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Howze that for hot? OU defies the odds

JUST A YEAR ago the controversy at Oakland University broke. Men's basketball coach Lee Frederick would not have his contract renewed. The decision was made even before Frederick's team embarked on its 1983-84 campaign.

Whatever was going to happen to the ship, its skipper was doomed.

It was a messy affair, poorly handled by OU's athletic department — no announcement was made, just an ad placed in The NCAA News for a new coach — and they'd just as soon forget it.

No doubt it will be, if it isn't already.

SUCCESS CAN do that for you. All past mistakes are forgiven, all bunnings become distant memories.

It's not that the Pioneers are enjoying a fantastic season, that they are battling for the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) championship. They aren't.

But they are performing better than anyone, including first-year coach Greg Kampe, anticipated. They are 11-8 overall and 4-5 in the GLIAC, which makes Kampe's preseason evaluation — "We have no height, no speed and no quickness" — seem unduly harsh.

But the Pioneers aren't that talented. What the team does possess are the proper components, the right players to fill necessary roles. Each one has a job to do, and he is doing it at a high level of consistency.

In a word, they are overachieving.

THAT INCLUDES the most talented of the Pioneers: Chris Howze.

What success OU has enjoyed this season can be attributed to team play and rugged defense. But in recent weeks top rebounder Walt Dixon and shooter Craig Tontl have both been sidelined with injuries, making Howze's job more difficult.

The junior has responded with an amazing effort. After six GLIAC games, Howze was second in the league in scoring (20.5 points), third in field goal percentage (.581 percent), fourth in free throw percentage (.851 percent) and tied for fourth in assists (4.2 a game).

He earned GLIAC Player of the Week honors after scoring 77 points, grabbing 28 rebounds and dishing out 18 assists in a three-game span. He hit 75 percent of his floor shots (30 of 40) and 79 percent of his free throws (15 of 19) during the streak.

His value to the team, with Dixon and Tontl injured, is impossible to measure. He stands only 6-foot-3, about the size of a shooting guard. But his position is forward, and he is averaging 7.6 rebounds per game.

Perhaps Kampe says it best: "I am personally going to push Chris Howze for All-American next year."

HIGH PRAISE indeed. Howze hears it and smiles broadly, switching topics to talk about "dimes," which is what he calls the prettiest of assists. "My passes are so sweet," he chortles, "there should be another category for them."

Howze teases about his statistics — telling the young women tracking stats during OU women's games, "Give me 10 assists and I'll take you to dinner AND a movie," — but the only one that means much to him is under the win column.

"It's kind of hard to talk about how you did personally when the team is losing," he says.

Howze was recruited by Frederick out of Orchard Lake St. Mary. He guided the Eagles to a Class C state title and enjoyed a solid freshman season at OU, averaging 14.3 points and 6.8 rebounds.

But last year's controversy hurt all the Pioneers. "Everyone just kind of gave up," Howze says of the campaign's conclusion, when OU lost six straight.

THE SITUATION has improved dramatically this season. A run-and-gun unit under Frederick, OU has concentrated more on defense with Kampe. The approach has worked.

"I don't want to get into that type of comparison," he said of the different coaching philosophies. "(This year) we're a defensive-oriented team. Our offense has been off and on, but our defense has been constant. That's what (Kampe) has been stressing."

And yet, this is a team without a starter over 6-6. This is a team without a senior among its top seven players. This is a team that, at the season's start, might generously have been described as possessing "a bright future."

It's proved to be much more. And as is wont to happen when success strikes, confidence builds. Tight losses should have been more.

As Kampe says: "We are so close. We're not there yet, but we're very close. Just one play in a couple of games beat us."

HOWZE ECHOES his coach's feelings. "No one thought we'd do much," he admits, "but we're doing the things we have to do to win."

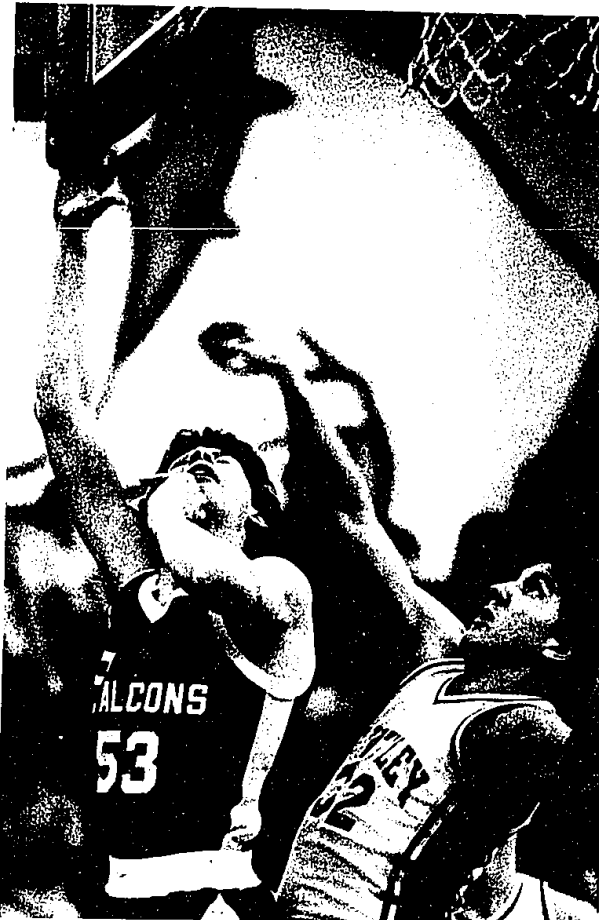
"We're better than everyone thought, but we're not as good as we were. We didn't lose those last two games, we gave them away."

That's a problem solvable through experience. At present, Kampe's aims are more moderate.

"Right now, we want to achieve the goals we set at the beginning of the season," the young (29) coach says. "We want to have a winning record in the league."

That won't be easy, not with road games remaining at Wayne State, the defending GLIAC champion, and at Grand Valley and Saginaw Valley, the current conference co-lead.

But nothing this season has been easy for the Pioneers. Why change the script now?



Farmington center Kyle Mutz (53) lays in a shot over Bentley's Sal Demillo Tuesday night. It was two of Mutz's 21 points for the night.

DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Mutz leads Falcon win

The Farmington Falcons swooped down and knocked off Livonia Bentley on the Bulldogs home court Tuesday in a come-from-behind Western Lakes Activities Association basketball win, 63-59.

The Bulldogs led by 11, 33-22, at halftime, but folded in the second half.

The Falcons exploded for a 21-13 advantage in the third period, a momentum Bentley couldn't adjust to.

"We shot well and controlled the tempo in the first half and just the opposite happened in the second half," said Bentley assistant coach Marty Derda. "(Farmington) controlled the boards and we couldn't adjust."

The Falcons outshot the Bulldogs from the free throw line in the final quarter. Farmington hit 7 of 12 in the final quarter and 16 of 18 overall. Bentley was 11 for 21 overall.

Kyle Mutz poured in 21 points for the winners and Bruce Kratt added 13.

Bentley was topped by Steve Carl (13 points), Dennis Patchett (12) and Brian Belts (10).

Farmington is 7-5 overall and 5-3 in league play. Bentley is 5-6 overall and 3-5 in the league.

NORTHVILLE 45, HARRISON 39:

basketball

Farmington Harrison lumbered through its second straight night of cold shooting, only this time the Hawks lost to Western Lakes rival Northville.

The Hawks shot only 41 percent against Plymouth Canton last Friday, but they beat the Chiefs 44-29. Against the Mustangs, Harrison could only muster 29 percent from the floor.

"We were flat," Harrison coach Mike Teachman said. "(Ken) George did a nice job of bringing us back."

The Hawks trailed 33-32 heading into the final quarter, but they couldn't overcome the deficit.

Junior point guard George tossed in 17 points and had 9 steals to lead Harrison (6-3 overall, 5-3 in league action).

For the Mustangs, Don Norton scored 11 points, but the real story was Greg Wendel and his 24 rebounds. Northville outrebounded Harrison 44-30.

Northville is 5-6 overall and 3-5 in league play.

Chiefs rout Western

Like a beautiful butterfly transformed from an ugly caterpillar, the Plymouth Canton offense came to life Tuesday night against Walled Lake Western.

The Chiefs basketball team exploded against Western Lakes League foe Western, winning 99-51 at Canton.

Farmington Harrison held the Chiefs to 29 points Friday, but Canton coach Dave Van Wagoner insisted it was his team's defense that made the difference in Tuesday's win.

"It wasn't our offense that improved but our defense," Van Wagoner said. "We got down and played defense to night. We played at the intensity level we need in order to be successful."

It was the Chiefs' defense that provided steals and got the fastbreak going, Van Wagoner said.

Canton (4-7 overall, 3-7 in league play) used a 30-point second quarter to trounce the winless Warriors, opening up a 51-22 halftime advantage.

"We would have had 115 points if we would have hit our free throws," Van Wagoner said. The Chiefs were 31 for 45 from the charity stripe.

Jim Schlicker paced six Canton players in double figures with 18 points. Matt Levesque dropped in 16, Dan Olaszewski had 14, Kevin Hawkins had 13, Joe Bono scored 11 and Dave Knapp added 10. Hawkins also had 12 rebounds and 4 assists.

"This could be a stepping stone to a successful second half of the season for us," Van Wagoner said.

Brent Stack grabbed 8 rebounds and dished off 5 assists for the Chiefs.

Western was topped by Quint Scannell's 11 points.

Canton takes on cross campus rival Salem Friday night at Salem.

SALEM 67, CENTRAL 58: It wasn't easy, but Plymouth Salem came back and knocked off Walled Lake Central with an excellent second half Tuesday.

OU mens cagers topple Hillsdale

By C.J. Risak
staff writer

A glance at the stat sheet would reveal that Chris Howze had a decent game Monday night for Oakland University. Not spectacular, but good.

Howze hit just 7 of 18 floor shots, but caused 11 straight free throws for 22 points. He also nabbed 7 rebounds, passed off for 6 assists and made a pair of steals.

It's the kind of all-around, solid performance Howze has been contributing for OU all season. But there's more.

What the stat sheet wouldn't show are the clutch shots the junior forward sank that were so pivotal in OU's 73-64 triumph over Hillsdale.

Howze converted two 3-point plays and a 4-pointer to dash Hillsdale comeback hopes and keep the Pioneers in command of a game in which they never trailed.

"I didn't think Chris had a particularly great game," said OU coach Greg Kampe. "But when we needed him he was there."

HOWZE, WHO is ranked among the top six players in the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) in 4 different statistical categories, hit his first 3-pointer with 10:51 to go in the first half. The play pushed OU's lead from 7 to 10 points and came in the midst of a 12-0 run.

OU's lead grew to 24-7 at the 9:49 mark before Hillsdale came to life. The Chargers eventually narrowed it to 7 (35-29) at the half, and a quick start after the intermission put the Pioneers in trouble.

Two baskets by Jim Schuster sparked an 8-2 surge in the first 4 minutes of the half that pulled Hillsdale to within a point, 36-37. Rob Skinner scored on a drive to the hoop to put OU up by 3. Then Howze took over.

The former Orchard Lake St. Mary's star drove around two defenders on the baseline, scored and was fouled. His free throw doubled OU's lead and took the steam out of the Hillsdale charge.

Howze followed that by scoring 6 points in a 3-minute span, as OU kept the Chargers at a 7-point distance.

Then, with 7 minutes to go and the Pioneers up 45-48, Howze drained an 18-foot jumper from the corner. Terry Sines knocked Howze down after the shot, earning him 2 free throws. He hit both, and OU's lead was 59-48.

HILLSDALE GOT back to within 7 three times, but could get no closer as it lost to OU for the second time this season.

While Howze's performance was significant, everyone contributed to the victory for OU. Randy Strunk hit 6-of-12 from the floor, scoring 13 points and grabbing 7 rebounds.

Skinner finished with 12 points, 4 assists, 2 blocks and 2 steals. Pete Schell contributed 8 points off the bench. John Ellis hauled in 8 rebounds in just 9 minutes and Tracy Tontl, just back from an early-season knee injury, sank three long-distance jumpers to spark OU's early spurt.

"Randy Strunk is really playing well," Kampe said, then added, "but so is everyone. Everybody is playing their role."

Hillsdale got 19 points from Mark Wentzel off the bench and 14 from Bill Grandberry. Steve Dunning collected 9 points and 9 rebounds.

OU's sharp free throw shooting — 21 of 23 — made the difference. Each team had 28 baskets, but Hillsdale was good on only 12 of 20 from the stripe.

The win ended a 2-game losing streak for the Pioneers and pushed them to 4-5 in the GLIAC and 11-8 overall. Hillsdale is 11-9 overall and 4-5 in the GLIAC.

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