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(F10)



Brad Emons

Tartar venture satisfies 'junkie'

IT WAS SATURDAY AFTERNOON and what was a basketball junkie to do? Heck, it's January and cold outside. One thing you could do is take down the Christmas tree, which I did in no time.

But I wasn't in the mood to insult the house. I'd rather freeze and go to a basketball game instead. The driving was easy, no snow in sight. The options were limited this afternoon, so I started watching Kentucky play N.C. State on TV, but it's the same old story at Rupp Arena. The officials make sure they don't upset the Bluegrass fans too much.

I live in the deprived section of Livonia anyway. I don't have access to cable yet, so I missed out on five different ESPN telecasts in one day.

I also thought about going to see Ohio State play at Michigan. It seemed like a good game, but I may have lost my appetite for Big 10 basketball after watching Bobby Knight put a fake headlock on Bill Frieder three nights earlier.

I WAS TEMPTED to go, however, because the last time I went to see a Michigan-Ohio State game, one of Bo Schembechler's sons sold me a good ticket outside of Crisler Arena. It wasn't "front row," but it was close. I'm sitting right there surrounded by Bo's assistants. It was almost like we were holding a coaches' meeting, maybe talking about how we could sign a potential recruit.

But I didn't take the road to Ann Arbor. I took the road to Detroit instead.

My final destination that day may seem curious to many, but I chose the Matheson Building on the campus of Wayne State University.

It was Wayne State against Hillsdale and I'm glad I was there.

I guess I went on past experience, remembering that last year's game was a gem, certainly a delight for any true basketball fan.

I would see a lot of familiar faces. That attracted me to this Great Lakes Conference game.

As soon as I got in the building I saw "Woody," sitting at the concession stand. It wasn't Dr. Strangelove, but Rich Wood, a product of Livonia Franklin and Wayne State's top pitcher last season.

AS SOON AS I walked in the gym there was another familiar face, North Farmington girls basketball coach Greg Gotschki, who was on the floor with a camera, taking pictures of one of his ex-players, Suzanne Howley. She plays for the Hillsdale women's team along with ex-Plymouth Salem standout Jacques Merrifield, a starting forward for the Chargers.

As it turned out, it wasn't a good day for the Hillsdale women. They lost 85-71.

Partly responsible for the loss were two other familiar faces — Ann Roy (Livonia Bentley) and Pearly Cunningham (Plymouth Canton). Both start for Wayne State.

Cunningham had 12 points and 8 rebounds, while Roy contributed 9 points and 7 rebounds.

In between the women's and the men's games I met Richard Thorderson, assistant vice president in WSU's Enrollment Office.

Richard has three sons playing for the Wayne State men's team — Eric, who starts and is third in the team in scoring; Kurt, a reserve forward; and Jim, a first-year player.

They all played at Livonia Bentley along with Eric Slink, a back-up center for the Tartars. George Merriweather, who played at Schoolcraft, is also on the WSU roster, but was out of the lineup with a broken hand.

ON THE OTHER side of the court was Westland's Jack Furlong, a starting forward for Hillsdale. He started in Charger Blue was 6-foot-11 Paul Horton, who played at one time for Michigan State after graduating from Salem.

Another former Charger player, Ed Peper of Plymouth, was there in spirit, cheering on his ex-teammates.

And if there weren't enough familiar faces around, I bumped into Bob Drapp, the head coach at Garden City, during halftime of the men's game. He brought down one of his players to meet the Hillsdale coach.

My day at the Matheson Building turned out to be a Wayne State sweep. The Tartar men halted a Hillsdale comeback in the second half to win, 85-63.

Eric Thorderson finished with 9 points and 4 assists to help pace the winners.

Furlong, meanwhile, played a steady floor game, but was somewhat discouraged by the loss outside the lockerroom, even though he grabbed 9 rebounds and had a game-high 6 assists. Furlong, however, got over the loss quickly after being greeted by family and friends.

IT WAS AN entertaining day of hoops and it was fun bumping into all the familiar faces from Observerland — on and off the court.

The big story of the day was a guy named Raheem Muhammad. He dominated the boards, grabbing 25 rebounds for the victorious Tartars.

Afterwards, Muhammad got a hero's welcome as he was embraced by his family.

It was a family atmosphere that day. Even the losing coach, Ron Halstead, took defeat like a true sport. There were no Bobby Knight tantrums.

Maybe it was the familiar faces that made this day of hoops seem enjoyable. At least I didn't see any fake headlocks.

I have to follow this bouncing ball more often. It was time well spent.

Hawks win 4th straight

Farmington Harrison made a believer out of Redford Union coach Leo Byrke Tuesday night.

The Hawks took the Panthers to the cleaners in the first half and held on to win, 57-49, in the RU gym.

"They are a physical team with good athletes," Byrke said of his opponents. "I was impressed. They're the best team we've played so far."

Harrison opened up a 29-17 first half lead thanks to its strong rebounding.

"The rebounding was a big factor," Hawks coach Mike Teachman said. "We set the tone early."

The Hawks outrebounded the Panthers 39-24 with Mike Dempsey leading the way with 10. Vince Enright and John Miller pulled down 9 boards apiece.

Harrison's shooting touch was on from the free throw line as well, shooting 15 for 17. RU was 9 for 10 from the charity stripe.

Enright led the Hawks with 16 points. Ken George added 12 points and 8 assists and Dempsey contributed 11 points and 3 blocked shots. Ken Rixson picked off 6 passes for Harrison.

RU was led by Pat Lowmyer and Dennis Bushart with 14 points a piece. Raffi Kostogian added 11.

Harrison's record improved to 4-1. RU fell to 3-4.

NORTH FARMINGTON 75, MILFORD 54; North Farmington (5-2) turned in their best shooting night of

basketball

the season Tuesday when it downed visiting Milford.

North jumped out to a 20-8 first quarter lead and led by 10, 30-20, at intermission.

"Our offense is coming around," North coach Tom Negoshian said. "Hopefully things will start falling into place."

The Raiders were 25 for 58 from the floor and 25 for 55 from the free throw line.

Rick Anderson led the winners with 26 points and 8 rebounds. Rick Pennella and Bob Chwalik added 12 and 9 points, respectively. Chwalik grabbed 8 rebounds.

John McKeever pumped in 12 points for Milford (4-2).

STEVENSON 51, FARMINGTON 39: Senior guard Pat Williams came off the bench to spark Livonia Stevenson (4-1) to the win over Farmington Tuesday in Livonia.

The hard-working Williams scored 12 points to lead the Spartans. Bob Slinka added 11.

Farmington trailed by 2 at intermission, 21-19, and lost the game in the third quarter when it was out-scored 14-3.

Bruce Robinson led the Falcons (3-3) with 11 points.



John Miller's muscle helped Farmington Harrison dominate the boards against

Redford Union Tuesday and win its fourth straight game.

McGrath tops in fast company

By G.J. Rihak
staff writer

Kira McGrath has made some difficult decisions in her lifetime — and she's only a sophomore in college.

McGrath regrets none of them, particularly one she made during her sophomore year at Farmington Hills Our Lady of Mercy.

"Mark Boerner, my coach (for the Birmingham-Bloomfield swim team), was leaving," McGrath recalled. "We went to a meet in Cincinnati, and that's where I saw Lakeside Swim Club (of Louisville, Ky.)."

"He said if I was going to really improve, I'd have to switch and go somewhere where there wasn't enough really good competition in Birmingham."

WHICH IS an indication of the kind of talent McGrath possesses. The Birmingham native won state titles for Mercy in the 100-yard butterfly and 200-yard individual medley as a sophomore, before convincing her parents that the best place for her to refine her talents was in Louisville.

That McGrath was able to convince her parents to allow her to move, by herself, to Louisville is also a testimony to her determination. Many high school athletes never handle the transition to college with the Lakeside Swim Club in Louisville, McGrath was training with the likes of Olympic gold medalist Mary T. Meagher by her junior year in high school.

With that kind of history, it's no surprise that McGrath is currently one of the top swimmers on the NCAA's top-ranked women's swim team, the University of Texas.

"It helped me a lot," McGrath said of her move to Louisville (her parents still live in Birmingham). "Lakeside had a lot of fast swimmers."

That kind of competition prepared her for life in the fastest lane, at Texas. The Lady Longhorns were NCAA champs in McGrath's freshman season last year.

McGRATH CONTRIBUTED a pair of top-10 finishes at the NCAA finals, taking third in the 200-yard butterfly and eighth in the 100 fly, despite suffering from a shoulder injury throughout the season.

people in sports

"I had tendonitis, either from overwork, lifting too much weight," she said. "It was still bothering me at the NCAA's. It didn't hurt when I swam, but it did before and after. I'd have to put ice on it and take aspirin after I finished my race."

"There were a lot of times at night that I couldn't sleep. Right now it still hurts some, but I've learned to deal with it. A lot of people on the team have shoulder problems. You just have to learn to live with it."

Judging by her early season performances, McGrath isn't hurting too much. She ranks among the top three on the team in four events. She's second in the 100 fly with a time of 57.00. She's also second in the 200 fly (2:03.84), behind only Olympic medalist Tiffany Cohen, and ranks third in the 500 free (5:06.8) and 400 IM (4:32.07).

IT'S STILL early in the season, so McGrath's times will drop substantially by the time the NCAA finals come around in March. Her season's goals are simple.

"I'd love to win a title at the NCAA's. If I did that I would be able to make a trip to Japan this summer, for either the World University Games or the Japan Pacific Games."

It will be a difficult goal to attain, McGrath knows. She practices for four hours three days a week and 3 1/2 hours two other days. Combine that with her studying and there isn't much time left.

"I pretty much eat, sleep, swim and study," she said, then added, "I do have fun. It's not like the army — I do go out on weekends."

Still, that kind of intensity is imperative if McGrath is to remain among the best at Texas. "There's a lot of world class swimmers on this team," she said.

But it's the kind of challenge she craves. "I think I do. The busier I am, the better."

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