Who will it be?

Western Lakes basketball outlook a tossup

By Bred Emons and Chris McCosky stalf writers

The second year of the Western Lakes Activities Association (WLAA) boys baskebal playoffs produced a surprise winner, Plymouth Canton, and a surprise finalist, Luvonia Churchill.

"Plymouth Salem, the team with the best overall record last year in the two-divisional set-up, was knocked off by both teams — Canton during the regular season and Churchill in the playoffs. So it was no fluke to see those two teams in the finals.

The team with the best overall talent

So it was no fluke to see those two teams in the linals.

The team with the best overall talent last season, Livonia Stevenson, never got it together. The Spartans are big and have experience again, but whether they come to play every night is another story.

Standard study be battling it out the two study of the study of the study of the two for the Lakes Division crown while the Western-Division appears to be a tossup between Canton and Farmington Harrison. But don't count out North-ville, Churchill, Walled Lake Western. Those teams cannot be far behind.

Here is a pre-season look at the Observerland schools in the WLAA.

LIVONIA STEVENSON

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The Spartans return a good nucleus of players, the top loss being leading scorer Tom Domako, a 6-foot-7 swingman who went on to Montana State.

Veteran coach George Van Wagoner hopes this year's team will play more like a team after last year's disappointing 16-6 overall record.

- We'll have better team play — both offensively and defensively, he said.

The leading returnee is 6-6 schlorforward Bob Sluka, the team's top rebounder who also averaged 13 points per game en route to second team All-Observer bonors. Sluka is flanked on the front line by 6-4 senior center Vic Nettie and 6-4 senior forward Matt Burdiss, both showed flashes of promise last year.

The Spartans are pretty well set at guard with the return of seniors Ed Glibert (6-0). Pete Huddy (5-9) and Pat Williams (6-0).

bert (6-0), Pete Huddy (5-9) and Pat Williams (6-0).
Depth will be provided by juniors Jim Kimble (6-1), Dan Paimisano (6-1), Dan Rrafit (6-1), Joe Digilo (6-9), Chip Finneran (6-0) and John Kuffel (5-9).
We'll' run a one- and two guard front with some pattern offense," said Van Wagoner, now in his 19th season. We'll break when we can.
"We'll change defenses — use pressure whenever possible."

LIVONIA CHURCHILL

Fourth in the Western Division last season, Churchill (13-9) made a mad Clough eyes better days

Steve Juddawikis and John Grzybek, second and third team All-Observer picks, respectively, "It's a rebuilding year, even though looking at the league, there are no dominating players," asid Churchill fifth-year coach Don Albertson. "We won't be able to post down by the low post. We'll fast break and press."

The lone returning starter is 6-0 forward Scott Hille, a mid-year transfer who solidified the Charger's lineup. In nine games he averaged 12.8 points and shot 47 percent from the floor.

But Hille won't be available for the Charger's first three games because he has been suspended for school disciplinary reasons.

Hoping to pick up the slack in his absence is Mike Hermanson, a 6-4 senior and fart-time starter last year.

Albertson also said that of.

Tyraduates Ang Oliver and Mickey Katschor, both 6 feet, vying at guard. Other possible starters include first-year leaper Ken Gendjar (6-0), junior Kevin Yost (6-0), senior Dave Andrus (6-1), and senior co-captain Mike Scicluna (6-2), Also vying for time are Matt Ahearn, Ken Sliwka, Don Olds and Bentley transfer Jason Landry.

LIVONIA BENTLEY

LIVONIA BENTLEY

Second-year coach Tom Nieml will see out the final basketball team ever to go through the doors of Bentley (the school will close in June).

Although the Buildogs struggled through the regular season, they caught fire in post-season play, winning the Churchill District by upsetting Stevenson and reaching the regional final before losing to Detroit Henry Ford.

All five starters are gone from last year's 10-13 team, including 6-8 center Phil Graceys, who averaged 16 points and 17 rebounds per game. Graceys is now at Eastern Michigan.

Niemt, however, used 10 people most of the time with the second five all returning. They include seniors Sal Donin Patchet, a 6-1 swingman, and Steve Carth, a 2-9 center, Brian Beltz, a 6-1 swingman, and Steve Carth, a 2-9 or of experience.

Niemi said. "Last year we had a tall team. This year rebounding could be a roblem."

problem."
Niemi will adjust his style of play

Niemi will adjust his style of play somewhat.

"We'll pressure more than in the past," he said. "We can't afford to play half-court baskethall because we're not big. We've got to make our opportuni-ties with defense. We'll have to be a scratching, claw-type team. We'll have

dash to the WLAA playoff final before losing to Canton.

Four starters are gone, including Steve Juodawikis and John Grzybek, second and hilrd team All-Observer Robicks, respectively.

PLYMOUTH CANTON

PLYMOUTH CANTON

The Chiefs enjoyed one of their finest campaigns, going 16-6 a year ago and winning the ieague champlorship. But, four of the five starters off last year's team, including Mark Bennett and Gary Thomas, have graduated.

What's left are three solld players off the 1984-55 team and a bost of promising newcomers.

"We are cautiously optimistic," said head coach Dave Van Wagooer, last year's observerland Coach of the Year. With only two players with experience back, it may take some time for us to fell... But, if we can play an up-tempo game and hold our own on the glass, we will be right there battling for the Western Division title.

Jim Schlicker, a tremendous leaper, will be counted on to pick up the scoring slack. Kevin Hawkins, Canton's sixth man last year, is a strong inside player despite his 6-foct for the country of the country

Van Wagoner is high on junior point guard Joel Mies. Mies transfered in from Illinois and is solid playmaking guard. Another surprise has been Dave Knapp. An All-Area football player, Knapp is playing basketball for the first time since eighth grade, but Van Wagoner is considering him as a starting forward.

Like last year, Canton is small. But, also like last year, they are quick and aggressive. They will play a menacing defense and run the fastbreak as often

PLYMOUTH SALEM

The big news here, obviously, is that Fred Thomann is no longer the head

Fred Thomann is no longer the head coach.
Thomann resigned after taking the Rocks to a 20-4 season and a district championship last year.
Bob Brodde, a longitime assistant at Salera, will replace Thomann.
Salem, despite heavy graduation losses — notably Erich Hartnett, Rick Berberet and Jeff Arnold — should be as up among the WLAA leaders as usual.

as up among the WLAA leaders as ususl. Seniors Mike White (6-0 guard-forward), LeSean Haygood (6-5 post player) and Eric Sovine (5-11 guard) will
trigger the Rock attack.

The Rocks are fast. They will run as
much as possible. And, like the Salem
teams of the past, they will center their
game on tough defense.

"We will be competitive in both the
division and league race, but I'm also a
bit cautious because of our lack of varsity experience, Brodie sand Makara (junjor guard), Steve Potoczak (senior forward), Steve Sobditch (senior guard),
Mike Hale (sophomore forward), Bryan
Waldron (junior guard) and Bryan
Karas (sophomore guard).

FARMINGTON HARRISON

FARMINGTON HARRISON
Mike Teachman may have the most
improved team in the league.
"The senior leadership is right," the
eight-year veteran coach said. "If we
come together as a team, we could be
in the thick of the race for the Western
Division."
The reason for his optimism is simple. Seniors John Miller (6-2 swing
man) and Vince Earlight (6-4 forward)
return along with Mike Dempsey (6-7
senior center) and Ken Hixon (senior
guard).

Stevenson's top returnees are Matt Burdiss (far left) and Bob Sluke (far right). The two Spartans, standing 6-foot-4 and 6-foot-6 respectively, should form a formidable front line.

The Falcons have struggled in recent years, but there are signs that they may be on the road to respectability.

Teachman is also very high on junior point guard Ken George. George will replace the graduated Brian Hickey as funior has Ali-Area potential as asys the junior has Ali-Area potential of the sepected to contribute are George Sarcevich (6-4 senior) and Will Lund (6-2 junior).

"Our goal is to play on Saturday, March 2, (WLAA league champlonship game), Teachman said. "To do this we must stay july free and cut down on turnovers."

FARMINGTON

The Falcons have struggled in recent.

Roy said he figured his team to finish in the middle of the WLAA pack.

Cage season unfolds Friday

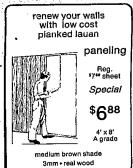
Although there's still one week left in the girls basketball season, the boys campalgn kicks off Friday night with a full slate of games.

Among the featured attractions in and around boserverland are North Farmington at Farmington, Livonia Franklin at Plymouth Canton, Farnington at Reford Union and Clarkston at Redford Catholic Contral. (See The Week Ahead for other sames).

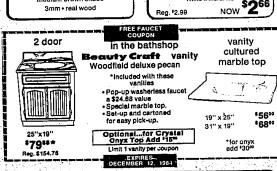
games).
Livonia Bentiley, mcanwhile, may have the toughest season opener. The Buildogs travel Friday to meet Dearborn Heights Robichaud, picked by many to win the state Class B championship.
Robichaud, 13-10 a year ago, returns four starters, including All-State candidate Jarvis Walker, a 6-foot-2 forward.

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VERING

4 8LK. E. OF VENOT

season and I'm not sure how strong they'll be," he said. "Realistically we could finish anywhere from third to sixth." IF THE TROJANS are to enjoy success, they must get maximum efforts from senior returnees Jeff Vakratsis, a 6-2 forward, Ron Petrie, a 5-4 guard (assist leader); Tom Colaluca, a 5-10 guard; and Rob McCamant,

Colaluca, a 5-10 guard; and Rob McCamant, a 5-9 guard.

New help is expected from 8-4 senior forward Erle Esser, who led the JV team in rebounding, 5-11 senior forward Mike Schwab, who led the JV squad in secring; and 8-5 junior center Chris Debalski.

"Although we're small, I think we have enough team quickness to put more pressure on the ball," Clough said. "Our main defense will be man-to-man with varying degress of pressure."

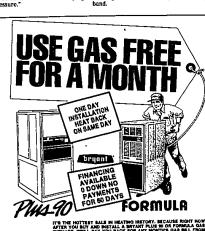
Paul Clough is going to slow things down this season for the Livonia Clarenceville boys basketball team. The third-year coach lost 8-foot-4 forward Tim Spencer, the team's leading scorer and rebounder of the last two years to graduation, and doesn't have much size. "We're going to be a bit more deliberate on offense," he said. "We'll run wherever possible, which when not possible, which could be often, as small as we are, we want to run a very deliberate half-court offense looking for the best shots." Although Detroit Country Day, Detroit

year's team can win as teams.

"We don't have any easy games on our schedule, but on the other hand, none of our opponents have a huge talent gap on us as in the past," Clough said. "Our lack of height will be a problem, but if we can compensate for it in quickness and solid defense, we will make our goal and possibly surpass it."

Clarenceville notes: Friday's home opener against Taylor Baptist Park will be "Community Appreciation Night." The JV game starts at 6 p.m. followed by the variity game at 7:30 p.m.

The Clarenceville public is invited free of charge. The school's majoretics will be performing at halftime along with the pep band.



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