

Slivka: 'It just went in. What can you say?'

By Tom Beer
staff writer

Greg Slivka's voice still shakes a little when he talks about it.

"When I'm around home I kind of forget about it, but it all comes back when I have to talk to people like you, people who've been around it," Slivka told a reporter Sunday night.

The "It" that keeps popping up in the conversation refers to Mark Harris' last-second 40-foot jump shot that somehow fell through the hoop to give Flint Central a 48-47 victory over Slivka's Southfield squad in the state Class A basketball semifinals last Friday in Michigan State University's Jonson Fieldhouse.

Southfield, rallying for three quarters of the game after some lusterless play early on, had taken the lead, 47-46, on Jerome Walker's tip in with only eight seconds left.

At that point, Slivka, along with most of the Blue Jay faithful in the crowd of 9,578, thought Southfield had the game won and would advance to the Class A final to play Detroit Southwest.

But then Harris, a 6-foot senior guard who could make some college coach very happy, got his hands on the basketball and saw to it that Central—not Southfield—moved on to the glory game.

The loss sent Southfield home at 25-2, the best basketball record in the school's 30-year history.

SLIVKA, WHO spent the remainder of his weekend watching Central whip Southwestern in the Class A final and viewing a film of the Southfield game talked about those last seconds after Walker's go-ahead bucket.

"The inbound pass was to Mark at about our free-throw line," he said. "Jerome Walker did a smart thing—he stepped out of his (Harris') way. He (Harris) was on his way down court, and the official could have called a block."

"He (Harris) got to the 10-second line. He got to the Spartan head (about 40 feet from the basket), stopped his dribble, took one step and fired it up."

*Pewee Cornell (Southfield guard)

came up and put a hand on him. We did everything we could. It just went in. What can you say?"

After the shot fell, Flint Central's fans stormed onto the court and mobbed Harris and the rest of the Indians. Tears streamed down the faces of Southfield's fans.

SLIVKA'S REACTION after the shot fell:

"My thought was: Why this way? I've never lost anything like this. I just couldn't believe it."

But the Southfield coach had nothing but praise for Harris, who scored a game-high 26 points. Twelve of those points came in the first quarter to put the Jays in an eight-point hole.

"I don't know of a better guard in the state," Slivka said. "I don't care what newspapers say who's the state."

Harris' heroics overshadowed an exciting comeback by Southfield, which outscored Central in every quarter but the first.

The Jays trailed by five (36-31) at the three-quarters mark and cut the spread

to three a couple of times in the fourth quarter before taking their first lead (41-40) on Mike Priest's 18-foot jumper with 5:06 left to play.

Priest, a 5-9 guard who hadn't scored until that time, keyed the comeback with six fourth-quarter points. There were eight lead changes during that last frantic eight minutes.

"It was difficult but we made the comeback, and I'm proud of the kids for that," Slivka said. "I told the kids at halftime, 'Hey, if they're going to beat us, let them beat our best. Don't go out there in awe of all this.'"

ON CONTAINING Harris, whose game-saver was his only basket of the fourth quarter, Slivka said: "I was looking for somebody to stop him. We went from Mike Priest to DeVoe Cornell to Pewee Cornell, and we just couldn't find any way to stop him."

"We finally had to leave our man-to-man and go to a zone. He (Harris) finally quit penetrating and started passing off to the other people. And he seldom got it (the ball) back."

"That gave our defense the chance to move around and make some steals and get us back in the game."

Jerome Walker, a 6-5 senior, led Southfield with 12 points. Darwin Cornell added nine, and Mike McCaskill and Ralph Walker contributed eight apiece.

Southfield will graduate four starters and its first sub—Priest, the Walkers and the Cornells—but the lone returning starter, 6-3 Mike McCaskill, could lead the Jays to another winning season.

"You never know what Michael can do," Slivka said. "In the Brother Rice game (a regional victory for Southfield), he totally dominated. Next year, things depend on how far he can carry us."

"Our next goal is to see about getting our seniors into college. It's going to be very interesting to see what happens."

Slivka also can count on this year's varsity substitutes, most of whom got plenty of playing time, the junior varsity (12-8) and the freshman squad (18-2) for help.



Greg Slivka

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