Tall exchange student paces cagers

By DOUG FUNKE

After losing its first eight Suburban Eight League basketball games last season and concluding the campaign tied for last place with a 2-14 conference record, Livonia Bentley has rebounded this year to become one of the league and area powers.

One big reason for the turnaround, albeit not the only reason, is the presence on the squad of one Florian Homm, a 6-6, 205 pound senior who happens to be a foreign exchange student from West Germany.

Homm, a personable young man, has been residing with the Richard Dahlers in Livonia and experiencing all facets of American life as part of the American Field Service program.

Among his more pleasant experiences are those on the basketball court, where he has averaged 18.8 points and 18 rebounds per contest for the Bulldogs during the first third of the season.

Homm says he has enjoyed settling into the routine of the average American teen. "So far, I'm having a lot of fun," he said. "I have a couple of real good friends here and no real problems."

Homm has especially made himself at home at a forward position on the Bentley basketball team. Although Homm ranks with the best of area scorers and rebounders, his adjustment from the European to the American style of play was not so easy.

"Here, it (pace) moves faster due to the playing time," Homm began. "We play two 20 minute halves in Germany and here we play 32 minutes. That means that the games are more physical in Germany.

"In Europe, there are a lot more elbows under the boards, hand checking and pushing," Homm continued. "I've been lucky with a good start, but I'll probably meet trouble later because I play aggressive."

Homm fouled out during two of his first six games but, he said, he has stopped what for him in Germany would be a legal maneuver, hand checking, and cut down on his fouling.

The forward also said that he had trouble adapting to the American allowance of a step and a half before shooting. In Europe, two steps are permitted and as a consequence, Homm was occasionally called for travelling early in the season.

However, his overseas experience also gives him a slight advantage, Homm said, when battling for rebounds, because he is accustomed to rough play under the boards.

One of the amazing aspects of Homm's play is that he had competed in organized ball only three years prior to this season. But how much he has packed into those three years!

Basketball is organized more on a club basis than in schools in West Germany. Last season, as a 16-year-old, Homm played on five squads—the national junior team, a state team, a junior club team, a men's club team and his high school team.

It is easy to see how the current campaign might be more relaxing for Homm, although he said the intensity of the practices has surprised him.

"Everyone was psyched up and practices were extremely hard," he said of the initial sessions. "That really surprised me. People were totally fighting for positions." Homm said practices remain just as arduous now as before the schedule began.

In addition to basketball, Homm, an all-around athlete, said he has participated in swimming, tennis, skin diving, soccer, track and boxing. He said he is considering reporting to the track team this spring to try his luck in the high jump, shot put and discus throw.

Gerry Dahler, who is active in the Livonia Town Hall series which raises funds for the AFS program and whose home Homm is sharing, said everything seems to be working out fine.

"We treat him just like one of our own," Mrs. Dahler said. "He comes here not to be a guest, but to experience our way of life." That experience includes a share of the household chores.

"He's very cooperative," Mrs. Dahler continued. "He's a very sophisticated 17-year-old."

Even Homm agrees that he seems to have become more domesticized.

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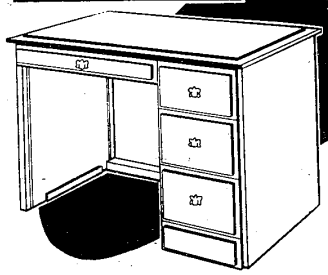

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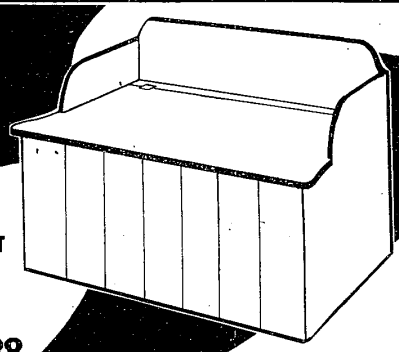

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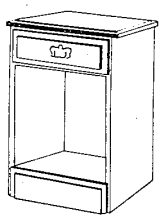

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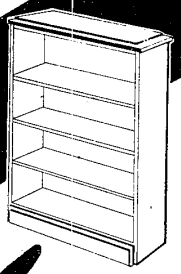

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