



Brad Emons

Ralph remains a mystery man

I'VE GOT A GREAT story idea for narrator Leonard Nimoy.

Let's call this one: "In Search of . . . Ralph Walker."

On my annual trek to the NCAA basketball tournament in Dayton, Ohio, I got an idea about a column piece.

Here's a local guy, Ralph Walker, of Southfield High School fame, who is part of Michigan State's Final Four quest, an odyssey that has taken the Spartans to the round of 16 and a date Friday night with Kansas at Kemper Arena in Kansas City.

I went to Dayton strictly as a spectator. You know, Section 313, Row E, Seat 9.

Wanting to make an introduction Thursday night, I bumped into MSU assistant Mike Deane. He told me that if I wanted to set up an interview with Walker, I should clear it first with MSU Sports Information Director Nick Vista.

The 6-foot-8 forward, the Spartans' seventh man this season, was receptive and seemed pleased that I was interested in doing a story on him when I greeted him in the tunnel of the Dayton Arena.

"The Southfield Eccentric?" Walker responded. "Sure, I'm staying at Stouffers and I should be there around 9 in the morning."

THAT WAS THE LAST I've seen or heard of Walker after missing my scheduled contact by phone Friday morning.

No, Walker hasn't been avoiding my calls. Security is tight around MSU players. I suspect it's that way because of the media's run-ins with coach Jud Heathcote over the Scott Skiles affair.

But that was no problem for me, I'd just go through the proper channels Monday and have Vista set up an interview.

The call went through to one of Vista's student assistants at 1:30 p.m. Monday, but there was no response.

I tried again Tuesday, but struck out. "The press is only allowed interviews with the players and coaches on Mondays," said Vista's secretary. "That's the rule."

I didn't want to talk to Scott Skiles or Jud, I just wanted to talk to Ralph Walker, a guy who's played in relative obscurity for four years.

Vista later called me back and said: "It's like we've been hit with a bomb. We've got the hockey tournament here this weekend and the high school (state tournament) games Friday. Plus, we're in the NCAA basketball tourney. We've had over 300 calls today."

I APPRECIATED Vista's sincerity, but I told him I had to talk to Walker before Tuesday night's deadline.

"I see your message here, and I don't know why somebody didn't get back with you. . . I'm sorry," Vista said. "I just can't do it. And has strict rules."

My next step in finding Ralph weighed upon the shoulders of Southfield High coach Greg Sliwka.

In 1982, Sliwka's Blue Jay team, featuring Ralph and brother Jerome Walker, Mike McCaskill and Mike Priest, captured the fancy of prep fans by reaching the Class A semifinals.

When Walker graduated from Southfield High, he was only 16 years old, having been promoted a grade during his elementary school days.

Sliwka offered me great insight on his former pupil: "Ralph was extremely cooperative and a determined one. He was one of the more coachable kids I ever had. He was a great kid. And his parents (Arthur and Janie) gave them tremendous support."

SLIWKA ADDED that Walker was a B-minus student who excelled in the creative arts.

And because he was only 16 when he graduated, Sliwka said that the pencil-thin Walker was physically underdeveloped.

That played a big part in his recruitment. Because of his lack of strength, Big 10 schools shied away.

"Dick Parritt (the Central Michigan coach) was here just about every game and every practice," Sliwka recalls. "The University of Detroit came on late and there was a time when I thought they might get him."

"Michigan State didn't come around until we got to the regional (late in the season). It was a tremendous surprise when he went to MSU."

Walker has been unspectacular in his four years, but according to Deane, "the last four or five games Ralph has been a factor."

In MSU's final two regular season games, Walker scored 14 points and pulled down 10 rebounds in a loss to Indiana, followed by a 10-point, 13-rebound game in a victory over Ohio State.

IN MSU'S NCAA wins over Washington and Georgetown, Walker has played a key role coming off the bench, giving the Spartans much needed rebounding and defense.

"Ralph comes back every year and we talk," Sliwka said. "There's been some tough times and some natural second-guessing on his part. There was talk every year of him red-shirting (sitting out a year), but he still feels he made the right decision."

Unfortunately, Sliwka couldn't come up with a phone number for Walker's parents. It's unlisted anyway. I even made a call to one Arthur Walker's teaching associates at Cookey High School in Detroit, but came up empty.

After striking out with East Lansing information where the Walker brothers share an apartment, I decided the odds of finding "Herb" at Burger King were better than finding Ralph.

I'm afraid that the usually quiet Ralph could pull off something big this weekend, perhaps tipping in the winning shot to put MSU into the Final Four.

That might cause Nimoy to return to "Star Trek."

Homenthmen falter

Mike Basmagian's four goals were not enough Saturday as the Livonia Homenthmen fell to Detroit College of Business in the second round of the Budweiser Mens Indoor Soccer Tournament at Four Seasons in Farmington Hills, 6-4.

Solomon Denny scored three times for the winners, who lost to the Birmingham Cobras in first-round action, 5-2.

Taormina shines for C'ville swimmers

The Clarenceville Swim Club took fourth in the 1986 Girls Short Course Age Group Swimming Championships held March 7-9 at Oakland Community College.

The Livonia Spartan Aquatic Club outdistanced 42 other teams, amassing 1,315 points, the highest total ever in the meet's history.

Heading out the top five teams were the Royal Oak Penguins (167), Michigan Stingrays (736), Clarenceville (664) and the Birmingham-Bloomfield Dolphins (535).

Clarenceville's Sheila Taormina was second in the 15-16 age category. She took first in the 100 and 200 butterfly, and 200 and 400 IM. She garnered seconds in the 50, 100 and 200 freestyle.

OTHER C'VILLE FINISHERS
10-and-under: Juli Knapp — sixth, 100 freestyle.

seventh, 50 breaststroke; Lisa Tomie — seventh, 100 butterfly; Rebecca Weary — third, 100 butterfly; fourth, 50 butterfly.

11-12: Jennifer Knapp — third, 50 breaststroke; fourth, 100 breaststroke; fifth, 200 breaststroke; fifth, 500 freestyle; eighth, 100 and 200 IM; Lisa Tucker — fourth, 50 breaststroke and 100 IM; fifth, 200 IM; sixth, 100 breaststroke.

13-14: Pam Hodge — fourth, 200 butterfly; fifth, 100 breaststroke; Angela Henke — fourth, 100 breaststroke; fifth, 500 freestyle; eighth, 100 and 200 IM; Susan Selles — fifth, 100 butterfly.

15-16: Susan Knapp — third, 100 and 200 breaststroke; fifth, 50 freestyle; Catherine Tucker — fourth, 100 freestyle; fifth, 50 freestyle; seventh, 200 IM.

RELAY EVENTS
10-and-under: Tomie, Knapp, Weary and Nancy Watson — third, 200 medley; Watson, Rebecca Campos, Brenda Hewton and Weary — third, 100 freestyle; 11-12: Megan Hodge, Knapp, Tucker and Franz —

third, 200 medley; Jill Hewton, Knapp, Julie Farabee and Lisa Murray — eighth, 200 medley; Knapp, Tucker, Farabee and Knapp — fourth, 200 freestyle.

13-14: Hodge, Henke, Lauren Weary and May Cunn — eighth, 400 medley.

15-16: Nicole Herppmann, Chan Thompson, Taormina and Selles — fourth, 400 medley; Selles, Thompson, Hewton and Taormina — fourth, 400 freestyle; Hewton, Thompson, Selles and Taormina — third, 800 freestyle.

CLARENCEVILLE SWIM CLUB
JUNIOR OLYMPIC MEET RESULTS
March 14-16 at Oakland CC

Girls 10-and-under: Rebecca Campos — second, 50 breaststroke; third, 50 butterfly; Andrea Hodge — first, 100 breaststroke; Nancy Watson — second, 50 breaststroke; third, 200 freestyle; fourth, 100 breaststroke; fifth, 200 IM; sixth, 50 breaststroke.

Boys 10-and-under: Danny Danio — first, 100 breaststroke; third, 50 breaststroke; fourth, 200 IM; Girls 11-12: Julie Farabee — first, 100 freestyle; second, 200 IM; fifth, 100 butterfly and 50 freestyle; Megan Hodge — sixth, 200 IM; Kele Knapp — sixth, 100 breaststroke; seventh, 50 butterfly; Julie Farabee — second, 50 butterfly; fourth, 100 breaststroke and 200 freestyle; Lori Tucker — sixth, 100 freestyle.

Boys 11-12: Mike Hodge — first, 100 butterfly; fourth, 50 and 100 breaststroke; Bob Hodge — third, 50 freestyle.

Girls 13-14: Pam Hodge — first, 100 and 200 breaststroke; third, 100 freestyle.

Boys 13-14: Mark Cogeny — third, 100 breaststroke; Dan Knapp — third, 200 breaststroke; sixth, 100 breaststroke; Eric Hewton — first, 500 freestyle; fourth, 100 butterfly; fifth, 100 breaststroke.

Girls 15-16: Lisa Campos — second, 200 breaststroke; third, 50 butterfly; Susan Knapp — first, 100 freestyle; third, 200 freestyle; Amy Menely — first, 200 freestyle; second, 200 IM; fifth, 100 breaststroke and 200 backstroke; Catherine Tucker — second, 200 freestyle; third, 200 breaststroke and 200 backstroke; fourth, 100 breaststroke and 100 backstroke.

Boys 15-16: Jim Burmester — third, 100 backstroke; second, 400 IM; third, 200 backstroke.

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