

Vikes thump RU cagers

By Steve Kowalski
staff writer

The junior varsity game between Walled Lake Central and Redford Union went into overtime Tuesday night, pushing the varsity starting time back about 40 minutes.

As far as RU fans were concerned, it wasn't worth the wait.

Central, looking like it was already in mid-season form, wallpopped host RU, 94-49, in a non-league boys basketball season opener. The Vikings won last year's meeting by only five points but on Tuesday wasted no time proving RU didn't belong on the same court.

The Vikings led 22-8 after one quarter and outscored the Panthers, 20-4, near the end of the half for a commanding 48-17 halftime lead. The final score was impressive and so was Central's balance.

Four Vikings scored in double figures and four more scored at least six points. And to think, with only two seniors among Central's playing group, the best is yet to come for veteran coach Steve Emert.

The top eight scorers Tuesday were juniors.

"THIS IS A great bunch of young men," Emert said. "I've been watching them since they were in the fourth grade, when five of them started to play together. The rest of them have been melting together with them and they believe in each other."

"I tell them the key is right here (pointing to his brain). Don't let ego step in the way and keep your unity. That's why I like our two senior captains (Steve Rabout and Tom Donabue). The kids are fun to be around and work hard. You should see our practices — they're all-out wars."

One might imagine so, when you consider Central has about 10 players of equal talent. Junior guard Adam McCarthy came off the bench to score a game-high 15 points, including three 3-pointers, for the Vikings.

Junior guard Mike Gluski scored 12 points, while juniors Eric Leaf and Ron Thompson contributed 11 apiece. Justin Cheroff scored nine, Chris McFarlane eight and Christian Emert and Gary Coe contributed seven and six, respectively for the Vikings.

The Vikings, who made 10 three-point field goals, shot 47 percent from the field (37-79).
"We're playing a lot different style than last year when we were more half-court oriented," Leaf said. "This year we're more up-tempo and that spreads the points more."

THE VIKINGS scored several fast break points, most coming after RU turnovers. The Panthers fumbled the ball away 24 times in the first half and for the game suffered 42 turnovers.

RU had only one capable ballhandler, senior guard Bill Malecki, leaving coach Tim Smathers searching for help. Smathers probably didn't know how much he'd miss last year's point guard, Steve Zimbalatti, who graduated.

"We missed Steve (Zimbalatti) because of his quickness and ballhandling, but it was our passing that was just goofed up," Smathers said. "They played such good, aggressive, hands up-and-out defense, and when we had the ball (after a pass) it wasn't safe because they were still coming after it."

"I didn't expect scoring was going to be a problem and I don't think it will be, but before you can score you have to get the ball to where you can score."

MALECKI, WHO averaged 18 points per game last year, had trouble getting shots and finished with 14 points, 10 coming after halftime. Malecki made his first two shots in the first quarter but went scoreless in the second quarter and was a respectable 6-12 for the game.

Mike Emert scored eight and Brian Thels seven for the Panthers, who managed to outscore Central, 41-38. That's a deceiving statistic, however, since the Panthers missed so many shots from around the paint and got the rebound — only to miss again.

Jason Gagnon led RU with 10 rebounds.
"Matchup — we knew he was a good shooter — we just didn't want him to feel comfortable," Emert said. "If you look at us we're not a big team so we can't afford to let teams set up in a half-court game."

As for the other thriller — the JV game — Central won that one as well, 55-33.

Mercy played Cinderella in Class A hoop tourney

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

When coach Larry Baker thinks back on the 1991 girls basketball season, he will recall the perseverance and resiliency of his Farmington Hills Mercy team.

Despite finishing the regular season 12-8, the Marlins rebounded in the post-season tournament and got all the way to the Class A final Saturday before losing to defending champ Detroit Marlin Luther King 52-35.

"What I'm really beaming about is the fact we went out of the league tournament extremely down," Baker said, "but we managed to regroup and proved to be the classic Cinderella team."

"It was a terrific tournament run by an underdog. From a coach's perspective, that was tremendous fun. It has given us something to relish and take with us for a long, long time."

Mercy (18-9) made its sixth appearance in the state final, but it had been nine years since the Marlins were last there. Mercy made four consecutive trips to the finals in 1974-77 and again in 1982, winning state titles in 1977 and '82.

"I WAS ABLE to appreciate it far more than in earlier years when we went there with great talent," Baker said, adding he had never been to the Final Four with a team that had eight losses.

"That's a real tribute to the '91 Marlins. They kept believing and coming back, and they got their act together at the perfect time."

Before the semifinal game Friday against Saginaw, Baker reflected on the success in earlier years when he saw longtime friends and coaching

girls basketball

veterans Ron Mott (Okemos) and Mike Munro (Manistee).

"They told me to 'Win this one for us old guys,'" Baker said. "There was a nucleus of guys who hung in there with the sport through its growth years, and I felt I was representing the coaches who kept their programs going and worked hard to remain competitive."

The Marlins will remember this year's tournament because of the unusual circumstances of the final week, also.

Mercy topped rival Birmingham Marian in the regional final and was to have played Detroit Murray-Wright in a quarterfinal game, but the Pilots were removed from the tournament after two players were left off the eligibility sheet.

THE ISSUE WAS tied up in court for most of the week while a group of Murray-Wright parents sought to have the team reinstated. A decision to uphold the team's expulsion was finally reached late Friday afternoon, about an hour before the start of the first semifinal game.

"No coach in the history of either girls or boys basketball had to deal with anything like that because the events were unprecedented," Baker said. "We went from a thrilling regional championship to not knowing who or when we would play."

Mercy got a bye to the semifinals and upset No. 2-ranked Saginaw, 47-44. The Marlins rallied from a 25-19

halftime deficit by hitting 14 of 21 shots in the second half, including eight of 10 in the fourth quarter. The Lady Trojans and star guard Erin Reed were only 1-of-18 in the third period.

"Winning the semifinal game cleansed us of that uncertainty and allowed us to play the final game with the confidence of knowing we belonged there," Baker said, adding it was only the second time Mercy had beaten Saginaw since the teams began playing in 1985.

"Surely, Erin Reed is as highly regarded a basketball player as there is around, and that added to the legitimacy equation, also."

The Marlins will lose four senior starters, including All-Catholic players Laure DeMatteis (center) and Kathleen Berrigan (point guard), Mary Bleniewicz (forward) and Natalie Cichoski (guard) will need to be replaced next year, too.

Six-foot freshman post player Julie Angell, who had a lot to do with Mercy's success in the tournament, will return along with juniors Valerie Jones, Marshelle Brooks, Katie Helferman, Dana Wade and Rebecca Calver. All are forwards except for Jones, a guard who played superbly against Saginaw. Sophomores Zen-dre Simmons, Nadine Cichoski, Maggie Clinton and Katie Kenny also return.

"While we graduate the nucleus of this team, the terrific tournament run can't help but instill in the younger players a belief in themselves that will be hard to shake," Baker said. "They've seen a team make tremendous growth and turn what seemed a very mediocre season into a championship-aura season."



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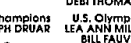
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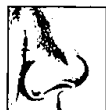
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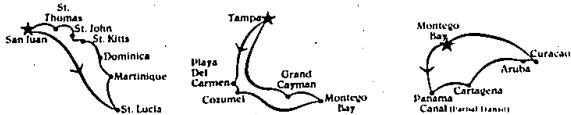
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