

Marian forces WB to stumble in state playoffs

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A familiar roadblock derailed West Bloomfield's journey in the girls basketball state tournament Wednesday night in the Class A Region 5 championship game at Birmingham Groves. The Lakers (19-6) squared off against defending Class A state champion Birmingham Marian (16-9) and came out on the short end of the count, 48-36.

"The key for us was to be able to take away their perimeter game," said Marian coach Mary Cicerone, whose team plays Waterford Kettering Tuesday at

Berkley in the Class A quarterfinals. "They shoot very well from outside and if you give them the open look you're in trouble. Our game plan was not to worry about their inside game and to make them put it on the floor." The strategy worked to perfection. Marian's peppy defense took the Lakers out of their perimeter game and forced West Bloomfield into a dismal 29-percent shooting from the floor (16 of 55).

"This is the third year we've stumbled at this roadblock," said West Bloomfield coach Lance Davis, referring to three-straight losses to Marian in the state

GIRLS BASKETBALL STATE TOURNEY

tournament. "We have to change this roadblock into a stepping stone. I thought, for the last two years, that we've had the better team player-for-player. But they prepare for us and they get it done. I don't know if it's the mystique of Marian or what, but we seem to stumble when we play them."

While the Lakers were struggling to hit just one of 11 shots from the floor in the first quarter, the Mustangs were building an 11-3 lead. Laker senior Jen

Kristensen (15 points) finally stepped up for West Bloomfield and nearly single-handedly got the Lakers back into the game. Kristensen drained a triple to open the second quarter then grabbed a rebound at the other end of the court, drew a foul and split a pair of free throws. Her second triple of the quarter, with 5:45 remaining, pulled the Lakers to within a point, 11-10. A short jumper by Kristensen with 2:50 left in the half gave the Lakers their first lead of the

game, 16-16.

The lead see-sawed back and forth early in the third quarter until Marian's Crystal Andrews stepped up for the Mustangs. The 5-foot-10 senior scored eight of her team-leading 15 points in the third as the Mustangs began to pull away. Junior Amber Mazza scored from down low with 1:30 left in the quarter to put Marian ahead for good, 28-26, and Andrews' buzzer-better off an offensive rebound gave the Mustangs a 34-28 lead heading into the fourth.

While the Lakers continued to struggle from the floor (four of 15 in the fourth) Mazza (10

points), Renee Demres (11 points), and Katherine Solner (eight points) scored four points each for Marian as the Mustangs sealed the win with a 14-8 scoring edge down the stretch.

"I thought early in the game we were getting the shots we wanted, but when they didn't fall we started pressing and taking shots maybe we shouldn't have taken," Davis said. "It was a combination of having a bad shooting night and playing a very good basketball team."

Junior Chastity Quinn added 12 points for West Bloomfield, which finished the season with a 19-9 record.

Rice loses 14-7 in championship game against Saginaw

BY CHRIS MAYER
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Birmingham Brother Rice's ability to win close games proved instrumental in its quest to capture the inaugural Division 2 state football championship.

Rice defeated three of its first four playoff opponents by a combined 11 points, so it wasn't too surprising to see the Warriors locked in a fourth-quarter struggle with Saginaw in Friday afternoon's Division 2 final.

But there would be no last-minute heroics for Rice on this day. Saginaw parlayed the big-play ability of Charles Rogers, a speedy defense, and senior Terry Jackson's 17-yard touchdown run with 7:03 remaining into a 14-7 triumph at the Pontiac Silverdome.

The hard-fought loss prevented the Warriors from earning their fifth state championship since 1977 and first since 1990. Rice's previous trip to the state finals came in 1991 where it suffered a 14-0 setback to Class A champion East Lansing.

"We knew that Saginaw was a very tough football team and that they had a very good defense," Brother Rice coach Al Fracassa said. "They were quick,

too, so we knew we were going to have a hard time moving the ball. But we did OK. I think our boys gave a good effort in the second half especially, but (Saginaw) is a talented team. They have good athletes on their team and they deserved to win."

The game was a defensive battle from the start. Brother Rice (11-3) managed just 208 yards total offense - the Warriors gained 78 yards on the ground on 36 carries - despite running 60 plays to Saginaw's 39. The Trojans (12-2), who overcame three lost fumbles, finished with 221 total yards as Jackson rushed for 106 yards on 18 carries.

Saginaw's two quarterbacks, junior Brandon Cork and sophomore Anthony Roberson, combined for only one pass completion in six attempts. But what a completion it was.

Rogers, a 6-foot-4 senior wide receiver considered one of the state's top players, hooked up with Cork late in the first quarter for a 60-yard touchdown pass. Rogers got behind cornerback Aaron Jackson on the third-and-one play, made the reception along the right sideline at the Rice 32-yard line, eluded safety Mark Mueller's tackle at the 12

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and went into the end zone.

"I felt like I set the tone when I caught my pass," Rogers said. "One defender slipped off me and I stiff-armed the other one and I got into the end zone."

(Jackson) is our best defensive back and he did a great job on Rogers," Fracassa said. "Rogers is a big-time player - he should be in the NFL. He looks like that (Randy) Moss from Minnesota. I think he's got the potential to be an outstanding football player for a Division 1 school. He's always a threat."

Kirk Carruth's extra point was blocked with 2:25 left in the opening quarter, and the score would stay 6-0 until early in the second half.

The third quarter began ominously for the Trojans when Jerome Jackson fumbled on the first play from scrimmage. Rice junior linebacker Eric Hackem recovered at the Saginaw 31-yard line, setting up an eight-play drive that culminated in a Tony Gioutos 5-yard TD run with 8:14 left in the quarter. Ross Ryan's subsequent PAT gave the Warriors a 7-6 lead.

The Warriors failed to move

the ball after recovering a fumble on Saginaw's next possession, and the Trojans eventually regrouped to stage a championship-winning drive.

Saginaw marched 84 yards in 12 plays, with Terry Jackson accounting for the final 17 yards on a sweep around left end. Terry Jackson, who rushed for 60 yards during the five-minute, 43-second drive, added a successful two-point run for a 14-7 advantage.

"(Rice) was moving two or three guys to Charles Rogers and we wanted Terry to do his own thing," Saginaw coach Donald Durrett said. "He threw a great move on them and went into the end zone."

The Warriors reached the Saginaw 41 with just over three minutes remaining but turned the ball over on downs. Rice regained possession with 1:38 to go when Gioutos recovered Cork's fumble at the Saginaw 45, but a penalty for an ineligible player downfield negated Matt Baker's 20-yard pass completion to Mark Goebel and the game ended with Jeremiah McLaurin intercepting Baker's desperation

toes in the end zone.

Baker, who suffered a concussion during Rice's 21-20 regional final win over Pontiac Northern, finished 16-of-24 passing for 128 yards. Goebel led the rushing attack with 62 yards on 16 rushes.

Defensively, junior linebacker Phil Jacques recorded eight tackles and a forced fumble for Rice.

■ But there would be no last-minute heroics for Rice on this day.

Saginaw was led by junior linebacker Ronald Stanley, who made 18 tackles and had one of the Trojans' two sacks.

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