

Sports

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(F1C)

Basford, Mercy too much for North



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Mercy's Sue Scott (15) feeds a pass inside against North defender Laina Shaw. Scott made a key steal and layup to begin the fourth quarter that squelched a North Farmington rally.

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

They say the really outstanding players, the cream if you will, will rise to the top in the pressure situations — like when the state championship is on the line.

Saving Basford, Farmington Hills Our Lady of Mercy basketball standout, is living testimony to that axiom.

She has saved her finest games for the state district girls basketball tournament. In the first two rounds, Basford scored 11 points against Farmington Harrison and 19 against Livonia Stevenson. She also played good defense and directed the Mercy fastbreak.

In the district championship game Wednesday night, against a dangerous North Farmington team led by potential All-Stater Amy Austin, Basford stole the show.

IN FRONT OF an SRO crowd stuffed into Mercy's crackerbox gym, Basford scored a game-high 16 points, but more importantly, frustrated and shut down Austin. The result: a 51-28 Mercy win and a berth in the state Class A regional tourney in Southfield beginning Tuesday night.

"Hey, it's tournament time," Basford said afterward. It was all the explanation needed for her tremendous effort.

Austin, who received a thunderous standing ovation after fouling out with less than three minutes to play in the game, scored 10 points, eight of which were in the second half.

Basford successfully kept Austin from driving to the basket, which is no easy feat considering Austin's tremendous quickness. Austin was limited to just 10 shots on the night.

"Sarah has had to guard people like (Ladywood's) Emily Wagner, and she's as good as they come," said Mercy coach Larry Baker. "Sarah is as good at staying in front of her man as anyone we have."

BASFORD'S OFFENSIVE game wasn't alighted by her defensive assignment either. Her outside shooting was terrific. She hit five of eight in the first half, nearly all from outside 12 feet. She missed just five shots all night, eight of 13.

Her outside shooting proficiency stung the Raider defense. They came out packing their zone defense underneath the basket in an attempt to neutralize Mercy's extreme size advantage. But Basford's outside shooting forced them to come out. Thus, the inside opened up again for the Marlinas.

"Sometimes a player of Sarah's quality gets submerged on a balanced team," Baker said. "She has played unselfish all year and has been a real reason why we have played so well as a team."

Annette Ruggiero also turned in a strong performance for Mercy. The junior point guard completely shut down North's sophomore sensation Laina Shaw. Shaw, who scored 21 points in North's win against Farmington on Monday, was held to just two baskets, both in the second half.

"We knew Laina needed a lot of room to operate," Baker said. "Annette just didn't give her any."

MERCY, USING the shooting of Basford and a tenacious man-to-man defense, built up a 21-8 lead by halftime.

girls basketball

North, with a large and loud contingent of supporters in the stands, wasn't about to quit. The Raiders fought back strong in the third quarter, thanks to the determination of Austin and Suzanne Howley, and pulled within 10, 28-18.

"I thought when we got back to within 10 points we had a shot," said Greg Grodzicki, North head coach. "We wanted to stop them from getting the second and third shots like they were getting in the first half, and I thought we did."

North controlled the tap to start the fourth quarter and the Raider fans were euphoric. But the euphoria was short-lived.

MERCY'S SUE SCOTT, the ever-present reserve guard, made a steal at half court and zipped in for the layup. From that point on, Mercy outscored

North 23-10.

"Mercy is such a great ball team," Grodzicki said. "They work so well together."

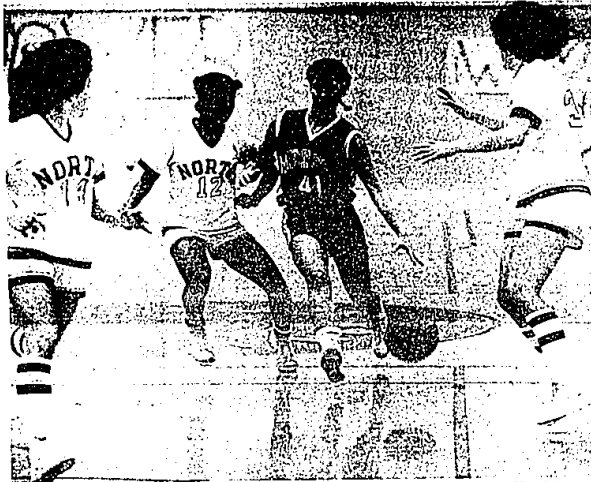
Baker returned the compliment. "Greg did an outstanding job," he said. "Both teams, I thought, were very well scouted. Their fans were beautiful and their kids were all pumped up."

"The element of poise was a big factor for us. We knew that we could make some mistakes and it would be no big deal. Our experience played a big part in allowing us to execute our game plan."

Amy DeMatteis, 12 points and nine rebounds, and Mary Rosowski, 14 rebounds and five steals, were major contributors to the Marlin cause. The loss ends North's season at 15-4. They were co-champions of the Northwest Suburban League.

Mercy advances into perhaps the toughest regional tournament in the state. The Marlinas (21-2 and ranked No. 1 in Class A) will take on Dearborn Fordson (22-0) at 6 p.m. Tuesday, at Southfield High.

The other regional game at Southfield pits Detroit Murray-Wright (17-2) against Western Lakes Athletic Association champ Livonia Bentley (20-2).



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Sarah Basford (41) draws a crowd of Raider defenders Wednesday in the district championship game. Basford hit on

eight of her 13 shots to lead the Marlinas to victory.

Rice thrice!

Warriors claim Class A title

By Marty Budner
staff writer

Al Fracassa, the coach, hugged Mike Popson, the athletic director.

Matt Diggins, the linebacker, hugged Mike Lodish, the lineman.

Mel Farr, Jr., the running back, and Jim Scott, the tight end, held each other's hands along the sidelines, waiting for the final moments to lapse.

Everyone was bleeding Warrior orange. They were instructed not to raise their hands and give the No. 1 sign, so they embraced in triumph instead.

The Brother Rice football team's season seemed to thrive on emotion, and that's the way things ended Saturday afternoon at the Pontiac Silverdome.

Showing the flair for the dramatic that had served them well all year, Brother Rice won the state Class A football championship for an unprecedented third time. The Warriors did it by rallying for an exciting, 15-12, victory over East Lansing before a record-setting crowd of 26,349 people.

"It's an honor to win the state championship. I hope it takes another team a long time to attain three championships," said Rice coach Al Fracassa, who guided the Warriors through his third 12-0 season. "We had to dig deep down twice to win the game, and I don't consider that lucky."

"PEOPLE WANTED to beat us pretty bad all year. . . we know that," said Fracassa. "It's an honor to be respected the way we are."

In the end, it was Mel Farr, Jr., Rice's "heavyweight" running back, who won the game.

Farr, a clutch player who scored the win-

ning touchdown in both of Rice's regular-season overtime victories, scored on a three-yard run around the left side with just one minute left in the game.

Rice had trailed 12-6 with seven minutes remaining in the fourth quarter, but drove 67 yards in 15 plays capped by Farr's run. It was the senior back's 14th rushing touchdown of the season — a Rice record.

"Mel Farr was bottled up a lot this year because he's a good back," said Fracassa. "But, he'll get a yard for you when you need it."

The troublesome Trojans controlled most of the first half and had a 6-0 intermission lead. The Warriors tried a few trick plays such as the halfback option pass, a quick kick and a reverse. None of them worked well.

Rice seemed intent on teasing the Trojan defense which had allowed just six points in their two previous post-season playoff games. The Warriors attacked more forcefully in rallying for the victory in the second half.

"WE DECIDED to block better in the second half. The difference between the halves was execution," said Fracassa, who now has led his team into 118 games in 15 seasons as Rice's head coach.

"We were a little tight in the first half. You know, it's like the 'Super Bowl' out there and emotions run high. We just decided to throw short passes. We ran up the middle a little more (in the second half) and that seemed to open up our outside game."

Brother Rice took charge immediately after halftime. Mel Farr took the opening kick off and raced 25 yards to the Warrior 39-yard line.

Rice then drove 61 yards in nine plays,

capped by quarterback Allen Szydlowski's scrambling, 12-yard scoring toss to Scott. Jim Love kicked the extra point to give Rice its first lead of the day, 7-6.

East Lansing responded with its own drive, eating up the quarter's final seven minutes. On the fourth quarter's opening play — a fourth-and-one situation from the Rice two-yard line — the Warrior defense stiffened and held East Lansing from getting a first down.

However, Rice couldn't get a first down and punted to give the Trojans great field position at the Rice 36-yard line. East Lansing scored and took a 12-7 lead six plays later on a seven-yard sweep by Steven Logan.

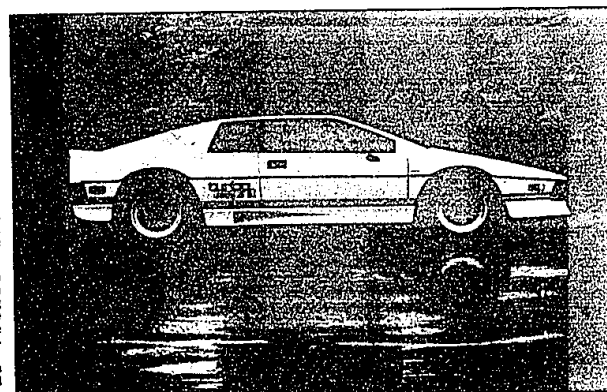
EAST LANSING coach Jeff Smith went for the two-point conversion attempt after each touchdown and failed on both tries.

Brother Rice then took the ensuing kick off and never relinquished the ball until after Farr's game-winning touchdown run. Szydlowski hit Matt Diggins with a pass after Farr's touchdown for two points which accounted for the final three-point margin.

The Warriors converted two fourth-down plays in that critical drive. One was a six-yard off-tackle run by Farr on a fake punt, and the other was a 14-yard pass from Szydlowski to Charles Laurencelle.

"It was a fine high school football game, and it was a great victory for us," said Fracassa. "Both teams went at each other very well."

Farr finished the game with 50 yards on 15 carries. Szydlowski, only a junior, completed 15 of 20 passes for 154 yards. Scott caught five passes for 54 yards, and Mike Farr and Laurencelle each had three receptions.



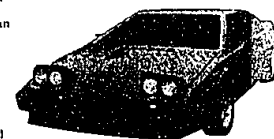
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