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SPORTS

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Marlins become 3-time champs



Farmington Hills Mercy will continue its reign in Catholic League girls golf for another year after winning its third consecutive title. The Marlins also ended the week with two more dual-meet wins to push their record to 13-0.

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER

It was much closer this time around, but Farmington Hills Mercy is still Catholic League champion in girls golf.

The Marlins have won every tournament since it started, making it three straight Wednesday with a one-stroke victory over Livonia Ladywood.

Mercy finished with a 198 team score at Tanglewood Golf Course in South Lyon, the Blazers 199, Birmingham Marian 229 and Waterford Our Lady of the Lakes 252.

"That was the best Ladywood has played all year, and that was the time to do it," Mercy coach Wicky Kowalski said. "I congratulated the Ladywood players and told them, if they shoot like that at the regional, they'll

qualify for state."

With five of the six playing groups in the clubhouse, Kowalski thought the Marlins had just about wrapped up another championship with a three-stroke lead.

But then Ladywood's sixth player, Diane Johnston, reported with a 52 and put the issue on hold until the final tabulations were complete.

"It was tough and go all the way," Kowalski said. "As each group was coming in, it was very close with Ladywood."

"After five groups, I figured it was pretty safe, but then my heart dropped. I thought, 'We're not going to win.' I hadn't realized it was only a two-stroke difference. I wasn't sure how all the scores were going to put together."

"But it made for an exciting championship. The first two years we pretty much ran away with it."

Mercy junior Sommer Woods claimed medalist honors after winning a playoff on the second hole with Ladywood's Laura Kowalski. Both finished at 47 for nine holes.

Woods was the third straight Mercy player to win the medalist title. Dana DeShaw was the winner last year and Kristyn Schulkins in 1992.

What also was impressive about the Mercy victory was the Marlins winning without their best player, Amy Schulkins, figuring in the team score.

She shot 52 and tied for ninth place. Tina Madej placed fifth (50), Sara Horgan sixth (50) and Karen Porter seventh (51).

"I think Sommer plays well under pressure," Kowalski said. "We have two real good golfers (Schulkins and Woods), and Tina Madej and Karen Porter have come on real strong this year. Both have dropped three strokes off their average scores, from 56 to 53."

Ladywood's Sarah Andersen shot 49 (third), Bianca Cerroni 51 (eighth) and Johnston 52. The Marlins scores: Molly Syron 60 (fourth), Christine Slikko 55, Michelle Vegas and Emily Kuczyński 62.

The Marlins won their 13th dual meet Friday without a loss, 223-225 over Plymouth Salem at Brue Burn Golf Course. That followed a 253-268 defeat of Dearborn Thursday at Walnut Creek Country Club.

Kowalski gave some of her other golfers a chance to compete both days, and Mercy still had no trouble winning.

Schulkins shot 53 Friday, Gina Mazzoni 54, Erin Moug 55 and Maureen McDonald 61. Schulkins also led the way against Dearborn with a 52; Horgan had 63, McDonald 67 and Maureen Sirhal 71.

"We have depth and that's where we're coming out ahead of other teams," Kowalski said. "We have seven kids capable of shooting 55 or below, and you just don't find that too much."



C. J. RISAN

Abraham wins double honor as Madonna coach

It's not like success is something foreign to Jerry Abraham.

He's had his share. Plenty of it, actually. League titles, Final Four stuff, national acclaim... he's done well at every level of coaching. And it doesn't take him a long time to prove it, either — be it in volleyball or softball.

So what he's done with Madonna University's softball team should come as no surprise. Abraham has proven it, time and again — his formula works.

And just what is this magic he creates? Some sort of spell he casts that mysteriously transforms losers into winners?

Afraid not. His coaching philosophy is really rather generic. As Abraham explained: "I coach (both sports) the same way, really. I gather kids who want to win, push them as hard as they can go, give them some discipline... and make them believe."

That's it? There's nothing else to fielding a winning team? "Besides getting the talent, I teach them to play as a team," Abraham answered.

Oh, Well, that clarifies it. Thanks. Perhaps we need understand what Abraham's done before conducting a search for any "secret formula."

OK then. Abraham has never been a loser: He started Madonna's volleyball program from scratch seven years ago. The Lady Crusaders have never had a losing season, going 282-94; they finished their '93 campaign in the NAIA Tournament quarterfinals with a 46-8 season mark.

And before that? Abraham coached volleyball at Redford Bishop Borgese — his alma mater (class of '70) — for nine years. The totals: 270-70 record, runners-up in Class A in '86, runners-up in Class B in '88, three Catholic League championships, five district titles, three regional crowns.

And in softball? He coached two years at Borgese, winning the Catholic League title in '83, his first year, he's been at Taylor Center since, with a 132-49 record going into this season. Twice he's guided the Rams to the Class A Final Four ('88 and '89); four times he was Tri-River League coach of the year.

Did we mention coach of the year? Well, here's something worth noting: Abraham might be the only NAIA district coach of the year in two sports in the same year.

This year. He downplays it, of course. Credits his players. But the paths he's traveled with his two Madonna teams are far different, which serves as a testament to his coaching ability.

Although his volleyball team was a success, come tournament time it seemed to fall frustratingly a bit short — until last season.

The softball team came close to extinction. When Dave Racer abruptly resigned as coach last year, the program nearly went with him. It wasn't until December that Abraham was coaxed and finally convinced by Madonna athletic director Ray Summers to take over.

Abraham was reluctant: "I knew we could make this into a good team, but I was worried about coaching two college sports."

Unlike his volleyball team, which had to be constructed from the ground up, the softball team had a nucleus to build around. But how would they react to a new coach, particularly when the former coach left so abruptly?

There were few recruits, and no fall season to iron things out. Practice didn't begin until four weeks prior to the opener.

Despite all the odds stacked against them, the Crusaders succeeded. They won the regular-season district title, came back to win the district playoff, then beat Shawnee State in the Bi-District to advance to the same goal — the NAIA Tournament — it took the volleyball team seven years to reach.

"Right off the bat, they worked hard," said Abraham of his troops. "They were hungry. They believed everything I was saying. They knew I had been coaching softball."

"As soon as we started playing games, I knew they would be a good team. They were serious about winning."

They proved it again in the Bi-District final Friday. It took some backs-to-the-wall stuff to pull it off, just like in the district tournament. A run in the bottom of the seventh to tie it, then a two-out hit in the eighth to win it and send Madonna to the NAIA Softball World Series.

Abraham likes to say winning isn't the reason he coaches. It's the relationships with the athletes, watching them succeed on and off the playing field that keeps him in it.

Break it all down and know what it adds up to? A formula that produces winners.



Abraham



Slide to safety: Stevenson's Marie Wilson was safe Friday when the ball bounded away from second baseman Amy Finkel. The Raiders won the game, however.

LaCosse throws no-hitter for Hawks

Erin LaCosse has been a standout pitcher for the Farmington Harrison softball team, and Friday she was at her very best.

LaCosse threw a no-hitter and struck out 16 as the host Hawks blanked defending Western Lakes Activities Association champion Plymouth Canton 3-0. LaCosse walked three.

"She really believes she's a very good pitcher now and can take command of the game," Harrison coach Mike Teachman said.

"She believes in herself, and the catchers are doing a great job of catching her. You can't throw the drop pitch if nobody can catch it."

"Even if she goes 3-0 on a batter, she believes she can come back and get them. She's a much smarter pitcher than she was a month ago and more confident. And it helps to have a team playing well behind you."

Amanda Ault had two of Harrison's four hits, including a double, and drove in a run. Kathy Schneider

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(triple) and Lori Hubble (RBI) had the other hits.

Stephanie Schwalm, the leadoff batter, was 0-for-1 but walked twice, stole two bases and scored two runs.

The Hawks are 5-2 in the Western Division and play at Livonia Church Hill today for the championship. The Chargers are 6-2 in the division.

Harrison is 12-4 overall and pleasantly ahead of schedule, according to Teachman.

"It's way too early for us," he said. "I thought we would have a chance to be 12-4 in our first 16 games next year. I think it shows what a great group of girls this is."

"They were almost too serious today, because they're a fun-loving group. But they were really focused. We stress having all 12 players ready to play, and I think that has really helped."

On Wednesday, the Hawks used a

three-run fourth inning to break a 3-3 tie and defeat visiting Livonia Stevenson 7-4.

Kristen Kozlarski pitched six innings, allowed three hits and earned the win. Harrison had eight hits off losing pitcher Laura Krol.

Kozlarski helped her cause with two hits, three stolen bases and two runs. Ault had a double and two RBIs, and she scored twice. Schwalm, Jenny Mylinski and Becky Maeck chipped in one RBI apiece.

Hubble was the fielding star, according to Teachman. Playing center field, she gunned a runner down at home plate to complete a double play and threw a runner out at first.

NORTH 15, STEVENSON 3: Amy Kelman batted in six runs and scored three as North Farmington merited visiting Livonia Stevenson in six innings Friday.

The Raiders are 6-2 in the Lakes Division and still in contention for the championship. North earned its overall record at 9-9 prior to tournament play Saturday.

Kelman and Becky Thursman, who had

three RBIs and scored two runs, led the 11-hit North offense with three hits each. One of Kelman's hits was a home run.

Allison Stein produced two hits and four runs, and Ellen Herman had her first varsity hit — a two-run, pinch-hit triple. She was thrown out at the plate, trying to stretch it into a home run, however.

McGowan Stephen also got her first varsity hit and scored three runs as the courtesy runner for Mackie, the catcher.

Melanie Cheney was the winning pitcher, holding the Spartans (four errors) to five hits. She walked none and struck out five.

Laura Krol hit a solo homer for Stevenson, 3-5 and 3-10.

The North-Northville game was postponed Wednesday because of rain and will be played Tuesday at Northville.

FARMINGTON 7, FRANKLIN 3: The Falcons started with four runs in the first inning and were ahead all the way Wednesday at Livonia Franklin.

The host Patriots had their pitchers, Tina Allen and Becky Jensen, combining for a no-hitter (walking eight batters and hitting two) despite the outcome.

Gibbons gets defensive with Buckeyes

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER

Dan Gibbons of Farmington Hills hopes he can be as successful playing defensive tackle for Ohio State University as another Dan.

The Birmingham Brother Rice senior will get the chance when he vies with others to replace Dan "Big Daddy" Wilkinson, who was the No. 1 pick in the recent pro draft.

"My impression is they're not going to redshirt me," Gibbons said. "They think I can play right away. I have a very good opportunity to come in and play in the fall."

"I'd rather be redshirted and get used to the system, so I'll be ready to go a year from now. But it's their decision, and I'll do whatever they want me to do."

The 6-foot-5, 285-pound Gibbons chose the Buckeyes over UCLA, Boston College and Michigan State because the others wanted him as an of-

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ensive lineman or were unsure where he would play.

"The opportunity to play defensive tackle was the most important factor in the decision and the overall tradition of the school," he said. "I really liked it when I went down there for my visit."

"I think I have more the mentality for defense. I'm more suited for defense than just sitting on the offensive line. I'm a more intense person than most offensive people."

Gibbons, who played for Farmington Our Lady of Sorrows before going to Rice, isn't planning to follow Wilkinson to the pros just yet.

"My goal is to have a successful college career and get an education," he said. "If the opportunity comes, that's my dream. But I'm not setting it as one of my goals."

"I worked my whole life, hoping to go on to a big-time school, and my parents are real proud of me."

Gibbons was well known in this state and caught the attention of the Ohio State coaches when he played opposite a noted offensive tackle from Sandusky (Ohio) last fall.

"They liked my size, my acceleration off the ball and my play against Orlando Pace — one of their big offensive recruits," he said. "He was rated the No. 1 offensive lineman in the country."

"I feel I equaled him. I didn't get the better of him, and he didn't get the better of me. I just stuck with him."

Gibbons was rated the No. 1 preseason high school player in Michigan last summer and made every all-state team after a fine senior season at Rice.

"I had a great four years there," he said.



Dan Gibbons headed to Ohio State