

# Eaglets make sure Phoenix won't rise again, 79-64

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Detroit Renaissance discovered yet again why Orchard Lake St. Mary's is considered the favorite to win the Class B boys basketball state title.

Renaissance entertained high hopes of upsetting the top-ranked Eaglets in Friday's regional final contest. The Phoenix dropped a close decision to St. Mary's in the Operation Friendship championship game earlier this month, but there would be no upset on this night.

Seniors Jermaine Gonzales

and Maurice Searight combined for 47 points, and the Eaglets used a crucial third-quarter run to post a 79-64 triumph at Warren Woods Tower High School.

The victory sends St. Mary's (25-0) onto Tuesday's state quarterfinal at Eastern Michigan University where Cheleux, an 81-68 winner over Ypsilanti Wil-Low Run on Friday, awaits. Tip-off is scheduled for 7 p.m.

The Eaglets reached the Class B quarterfinals last season where they fell to River Rouge.

"It feels great to be going back to the quarterfinals," said Gonzales, who sank six of OLSM's 10

3-pointers and notted a team-high 25 points. "Now we have to have stay focused and just continue to do what we've done all season. That means we have to practice hard and properly prepare for each game."

"We have to come out and play hard," OLSM head coach George Porritt said. "We bowed out at this point (the quarterfinals) last year and we have to stay focused. We can't worry about who we are playing, we just have to go after them."

The Operation Friendship game saw St. Mary's pull out a 57-54 victory over Renaissance,

and for a while it appeared Friday's highly anticipated rematch would be just as close.

The Phoenix (22-3) opened the second half with four quick points to narrow a 38-33 halftime deficit to a single point. But St. Mary's ability to break open close games suddenly surfaced in the form of a 19-5 run and the Eaglets never looked back.

The outburst, which left the Eaglets with a 57-42 lead entering the fourth quarter, featured nine points by Gonzales and seven points by Searight. Renaissance, meanwhile, did not register a point over the final

4:12 of the third quarter.

"We're a team that makes a lot of runs," Porritt said. "We're capable of putting up quick points because our top six and seven kids can put the ball in the hole and you can't leave one alone."

Renaissance closed within 66-56 with 2:47 left, but St. Mary's converted 14-of-20 free throws in the last 2:13 to seal the win.

Searight finished with 22 points and 11 rebounds, junior guard Grant Mason had a fine game with 15 points and junior center Charles Davis scored nine points, grabbed 15 boards and

blocked four shots.

Rickey Paulding, Renaissance's Missouri-bound senior, led all scorers with 33 points. Paulding, a talented 6-foot-5 swingman, registered 16 first-half points, but Gonzales helped limit him to just two points during the pivotal stretch of the third quarter.

"Renaissance has a super player in Ricky Paulding and they play so hard," Porritt said. "We knew that and we knew we had to play just as hard as them or the score could have been the other way tonight. And our kids played very hard tonight."

## Doughboys too tall for Knights in regional tourney showdown

BY MARTY BUDNER  
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One of the best basketball seasons in Bloomfield Hills Lahser history came to a thudding halt Friday evening in a regional championship game played at Southfield-Lathrup.

Detroit Pershing used its dominating Division-1 talent and superior size to register a 69-47 triumph and eliminate Lahser from the Class A state tourney.

The Doughboys take a 21-2 overall mark into the state quarterfinal match up 7:30 p.m. Tuesday evening at the University of Detroit-Mercy against Pontiac Central.

Meanwhile, the Knights ended their memorable season with an 18-6 overall record. Coach Chris Drogosch was disappointed to see the year end, but had nothing but praise for his veteran team.

"I'm extremely proud of our team. What a wonderful season," said Drogosch. "And tonight, in no way, diminishes anything we've done this year...18-6, league champs, district champs, Sweet Sixteen appearance."

"This is the first (Lahser) team since 1977 to get this far. No team from Lahser has ever won (a regional title). This is only the third time in school history that we've won league and district titles, and gone to the Sweet Sixteen in the same year."

It was their best season in 23. The fans at Lathrup couldn't stop focusing on the super-sized, sequoia-like line-up the Doughboys presented.

Pershing's starting front-court featured the likes of 6-foot-10 forward Darris Mancel, who has

not made a college choice yet but is considering Iowa and Texas Christian, 6-9 center Arthur Johnson, who's made a verbal commitment to Missouri, and 6-3 sharpshooting forward Jacob Shaw.

That height advantage resulted in a one-sided 46-23 rebounding margin for the Detroit Public School League representative.

Despite that advantage, Lahser trailed by just five points (26-21) at halftime.

The Knights attempted to play a slow-down game and utilize a tight zone defense to keep the Doughboys off balance. It worked for one half.

Lahser went up 6-0 to begin the game and trailed by one point after the first eight minutes, 11-10. The Knights played to their tempo through most of the second quarter and held a

16-15 lead four minutes before halftime.

Pershing gained its five-point halftime advantage with an 11-5 blitz to end the second quarter. The Doughboy run included a three-pointer by guard Michael Bailey, an offensive-rebound put-back by Shaw and three easy baskets - including two dunks - by Mancel.

Pershing took control of the game with a 13-4 blitz to start the third quarter.

"We wanted to stop them from getting it to the big guys, hope for them to miss some shots from the perimeter and rebound the ball defensively," said Drogosch. "And we did that in the first quarter when we had the lead."

Senior center Joe Finland led Lahser with a game-high 18 points and completed his double-

double with 10 rebounds. Sophomore forward David Komaley had 10 points and senior guard Brandon Casar had seven points and seven assists. Junior forward James Mathis had a team-high 13 rebounds to accompany six points.

The Knights this season tied for the Oakland Activities Association Division 111 championship, won the district title with a win over Farmington and defeated Birmingham Groves for the third time this season in a first-round regional game to advance to the regional final against Pershing.

The only previous Knight squads to advance as far in the state tournament were the Nick Conti-coached teams of the mid 70s that also fell in regional championship battles. The 1976 team lost to Detroit Denby by

three points and the 1977 Knight squad dropped a three-point game to Pontiac Central.

"Every season has highs and lows. There's no way to be lying high all season because it's too long," said Drogosch. "We had a couple of valleys that we worked through."

"I think the best indication that we were going to do well in (the state) tournament was when we hit a valley after we lost to Lake Orion. We had to beat Seasholm to gain a share of the title. They responded and stepped it up in that game."

"I thought our three captains - Joe (Finland), James (Mathis) and Brandon (Casar) really stepped it up in the tournament," he said. "As good as they played all year, they really stepped it up in the tournament and everyone else followed."

## Western's run done

BY JIM TOTTE  
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On a day full of charms, Walled Lake Western's boys basketball team again came up empty.

Looking to advance one step further in state tournament play than ever before, the Warriors fell victim to the surging Pontiac Central Chiefs, 57-50, in Class A regional final play at Macomb Dakota High School on Friday.

"We have gotten this far three of the last four years and I felt good coming in that this might be our year," said Western coach Rex Stanczak outside a solemn Warriors' locker room. "A lot of the bounces we got in other games didn't go our way tonight. But give Central a lot of credit because every time we needed a play, (Central junior Andrew) Brown made it."

The Chiefs fiery backcourt star caused havoc at both ends of the floor, accounting for a game-high 26 points on the offensive end and forcing numerous on the defensive side.

Brown's eight points in the first two periods kept the Chiefs, who have now won nearly as many games in the postseason (5) as the regular season (6), within shouting distance of the Warriors.

Seniors Jenero Dawood and John Eagle helped stake the Warriors to a 28-22 lead at intermission as Dawood bagged nine points and Eagle concluded the second period with a three-point play.

The inability to build a greater advantage was felt during the opening minutes of the third quarter as the Chiefs (11-14) drained a trio of treys to turn the six-point halftime deficit into a five-point lead.

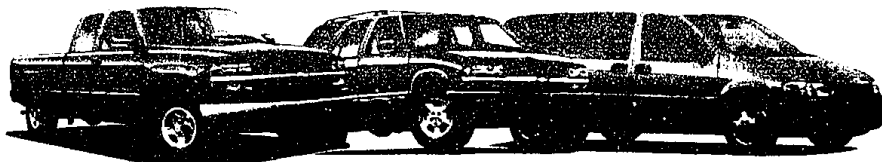
A Kip Skostek tip-in at the buzzer brought the Warriors to within three, 41-38, heading into the final frame.

A Dawood free throw knotted the game at 45-45, but consecutive baskets from Brown and Kashif Russell, and three free throws from James Smothers, built the lead back up to seven and signaled the end to the Warriors' season at 19-6.

The Warriors, who lost at the same point of the season to Pontiac Northern during the 1997 and 1999 campaigns, got a team-leading 14 points from senior Chris Howder. Dawood followed with 12 points and Eagle chipped in with eight.

"I guess that's why they call it March Madness," responded Central coach Ernie Hill of his team's tournament turnaround. "Through the bad times and through the good times they have been sticking together."

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