

Hoop title

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in foul trouble during that time and were at an advantage coming out for the second half. The kids were just full of confidence." Guards Kegley and Leach made key three-point shots in the third quarter as St. Fabian outscored the Falcons, 14-6, and went into the fourth leading, 29-28.

With less than a minute left, the Falcons had a three-point lead and three fouls to give and used them to prevent St. Clare from having a clear shot at a three.

But they fouled St. Clare's best

player attempting a three with three seconds remaining. With a chance to send the game into overtime, he made the first but missed the second, forcing him to deliberately miss the third, too.

But the rule requires the ball to touch the rim for a team to score on a putback. When the St. Clare player bounced the ball hard off the backboard, the referee signaled a violation and awarded possession to St. Fabian.

Leach was fouled and made a free throw for the 35-32, final score. St. Clare missed a desper-

ation, three-point shot from half court as time expired. Kelmigian led the Falcons with 15 points, which included three triples. Mackler and Rawls combined for 12 rebounds and eight blocked shots. Jwad played some important minutes in the second quarter when Mackler was on the bench in early foul trouble.

St. Fabian finished the season with a record of 22-2, which included being 10-0 in the CYO West Suburban Division, 8-0 in the playoffs and 4-2 in tournaments.

Statistically, the leading scorer for the season was Mackler; the top rebounder was Rawls; the assist leader was Leach; and the best three-point shooter was Kegley.

The overall team leader and Founders Award winner (for leadership, unselfishness and team attitude) was Kelmigian, who was in the top five of all statistical categories.

St. Fabian started the season with second-place finishes in the Our Lady of Sorrows Thanksgiving Tournament and the Catholic Central Christmas Invi-

tational. The Falcons resumed the regular season in January with a 7-2 record and cruised through the remainder of the division schedule undefeated.

St. Fabian defeated each divisional opponent (Sorrow, Livonia St. Edith, Novi Holy Family, Redford St. Mary's and Detroit St. Scholastica) twice by an average margin of 12 points.

The Falcons were the No. 1 seed in their CYO district tournament and crushed two opponents to capture the crown.

The next step was the region-

al, and the championship game provided the opportunity for St. Fabian to avenge a loss to Garden City St. Raphael in the CC tournament. The Falcons rolled to a 51-31 victory and earned a trip to the CYO Final Four.

In the semifinal game, which also was for the Westside championship, St. Fabian faced St. Mary's of Redford again and needed overtime to win, 51-37.

The score was tied at 35 after four quarters, but Kelmigian scored nine of the team's 16 points in overtime as the Falcons pulled away to a victory.

It's nice to see Ocelots, Briggs doing well

Former New York Giants manager Leo Durocher's most famous line was: "Nice guys finish last."

Prior to the start of the 2000-01 men's basketball season, Schoolcraft fourth-year coach Carlos Briggs knew he had the talent to go to Hutchinson, Kan. for the National Junior College Athletic Association Division I Tournament, but questioned his team's toughness, hunger and swagger.

But after going 31-2 and winning the Eastern Conference, state and region titles, answering every challenge along the way, the Ocelots are proving: "Nice guys can finish first."

When Schoolcraft takes to the court Tuesday to face Western Nebraska in the opening round of the NJCAA Tourney, Briggs will be taking a team capable of making it to the Final Four.

After unranked Schoolcraft demolished Region 12 bully Vincennes University (Ind.), by 23 points, VU coach Dan Sparks was quoted as saying his team was capable of reaching the semifinals of the NJCAA tourney had they gotten past Schoolcraft.

You have to go all the way back to Jan. 10 to find the last loss for Schoolcraft, an embar-

assing 100-77 setback to rival Flint Mott.

But when the Ocelots repaid host Mott the favor, 100-90, on Feb. 5, you could sense this team was on its way to doing something special.

The rematch with Mott never materialized in the Michigan Community College Athletic Association playoffs, but the Ocelots took care of business in a come-from-behind semifinal win over Muskegon followed by a rout of Grand Rapids in the championship game.

When Briggs recruited this team, he believed it had a shot at Hutchinson. This year Schoolcraft was hosting both the regional and district games.

Briggs, the former Schoolcraft All-America who once scored 60 points in a junior college game and led the Southwest Conference in scoring at Baylor, has transformed a dying program.

Coaches like Ron Hall, Rocky Watkins (Briggs' former coach), Bob Wetzel, Dave Bogataj and Glen Donahue tried their best, but Briggs has surpassed all expectations at Six Mile and Haggerty roads after arriving from a Texas high school.

And I have a true confession to make.

Briggs, who I had known as a player, called and asked me about the Schoolcraft job. I tried to persuade him not to take it.

I felt at the time that the Schoolcraft administration was-

n't committed to building a successful basketball program.

But give athletic director Ed Kavanaugh credit for hiring Briggs and women's coach Karen Lafata (whose team is also headed to the Division II NJCAA).

Kavanaugh was a winner at Livonia Ladywood girls basketball program and believed both coaches were good fits.

Of course, the Schoolcraft administration deserves credit for allowing Briggs the opportunity to succeed. They have made some moves that have to be applauded.

Briggs is now employed by the school, runs a study table each day for the players and is a relentless recruiter with loads of contacts in and around the City of Detroit.

And give Donahue, who left for an assistant's job at Central Michigan after his first year, some credit.

He brought in Kevin Nelson and Garden City's Pete Males, who then teamed up with Briggs recruits Derek McKelvey and Emeka Okonkwo (Wayne State) to make Schoolcraft more than competitive his first season.

Nelson just finished a great career at Wright State, scoring over 1,000 points and making all-Midwestern Collegiate Conference two years in a row. And Males has been a fixture at the guard spot for Rochester College.

Briggs won 24 games his first season, a state championship the

next, followed by two consecutive Eastern Conference titles.

Along the way he has produced several fine college players including Rob Brown, the leading scorer and rebounder this season at the University of Buffalo; Wayne Memorial's Brian Williams, a starting point-guard at Western Illinois; Quentin Mitchell, a key reserve at Western Illinois; and guard Reggie Kirkland, who recently broke Wayne State's mark for consecutive made free throws (31).

This year's team, of course, is well stocked with talent as evidenced by their 31-2 record. Two players, Sam Hoskin (DePaul) and Nick Evola (Western Michigan) are already committed, while players like Derrick Bird, Keenan Weir, Mike Peek, Colin Wilkinson, Dwight Windom are sure bets to continue their college careers at four-year Division I or II schools.

Briggs has always maintained his main goal is to make it possible for his players to receive their associate degrees and move on to four-year schools.

The only question that hangs over the Schoolcraft program is how long will Briggs stay.

Surely, a Division I program, perhaps Michigan, is looking for a capable junior college coach with a 104-21 record to become a valuable assistant.

And yes, nice guys like Briggs prove you can also finish first and compete for a national title.

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Madison Cleaves

Photo credit: [illegible]

Ocelots

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Meanwhile, the Ocelots practiced Wednesday at Eastern Michigan University and Thursday at the University of Michigan's Crier Arena to get accustomed to a larger arena setting.

Back-up guard Javon Clark (Detroit Cass Tech), who did not play in the Region or District games, is still receiving treatment from trainer Kim Kotlewski for a sprained ankle. He is the

team's top three-point shooter (48.3 percent).

Five Ocelots average double figures in points led by 6-8 center Sam Hoskin (24.6), followed by Derrick Bird (19.8), Dave McGlowin (11.5), Nick Evola (10.7) and Mike Peek (10.3).

The top rebounders include Hoskin (10.0) and Dwight Windom (8.2). The team's top find goal percentage shooter is Win-

dom (61.7 percent) followed by Evola (61.4 percent). Peek is the team's top free throw shooter (82.1 percent).

McGlowin, the point-guard from Pontiac Notre Dame Prep via Florida A&M, tops in the team in both assists (7.3 per game) and steals (92 total).

The Ocelots have outscored their opponents by an average of 106.3 to 76.6.

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