Sub sparks Lakers to district crown

By Bill Parker
staff writer

Mike Roberts accepts his role as a substitute player on West Bloomfield's varsity basketball team.

Friday, Roberts made the most of the situation and he couldn't have picked a better time. The Laker guard scored a team-high 14 points in leading West Bloomfield to a 60-46 victory over Walled Lake Central in the Class A state district championship game at Walled Lake Western.

With West Bloomfield leading 13-8 early in the second quarter, Josh Koby (20.2 points per game average) was forced to the bench after committing three quick fouls.

Sensing the Lakers needed a boost, Roberts stepped forward and took control of the game. The 6-foot sophomore scored 11 points on 5-of-8 shooting from the floor, grabbed two rebounds and came up with a pair of steals in the quarter as the Lakers blew the game open with a 19-8 run.

"I knew Josh was in foul trouble and I wanted to step up and contribute more," Roberts said. "I'm basically a role player and I just did my job."

THE CHAMPIONSHIP WAS the second in three years for West Bloomfield. The Lakers won the title in 1989 and lost in overtime in the district championship game last year.

"It feels good," said West Bloomfield coach Tim Domke, whose team improves to 19-3. "It's a lot easier to coach when you're an underdog. You end up playing with a lot of pressure when you're expected to win.

"I thought Central did a real nice job. They've come a long way this year and have some nice kids. They did some things that took us out of our game plan."

West Bloomfield advances to the Southfield-Lathrup regional tournament and is scheduled to meet Birmingham Groves (8-14 on the season) at 8 p.m. Wednesday.

"At least we'll know what we're up against," said Domke of a regional showdown with Groves. "We've played them eight million times. They beat us earlier this year."

THE LOSS WAS a disappointing one for the Vikings, who finish the season at 10-13.

"We hit our free throws and we win," said Central coach Steve Emert, whose team struggled at the charity stripe, converting 16-of-30 in the game and just 4-of-12 in the critical second quarter. "That was the difference in the game. I thought we proved we could play with them.

"We felt it would be critical, that when we had a scoring opportunity we had to score. But we didn't do that when we went to the line."

Rebounds were also a factor in the game as the Lakers outboarded the shorter Vikings 30-18 including 17-6 in the first half. Mark Beuerle and Scott Zach led the Lakers with six rebounds each. Ryan Dowd had six rebounds for Central, all in the second half.

"With their strength and their size, we had to board with them. I thought we did a better job of that in the second half," Emert said.

MARKS AND Matt Domke scored four points each in the first quarter as the Lakers stormed out to a 9-2 lead. Central rallied behind a couple inside buckets by Dowd as the quarter ended with West Bloomfield holding a 13-8 lead.

Roberts dropped in a layup early in the second quarter, and Koby scored three of his seven points in the game with a triple, as West Bloomfield increased the lead to 19-8 early in the second. Roberts, who scored the final seven West Bloomfield points in the quarter, hit a triple with :42 remaining in the half and returned an offensive rebound to the net at the buzzer as the Lakers increased the lead to 32-16 at halftime.

"We're starting to get more people involved," said coach Domke, whose team featured 10 players who scored. "I thought our bench did a great job."

Christian Emert scored seven of his 13 points in the third quarter including 4-of-4 from the free throw line, but the Vikings couldn't close the gap. Five players scored for the Lakers as the third quarter ended with West Bloomfield leading 44-28.

Central outscored West Bloomfield 18-16 in the fourth quarter, led by Joe Sharpe with four points, but couldn't make up the deficit. West Bloomfield drilled 14-of-18 free throws in the fourth to seal the victory.

Emert praised the effort of Sharpe, who finished his career at Central with [illegible] points, four assists, three steals and two rebounds.

"I can't say enough about the leadership Joe Sharpe provided for this team," Emert said. "He stuck through three years of adversity. He is a class-kid and leads by example as well as working with the younger kids. He did everything I ever asked of him."

Shamrocks win tourney honors

By Brad Emons
staff writer

Livonia Churchill put all the pieces of the puzzle together Friday, winning its first Class A district basketball title since 1977 with a rousing 51-43 victory over Wayne Memorial in the final at Livonia Franklin.

The Chargers (15-8) appeared to be walking on air, playing a near flawless game in their best performance of the year.

"We felt we lost some opportunities during the season, but it was no time to look back, we had to focus on this game and make a statement," said Churchill coach Fred Price, whose team lost the two previous district finals to Wayne.

The key question was whether Churchill could handle Wayne's full-court pressing defense?

The Chargers not only passed that test, but also controlled the pace of the game, while smothering Wayne on the defensive end with a 3-2 zone.

Churchill, which committed a total of 50 turnovers in district wins over Garden City and host Franklin, had a respectable 19 on the night, only five in the first half while enjoying a 26-16 lead.

FOR MIKE THOMAS, a 6-foot-4 forward, it was his finest hour.

The Churchill senior played like he was Isiah Thomas, scoring a game-high 21 points. He also set the tone early, stealing the ball on Wayne's first possession and causing another turnover the next time down the floor.

He also was the primary ball-handler against Wayne's press and came through in the clutch, much to the delight of Price.

"Mike accepted a different role this year, last year he was more of a scorer," said the Churchill coach. "In this game he decided he was going to lead by his doing. He runs the 3-2 defense and he has a lot of responsibilities where we ask him to do different things. He makes all the adjustments out there."

Wayne could never solve the Chargers' zone. The Zebras shot 13-of-57 from the floor (22 percent), while Churchill made most of its possessions count — 20 of 33 (60 percent).

"Churchill is playing their best ball of the season," said Wayne coach Dan Henry, whose team finished 15-7 overall. "Everyone was down on their guards, but if they put Thomas at guard and let him handle it, they're still a good team."

Townsend coming off the bench. They were really ready to go. I think they were tired of playing second fiddle to us for three years. They proved they can play. They definitely deserved this."

The Chargers clearly had things going their way much of the night. They led by 10 at half, had the lead cut to four, but went back up by nine after three quarters, 37-28.

Two free throws by junior guard Brian D. Johnson with 4:52 remaining gave Churchill its biggest lead of the night, 43-28.

Wayne never got closer than six the rest of the way.

Jeremiah Karolak hit Thomas for a back door layup with 1:41 remaining to put Churchill ahead, 48-39.

And it was only fitting that Thomas tipped in a Calcaterra miss with 31 seconds left to seal the victory.

"ALL OUR GUARDS played great — especially Thomas, it was his night," Calcaterra said. "We were worried, but Marcus (Sarnovsky) and Brian came through. He (Thomas) was due. He had to get one in before the season."

Thomas said he wore his lucky underwear (Seattle Seahawks boxer shorts) and ate applesauce (not Wheaties) for breakfast.

"All I knew is that I had to get the job done and not let the other guys down," he said. "I've been playing pretty weak this year, but it was time to step up and help the guys."

The 55-46 loss to Wayne in the district finals also remained vivid in Thomas' mind.

"I had three fouls in the first two minutes of that game and didn't play hardly at all," he recalled. "I didn't want to go out that way again."

Churchill's defense, spearheaded by Thomas and Calcaterra, proved to be the difference.

"I told the kids we had to play good defense and that's what did it," Price said. "We're not a great offensive team, but we had to control the pace and the tempo. I think we've won most of our games when we've held teams to below 50 points."

The Chargers also outrebounded Wayne, 29-17.

"We wanted to be strong and go to the basket hard," said Bowser, a 6-2 senior who scored six points. "We also knew they (Wayne) had quick hands and quick feet. But our guards did a great job of handling the press."

Chiefs upset Salem in district

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

The new kids on the block aren't a popular teenage rock group, but members of the Plymouth Canton basketball team.

The Chiefs, playing in the shadow of campus rival Plymouth Salem all season, stunned the No. 8-rated Rocks 68-65 in overtime Saturday night to win the Novi district championship.

It was the third meeting between the teams, Salem having won the previous two, including an 89-72 outcome a week earlier in the Western Lakes Activities Association final.

Canton advances to regional play for the second time in four years with a 15-8 record. The Rocks finish 19-3. The Chiefs will play regional tournament host Wyandotte Roosevelt at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday. The final is Friday.

"The whole year we've been playing in Salem's shadow, and Salem has been the big guys on the block," said Canton senior Rob Wilson, who scored the winning basket — his only field goal — with three seconds left in overtime. "We knew we could beat them, and we finally proved it at the right time."

Leading the Chiefs was junior guard Derrick McDonald, who scored 20 of his game-high 24 points after halftime to help Canton erase a 31-19 deficit.

"I think we just played too dammed good to get beat by a team like that," McDonald said. "I don't think anybody else in the tournament is going to beat us. This is Canton's year to play basketball. We're about 10 miles high right now."

THE CHIEFS also made coach Dave Van Wagoner sound prophetic with their come-from-behind victory.

"I told them they were going to find some way to win the game, and I was very serious when I said that," Van Wagoner said.

"I think people who were in the gym tonight realized there are two good basketball teams in Plymouth-Canton. We've been working all year to peak our guys at tournament time, and I think we've done that."

Canton played more aggressively in the second half, scoring the first six points and cutting Salem's lead to 42-37. McDonald had six points, and the Chiefs got help inside from Tony Coshatt and Kevin Holmes.

Despite Coshatt being in foul trouble and Holmes missing all of the fourth with a sprained ankle, the Chiefs continued to play well, as McDonald scored 10 points in the finale.

"I was definitely feeling the shot," McDonald said. "I played hesitant in the first half. I hate to say it, but I think we were intimidated in the first half, knowing they were Salem and ranked in the state.

"Our coach said we were going to beat Salem, and it was just in our hearts to do it."

CANTON CLOSED to 43-42, but Salem continued to lead until McDonald scored the last five points in regulation, including a baseline layup with :05 on the clock that tied score at 57 and forced overtime.

"We had the lead for most of the game," Salem coach Bob Brodie said. "We didn't have the knockout punch. Champions will win close games, and a championship team won it here."

Jon Pauporé, who scored 12 points, made consecutive shots in overtime to give Canton the lead, but Jake Baker's free throws with :44 seconds left gave the Rocks a 65-64 advantage.

Canton chose to play for the last shot, but McDonald's shot went off the front of the rim. The 6-foot-7 Wilson grabbed the rebound and laid it in with :03 remaining.

"I didn't think anything but 'Put the ball in the hole,'" Wilson said. "It's a little luck, a little bit of everything. But we won the game and that's all that counts."

Salem's Chris Tebben threw a floor-length pass on the inbounds play, but the ball went out at the other end with :02 left. The Rocks wanted a foul called when K.C. Kirkpatrick appeared to have been tripped but didn't get it. McDonald sank two free throw with a second [illegible] play.

"In the second half, we decided [illegible] get our good shooters good shots [illegible] work to get second and third shots," Van Wagoner said. Canton shot 19-of-39 in the second half and overtime.

"Derrick caught fire and it kind of snowballed after that. When Derrick gets hot he's as good as anyone.

"We decided to attack their zone in different way. We challenged our guys to play some defense. To the kids credit they did a helluva [illegible]. Our defense stayed the same, but [illegible] kids got tougher and blocked out better."

BAKER HAD 15 points to lead Salem but only one field goal as the Rocks had another sub-par performance. Kirkpatrick and Mike Mulso[illegible] scored 14 points each and John Hoff[illegible]meyer 11. Coshatt and Brett Howe [illegible] added nine points apiece for Canton.

The Rocks led 19-5 early in the game while Canton made six first-quarter turnovers and only [illegible] first-half field goals. But it turned [illegible] around in the second half.

"I've been around the block [illegible] enough to know a 12-point lead [illegible] nothing," Brodie said. "We ran a good motion offense, but it just wasn't occurring in the second half. I don't think we did it on purpose [illegible] we were doing a lot of one-on-one stuff."

Injuries, lack of talent hurt S'craft

By Darren A. Nichols
staff writer

What goes up, must come down.

That's one of the lessons Schoolcraft College women's basketball coach Jack Grenan learned this season.

Lack of experience and injuries interrupted a promising season as the Lady Ocelots finished 10-14 overall and 2-12 in the Eastern Conference of the Michigan Community College Athletic Association.

"We weren't a very good basketball team toward the end of the season," Grenan said. "We had a lack of talent and we lost two starters to injuries (point guard Donna Galli and Moe Merritt). We were slow at guard and when we lost our best guard (Galli), it made it worse.

"Unlike many other years, it was a pretty even year in the conference. The bottom teams were catching up with the other teams in the conference. In the last four years, we've had a record of 86-35 so it shows how much one year of injuries and (lack of) great recruiting can make the difference."

A NEW NATIONAL Junior College Athletic Association rule did not allow teams to practice until mid-October and that also hurt the young SC club.

"We lost four weeks of practice and it hurt our freshmen in terms of the basics," Grenan said. "Next year, no matter what, for the first 4-6 weeks we are going back to the basics."

The Lady Ocelots also suffered from inconsistent play, which was evident in a 91-65 loss in the final game of the season, Feb. 23 against Highland Park. The defeat kept them out of the state playoffs this season.

"In the game before (Highland Park), we played Delta and we were down two points with two minutes to go in the game," he said. "We ended up fouling and losing by 10 (72-62), but the kids made good decisions.

"Then we played Highland Park and we go right back to the lack of concentration and turnovers. They also exploited our lack of talent to some degree."

Bright spots this season were Nicole Dapprich, Tricia Lucas and Oakland Community College transfer Leanne Lightfoot. Grenan also likes to talk about the team's overall 2.9 grade point average.

"LACK OF CONSISTENCY was a major problem this year," Grenan said. "We didn't have the outside shooting we could count on. And other than Nicole Dapprich and Donna Galli, no one else got hot. We never hit all cylinders at all times. We were like a car out of tune.

"I challenge any college program with our 2.9 grade point average. We had to sacrifice some practice time for classroom purposes."

Grenan said he was pleased with the season and promises the Lady Ocelots will be back next season.

"I really enjoyed coaching the kids this year," he said. "We had a good group of quality kids that kept everything in perspective. We were 2-12 and we were able to hold together as a team. Through all of the adversity we stuck together. Winning is definitely important, but we [illegible] other priorities to worry about."

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Mr. Ed Thompson, Asst. Supervisor
Department of Physical Operations
Oak Park School District
22180 Parklawn Annex
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