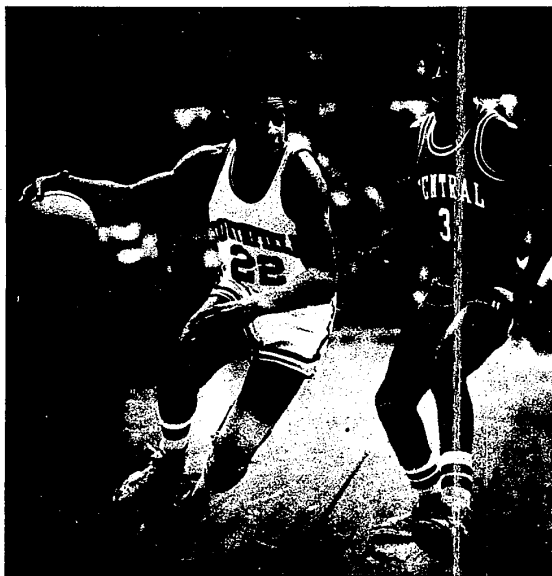


# The creme of the cage crop



The ultimate goal for every high-school basketball player — playing on a state championship team — is only a dream when he first faces up the sneakers in November.

When March Madness reaches its fevered climax, only four teams in each class are close enough to realize the goal of becoming the creme of the cage crop. The last weekend of the high-school basketball season brings the final four front and center.

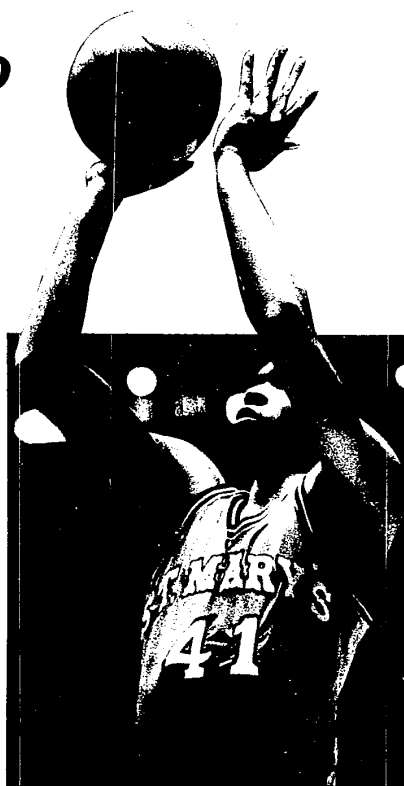
This season, two teams in the Observer & Eccentric coverage area lasted long enough to find out what it feels like to be one of the four best teams in the state.

Orchard Lake St. Mary's knows what it feels like to be the best in its class. The Eagles, under head coach Bob Shoemaker, went the distance, as they captured the Class C state title. St. Mary's endured a rough season and post-season schedule en route to the championship.

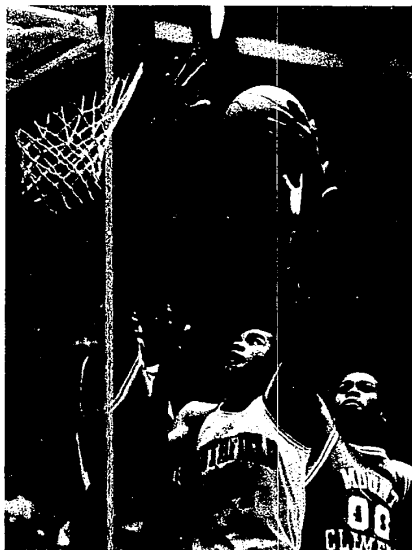
The Eagles bested Grand Rapids South Christian in the semifinals before capturing the crown with a win over Reed City.

Southfield High, coached by Greg Sliwka, came ever so close to the reaching the championship game. But a 35-foot desperation shot by Flint Central's Mark Harris at the buzzer of the semifinal game deprived the Blue Jays of a chance at the state title.

But losing in the semis is nothing to be ashamed of. Only four teams can say they've been there.



State tournament scenes (clockwise): Southfield's Mike Priest (22) penetrates against Flint Central's Mark Harris in Class A semifinal; St. Mary's Hiram Harris (41) shoots against Grand Rapids South Christian in Class C semi; Southfield's Darwin Cornell (14) gets up against MI. Clemens in U-D quarterfinal; St. Mary's Chris Howze soars over two South Christian defenders. (Southfield photos by Mindy Saunders; St. Mary's photos by John Stano.)



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