

Hardwidge leaves post at Churchill

BY BRAD EMONS
STAFF WRITER

Dana Hardwidge, who for 11 years ran one of the area's most successful softball programs at Livonia Churchill High School, has resigned as varsity coach.

The move caught players and Churchill Athletic Director Marc Hage somewhat by surprise last week.

"I hope I'm doing the right thing; I've been thinking about it for a year," said Hardwidge, who has coached 32 consecutive years in the Livonia Public Schools. "I need to step back from being a head coach and look at some other things."

Hardwidge, 2002 Observerland Coach of the Year, posted a career mark of 209-105, including a school-record 26 wins last season.

"I'm certainly going to miss working with the kids and the relationships with the kids, along with all the people, past and present, who were part of the program," Hardwidge said. "I thought I built a respectable program, but it's because of the kids and the effort they put forth in the program."

"One thing I was really proud of is that we never had a varsity season under .500. I worked with a lot of good people."

Even though Hardwidge hinted at resigning as far back as last spring, Hage was caught off-guard. He said the job will be posted within the Livonia Public Schools this week.

"Dana told me this might be her last year," Hage said. "She puts an awful lot of time and effort into the program and she didn't feel she could commit to that the way she wants to do it."

"It's sad for me and for her. She went out on her terms, but it's a total surprise to me."

Churchill softball players wore batting helmets around school Friday in a good-natured protest of Hardwidge's resignation.



Dana Hardwidge

Hardwidge, a native of Dover, Ohio, and graduate of Bowling Green State University, never played sports in high school. Sports was never favored.

After being hired as a math teacher in 1970, Hardwidge took her first coaching job as a volleyball coach at Livonia's Frost Junior High.

"I never dreamed I'd coach 32 years," Hardwidge said. "I thought I'd just be a math teacher."

Hardwidge spent one season (1976) as Livonia Bentley High's girls basketball coach, where she compiled a 9-6 record. She went on to have great success at Bentley as varsity volleyball coach, posting a record of 89-18 in seven years, including five Suburban Eight League titles.

When Bentley closed its doors in 1986, she moved on to Churchill to coach and teach. In 1992, she took over the varsity softball program, leading the Chargers to six district titles and three Western Division crowns in the Western Lakes Activities Association.

"Those are huge shoes to fill," Hage said. "She runs a total program and does all the right things in the off-season. She was a success because of her dedication and effort. But she's also fair and firm with kids. To find somebody who put their heart and soul into it like Dana will be hard."

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Triple-threat Garratt lifts C'ville cagers

BY CHAD MACK
STAFF WRITER

Trailing 37-25 at halftime, Livonia Clarenceville boys basketball coach Kevin Murphy wouldn't let his team say die.

The Trojans put together a rousing second-half rally Tuesday to defeat host Plymouth Christian, 77-68, in the season opener for both schools.

"Our guys battled back," Murphy said. "They played very unselfish basketball. We came out flat in the first half. Our seniors had to step up and they did."

"We switched to a full-court press at the break and it worked. We made the kids believe at the half, that we could come back. We set a goal

of being down by six by the fourth quarter, we ended up being down only one."

The Trojans outscored Plymouth Christian 28-17 in the third and made it a brand new ballgame. By the time the fourth quarter rolled around, they had the Eagles on their heels, trailing by only one, 64-53. In the fourth quarter, Clarenceville made the transition from trailing to leading with a 24-point output, along with its best defensive stand of the game.

"We played really good defense," Murphy said. "It took a lot of heart for these kids to pull it off. We stepped up and played good basketball. We held them to 14 points in the fourth, that was their worst

quarter." Aiding in the defensive clinic the Trojans put on in the second half was sophomore Bruno Shikrell.

"He played great defense in the fourth and made four steals," said Murphy. "We took them out of their game."

Clarenceville was led by the offensive outpouring of 6-foot-7 senior forward Glenn Garratt. He netted 24 points, grabbed 19 rebounds and dished out nine assists, missing a triple-double by one assist.

Five Trojans scored in double figures including Garratt. Senior guard Andrew Shaw had 17 points, while Josh Silvernail contributed 15. Allen Garratt and Pete Shaw had 11 and 10, respectively.

Shaw also finished with six steals.

Silvernail quarterbacked the offense with 11 assists. He also had a big play that helped spark the comeback. He made a steal, then dunked it with 10 seconds left to play in the second quarter.

The Eagles were led by senior forward Clay Welton's 22 points and closely behind him was senior center Ben Pew with 20.

Part of the reason Clarenceville was trailing at the break was the three-point shooting of Plymouth Christian's Dan Carty (15 points).

He was a perfect 3-for-3 from three point land in the first half, while the Eagles made all five triple tries.

Houston Baptist ends MU tourney run

BY C.A. RISAN
STAFF WRITER

VOLLEYBALL

It was near-perfect. Madonna University's volleyball team came within a few points of what could only be considered a miraculous comeback at the NIAA Tournament Saturday at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego.

Just a few points . . . The Lady Crusaders weren't even supposed to get that far. The seventh-seeded team, they won their first five matches of the tournament to reach the semifinals against Houston Baptist, the sixth-seeded squad.

But they lost their first two sets against Baptist, putting them on the brink of elimination. Lose another game and their season would be over.

The Crusaders refused to give in. They beat Baptist in the next two games 30-27, 30-27, and suddenly their match was in overtime.

"To win five-straight matches (in the tournament) is unbelievable," said Madonna coach Jerry Abraham. "And we fought like crazy to get back in it (against Baptist) after losing the first two games. It was 10-10 in the fifth game (played to 15 points) and I really thought

we were going to do it. I thought this was going to be the year."

However, it didn't work out that way. A missed serve cost Madonna one point, and a couple of kills by Elic Ekdell, a native of Kenya who was named the tournament MVP, led to a 15-10 loss by Madonna.

The Crusaders — who lost the first two games of the match 30-25, 30-18 — finished their season with a 48-4 record, tying for third in the NIAA. Baptist lost to unbeaten and top-ranked National American (41-0) in straight-sets in the final, finishing at 47-3.

Asked to rate his team's performance, Abraham said, "Absolutely exceptional. It got better as the tournament went on. We weren't at our best in the semis, but part of that was what (Baptist) was doing. Our passing was just a little bit off."

Madonna's attack throughout the tournament had been superb, thanks in great part to the serve reception and the passing from it, which led to some great sets by Natalie Sayre.

But the Crusaders struggled against Baptist.

"They served very aggressively with hard, sinking floats, which took us out of our serve

receive," said Abraham. "I think that was the biggest thing they did, was serve well. We never got in sync. They served so hard against us, it took us out of our offensive patterns."

Reid the Final Four in a national tournament and the differences in talent level are often so minute that the slightest of momentum swings can be decisive. "The kids said they were a little emotionally drained from the night before," Abraham recalled, referring to Madonna's 30-23, 38-36, 30-19 win over Westmont (Calif.) Friday night in the quarterfinals.

By the same token, the Crusaders' comeback in the semifinals did Baptist no good. "I think it did take it out of them," said Abraham. "They didn't recover."

Doing a favor for National American wasn't exactly what the Crusaders had in mind. But even though they didn't quite reach the final, it was a season to remember — the best in school history.

"I'll take a season like this anytime, with these kinds of players," Abraham said. "You never know how you're going to finish at a national tournament, and we had lost four starters and eight players from last year's team."

Laura Lesko, whose performance throughout the tourna-

ment was superb, led the Crusaders against Baptist with 18 kills (a .406 kill percentage). She also had 12 digs and three blocks.

Shelley Stanton, who had keyed Madonna's attack in the tournament, had 16 kills and four blocks but was limited to seven digs and a .115 kill percentage. "They really concentrated on stopping her," said Abraham.

Natalia Timina had 10 kills; Tera Morrill (from Livonia Franklin) had nine kills, 16 digs and two service aces; Hayley Myers had eight kills and three blocks; Lindsey Buche had four aces; Amanda Suder (Salem HS) had 21 digs; and Sayre finished with 56 set assists.

Ekdell's 38 kills (.338) were good reasons for her being chosen as the tourney MVP.

Stanton and Sayre were also chosen to the all-tourney team. There will be some rebuilding to do after this season.

Stanton — named the top player in the Wolverine-Hoosier Athletic Conference and a strong All-American candidate — and Sayre and Myers all graduates, and Morrill is undergoing shoulder surgery today, which could take more than six months of rehabilitation.

But considering how Abraham rebuilt the team last year, well, anything is possible. risan@oehomecom.net | (734) 953-2008

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