

Marlins earn berth in Final Four

■ Farmington Hills Mercy reached the semifinals of the state softball tournament for the first time Tuesday with a 3-1 win over Fraser.

BY DAN O'MEARA
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Farmington Hills Mercy's softball players and their fans could care less about high gas prices this week. The Marlins are filling up the tank for a trip to Battle Creek and a chance to win a state championship. Mercy advanced to the Final Four with a 3-1, upset victory Tuesday over Fraser in a Division 1 quarterfinal game at Clintondale High School.

SOFTBALL

"We've been working four years for this," Mercy senior third baseman Carrie Brankiewicz said.

"The loss in the Catholic League (final) devastated us, but we came back and proved we belong in the top four in the state. It's where we should be."

The Marlins (33-10) will play a semifinal contest Friday against undefeated and No. 2-ranked Portage Northern (39-0). Game time is 3:30 p.m.

For the seven seniors on the Mercy team, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity now.

"We've worked so hard for this," senior catcher Erin Carson said. "Since freshman year, we've wanted to go to Battle Creek so bad. This is the happiest feeling right now."

Mercy held its own against Fraser's highly-touted pitcher, Kelly Nilson, and countered with an outstanding effort by sophomore Megan Feduk.

Each team had five hits, but the Marlins got more mileage from theirs. Nilson struck out five and walked one, which led to Mercy's second run.

Feduk, who improved her record to 17-4, threw a perfect game through four innings. She had four strikeouts and didn't walk anybody.

"I never compare myself to the other pitcher," said Feduk, who didn't make too much of winning the duel with Nil-



Marlins go to state: Senior Nuverre Naomi is all smiles as she's greeted by teammates upon crossing home plate and scoring Mercy's first run Tuesday. The Marlins will play in Battle Creek Friday.

son. "It's a team sport; we play the other team and not the other pitcher."

"As a team, we played together real well, and it's a team win for us. If we pull together and play like we did today, I think we can go a long way."

Though she was stranded at third base in the first inning, senior Dana Falvo's leadoff single, which she pushed past the onrushing Fraser third

baseman, was a big play, according to Carson.

"That boosted our confidence against a great pitcher," she said. "When Dana got that hit, we knew we could do this."

Mercy was on the scoreboard in the next inning. Senior second baseman Nuverre Naomi hit a two-out triple to deep left field and scored on Krystle Shina's double.

Brankiewicz drew the only walk and made it 2-0 in the fourth. She advanced on consecutive sacrifices by Theresa Lawrence and Alex Duda and scored on a passed ball.

The Marlins did it with defense, too. Two big plays prevented the Ramblers (38-3) from eventually tying the score.

Please see MARLINS, C3

Prep runner was focus of attention at big track meet

Don't be mistaken, Dathan Ritzheim looks more like your local paperboy than somebody trying to make the Olympic Trials cut in the 5,000-meter run.

And make no mistake about it, the Rockford High junior tried to steal the show Saturday at Plymouth Canton High School in the Michigan International, a track and field meet, which piqued enough curiosity to bring out over 1,000 spectators on a warm and gusty night.

The headliners were Canadian miler Kevin Sullivan, and Cadillac native Paul McMillen, the man who represented the U.S. in the 1,500 at the Atlanta Olympic Games.

But Ritzheim, a scrawny lad trying to go where very few high school runners have dared to go, had the crowd buzzing with anticipation.

And he didn't disappoint the fans.

Ritzheim, the Foot Locker national cross country champion, the state record holder in the 1,600 and the national indoor record holder in the 3,200, pressed the envelope against a field of well-seasoned men.

Talking trash on the track

On the second lap, Ritzheim heard some chirping from one of the older competitors.

"That guy told me, 'If you're so good, why not take the lead?'" Ritzheim recalled. "He was kind of mocking me."

Nobody likes to be shown up by a kid, just ask Karl Malone, who once got irritated in an NBA All-Star game by an up-and-coming Kobe Bryant.

Ritzheim didn't win Saturday night, that honor went to former Michigan State standout Jim Jurjevich, a 24-year-old who has already made the Olympic Trials cut (13:47.0) in the 5,000.

But Ritzheim certainly gained a lot of respect, collapsing at the finish line in 14:15.8.

Jurjevich, who rallied to win the race on the final two laps after Ritzheim had pulled along the field, won the event in 14:07.83.

"He's certainly one of the up-and-comers, that's for sure," said Jurjevich of his young sidekick. "I'm sure he's going to step up to the 10K some day."

Ritzheim may give his dream of going to the Trials, which starts July 15 in Sacramento, Calif., one more crack at the Foot Locker outdoor meet later this month in Raleigh, N.C.

Ritzheim set state records

But he didn't go away empty-footed. His times at 3,000 (8:18.5) and 3,200 (8:52.5) are both state schoolboy bests. His 5,000 finish time ranks him among the top 10 ever run nationally by a prep.

And by his senior year, the legend of Ritzheim should grow even more.

And just for your information, no high schooler in this country has qualified for any track and field event in the Olympics since 1978.

"I felt good going in tonight, but during the race I was wobbly, queasy and the wind was pushing me around," said Ritzheim, who later was able to greet fans and talk to reporters. "I was dying the last mile."

"I have not been training enough because I've been training for the mile. I knew today I couldn't hit that time. It's a lot different running a 5,000 on a track than on a cross country course."

Chalk one up for experience, but

Please see EMONS, C5



Season ends for Hawks: Harrison pitcher Lindsey Emmett reacts to an extra-inning loss Saturday in regional softball action.

Blazers beat Hawks in extra inning, 7-6

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SOFTBALL

If no one uttered the famous phrase, certainly someone, at the very least, must have thought of Yogi Berra.

Livonia Ladywood proved "It's not over until it's over," as it rallied to defeat Farmington Harrison in a Division 2 regional softball game Saturday.

It looked as if it might be over when the Hawks scored three runs in the top of the fifth inning at Birmingham Scholastic to take a 5-1 lead.

But the Blazers rallied with six runs over the next 3½ innings to win the game, 7-6, on sophomore Dawn Rini's two-run double in the eighth.

"The kids just clawed back," Ladywood coach Bob Lulek said. "We were patient and made their pitcher (Lindsey Emmett) work."

"No one swung at a first pitch. We made her go to a lot of long counts, and that was to our advantage."

"And we not been patient, I don't

think we would have won. (Emmett) is very good. I just think she got a little tired at the end."

Ladywood forced the extra inning when Rini singled and scored on Meghan Wilkinson's double in the seventh, tying the score at five.

But the Hawks (17-11-1) regained the lead in the top of the eighth without the benefit of a hit.

Kristin Schrock was hit by a pitch, advanced to third on two wild pitches and scored on Jenny Wingert's sacrifice fly.

Kristen Barnes started the Ladywood half of the inning with a flyball to deep right field. Shawn Fallon walked with one out, and Rini followed with her game-winning drive into the left-center gap.

"That's part of the game," Harrison

Please see HAWKS, C4

Shamrocks continue to pursue state-title repeat

BY PAUL BEAUDRY
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BASEBALL

After winning Saturday's Division 1 regional, Catholic Central baseball coach John Salter laughed and shook his head when asked if he thought his defending state champs could repeat this year.

After beating third-ranked Novi, 12-1, and earning a trip to the semifinals for the third straight year Tuesday at Carleton Airport High School, Salter is

beginning to laugh a little less and believe a lot more.

The Shamrocks didn't just beat the Wildcats (30-5); they shut them down, using a well-tested combination of pitching, hitting and defense.

"Pitching and defense gave us the chance we needed," said Salter after his team earned a date in Friday's 6:30 p.m. semifinal against Hartland. "And

we hit the ball pretty well, too."

The Shamrocks (23-11) did everything the Wildcats didn't do.

Charlie Haege, who's pitched more in the last week than he had all season, shut down Novi on a one-hitter. Meanwhile, the Shamrocks banged out 11 hits against five different pitchers.

CC made two meaningless errors and caught virtually everything hit its way. Novi stumbled to four errors and made at least that many defensive mistakes, allowing balls to drop for hits.

There was one other thing that swung the Shamrocks' way — momentum. While CC had Novi on the ropes early, thanks to a 3-0 lead helped by three errors, Brian Williams delivered the knockout punch with a defensive gem that turned the tide.

CC held the lead going into the third inning, but Haege served up a lead-off homer to Jon Cervi — the only hit Haege would allow in six innings — and then hit Brendan Hadley with a

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