wouldn't take me," he said. "My grades weren't too good, but they still could have taken me. The coach said he didn't think I was a very good player, and he didn't want to take a chance on me. I'd like to go back up there now."

O'Leary said he is proud of what Cunmulaj has done not just in terms of athletics but also academics, observing that he got serious about school.

"He showed a lot of responsibility and realized academics were important," O'Leary said. "I'm really proud of him for going on to school."

He overcame a lot of obstacles, and he's still overcoming them. He doesn't have great size. He has a 6-foot frame and 250 pounds on him — and he's worked for every pound of it. He's one of those kids who did it the right way. He wasn't going to take any shortcuts with steroids."

THE 6-1, 245-pound Cunmulaj, an outstanding heavyweight wrestler in high school and junior college, uses

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