



Paul Tavana has overcome an overload of personal tragedy to become one of Observerland's premier basketball players.

## Falcons' comeback falls shy against Southfield

By C.J. Rieck  
staff writer

Give credit where it's due, first off. Southfield's cagers kept building those leads. The Blue Jays hit half their floor shots in the first quarter last night. They hit half their field attempts in the first half. That's why they had that 31-26 lead at halftime.

Ah, but Farmington. The Falcons trailed 29-19 with 1:39 left in the first half. Thank the Lord they had Bruce Kratt. Thank Him again that Bruce Kratt was bull's-eye in the basket late in the first half with four straight free throws and a put-back for a basket. That halved that earlier 10-point deficit.

SECOND HALF? What about the second half, you ask? More of the same, really. . . an 8-2 run gives the Falcons a very brief 34-33 lead with 5:30 left in the third period. A three-point play by Robert Ziegler 44 seconds later starts Southfield out on a 11-0 run.

That's about all those Jays needed to stay in control. Okay, so Farmington was stubborn. So the Falcons make it kinda tough. Won't make no difference. Southfield's the winner, 67-60. It's the Jays who will host their own district final Friday at 7:30 p.m. against Detroit Henry Ford.

Southfield coach Gregg Sliwka will tell you: "We couldn't put 'em away. (Farmington) played hard, they played well, they didn't quit. It got to the point where we played not to lose rather than to win. That caused us to make some mistakes. "Hopefully we'll learn from it."

## OCC cagers take conference title

Just one day after its most impressive performance of the season, Oakland Community College's mens basketball team sunk to the brink of defeat in a game it should have won handily.

At least it can be said OCC did win, escaping with a 77-75 victory over Southwestern CC in the Michigan Junior College Athletic Association finals Saturday at Kalamazoo Valley CC.

"Our players really earned the victory," said Fred Thomann, who has assumed the coaching duties for Tom McPhillips, who is on medical leave. "I really believe it's hard coming back after an emotional game against an arch-rival."

The arch-rival was Highland Park, which beat OCC twice during the regular season. Last Friday OCC thrashed its nemesis, settling up the showdown with Southwestern CC of the Western Conference for the MJCAA title.

SCC DIDN'T possess HPC's talent, but that didn't stop it from battling OCC throughout. The Raiders trailed throughout the first half and into

### basketball

No one said it was easy, coach. You could see Farmington wasn't 'bout to give up, way those Falcons kept comin' back. Heck, that 11-0 streak made it 44-34 with just 2:36 to go in the third quarter.

Farmington coach Rich Roy knew what to expect then: "They're the kind of team that can blow your butt right off the floor."

BUT THE JAYS didn't, or rather, couldn't. Free-throw shooting kept Farmington in it the first three quarters — the Falcons were 12 of 14 from the line going into the final period — and Kyle Mutz took over from there. The senior center poured in 13 of his 21 points in the last quarter.

But Roy didn't have a rowful of talent to choose from, like Sliwka. And that made a basketball of difference.

"They just wore us down," admitted Roy. "We only played seven kids. (Sliwka) had about 11. You could see we were tired down the stretch."

Check the scoring charts, if ya need further evidence. Mutz and Kratt had 21 points each, and Tony Racka had eight for the feisty Falcons, who finished 9-2.

In double figures in scoring for Southfield were Rod Hurst (15 points), Ziegler and Roy Bonier (14 each), Darryl Gray (11) and Ron Coleman (10). That kind of balance is why the Jays are 15-7 and still alive in the state tourney.

the second before making a run that put them in front by six.

The game remained tight until the final two minutes. OCC was up by seven, but missed free throws, a bad shot, a turnover and two fouls that sent SCC to the line and cut OCC's lead to 77-75 with a second left. SCC got the ball back on an OCC turnover, but its final, desperation shot missed, preserving the Raider win.

Gary Holt, who netted 31 points in the win over HPC, paced OCC with 21 points.

The win makes OCC the No. 1 seed going into the NJCAA regional Division II tournament. The Raiders open today at 1:30 p.m. against host-team Kalamazoo Valley CC. Other teams competing are Delta CC and Henry Ford CC from the Eastern Conference and SCC, Lake Michigan CC, Grand Rapids JC, Muskegon CC and Kellogg CC from the Western Conference.

Should OCC win, it will play in Friday's 6 p.m. semifinal. The championship game is 8:15 p.m. Saturday.

# Tavana: a survivor

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

Like most persons his age, Paul Tavana is given to laughter.

The Redford Catholic Central senior basketball player giggles when he reveals that he stays up to 12:30 a.m. watching "The Three Stooges." He even chuckles about getting bathroom time with five females in the same house.

But the lighter side of life has not always followed Tavana. If there is a school of hard knocks, Tavana has earned a Ph.D.

Life deals enough curves to a 13-year-old on the edge of puberty. Imagine Tavana at 13, when his father died of a heart attack.

IT WAS the third parent he'd loved — and lost. When Tavana was 5, his natural mother died of a heart attack. At 7, his stepmother died.

But with all the trauma and heartache he's endured, Tavana at 17 doesn't appear a bit scarred or cynical.

Instead, he just dribbles the ball harder and carries on. "He's a throwback to the old days," Catholic Central coach Bernie Holowicki said. "He has a sense of loyalty and a sense of respect. He places himself second and not first ahead of anyone. His sister Mary has done a tremendous job."

THE ACCOLADES directed toward Mary Tavana are not unwarranted. She picked up the pieces after the death of their father.

She moved back to the Westland family home, as did two of her other sisters, and became the legal guardian of Tavana. He and his brother John are the youngest of the eight Tavana children and the only boys.

"The day my dad passed away, she was my sister," Tavana said. "The next day she was being my parent."

The transition, as expected, was difficult at first. And Tavana admitted he didn't make it any easier.

As time went on, he became more receptive. Now, Tavana admires his sister for taking charge the way she did.

"I'm glad she did," Tavana said. "We probably would've went to our grandparents, and the family would've been split up."

INSTEAD, THE family stayed together. Mary, who attends most of her brother's games, attributes the closeness of the family for making the adjustments easier.

"It really hasn't been that hard," said Mary, 28, who calls her brother a sincere and somewhat shy person.

"We've been a very, very close family. It just seems sort of natural that the family stayed together."

As a result, Tavana has been more than able to keep it together on the basketball court. The 6-3 forward has been more than just a focal point in the Shamrocks' season.

A scorer, Tavana also can keep opponents from doing the same. CC has trimmed 10 to 12 points off its opponent's score with a tough man-to-man defense.

The perpetrator in all of it has been Tavana, whom

Holowicki calls "an excellent defensive player and quick-leaper."

BUT TAVANA, in the past, had been somewhat overzealous in keeping opponents in check. Last year, he fouled out of 15 games.

This year, he's only been sent out of five games. "I was too aggressive," Tavana said. "This year I had to stay in the game."

"He's a very aggressive player," Holowicki agreed. "That's his style. You can't hold him back. He only knows one way to go, go all out."

His tenacity on the court might be traced to the past. Mary believes that sports have been a way to vent feelings for both Tavana and brother John, who's a football player and wrestler at CC.

"PAUL DOESN'T express his feelings much," she said. "He keeps them to himself. Sports is an outlet for both of them."

"I've begun to learn to deal with it," Tavana said of his parents' deaths. "I'm able to talk about it now. Before, I used to break out in tears when I tried to talk about it."

"The hardest time is during basketball when we had parent's night," he added as his voice began to trail off.

But he looks to the future with renewed optimism. Currently, he's considering Baldwin Wallace College near Cleveland along with Hillsdale and Grand Valley. He plans to major in criminal justice because "I've wanted to be a cop or in the FBI," he said.

Holowicki thinks Tavana could be a good role player on the Mid-American Conference level.

"HE'D BE a guy stopping the other team's player," said the CC coach. "He could be a regular off-guard or off-forward."

Tavana enjoys that role now.

"I like guarding their best player because I can shut them down and score more points than them," he said.

Tavana's fondest recollection playing for CC was when the Shamrocks upset then Catholic-League powerhouse Birmingham Brother Rice in his sophomore year. He scored 18 points in the game, but more importantly: "I was playing well defensively."

He's taking more than a few memories with him from CC. Mary credits the school for helping her raise both Paul and John in their teen years.

She also believes it's a good idea for Tavana to go away to college. The adjustment of being away from home shouldn't be difficult since, according to Mary, he's already fairly independent.

"WE MAKE our own dinners and stuff," Tavana said, "because Mary's got so many problems of her own with the bills and all."

This season, he can appreciate Mary's leadership role since he's found himself in one on the CC basketball team. He enjoys it along with playing baseball, snowmobiling and roller skating.

And he likes to laugh.

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