

SPORTS

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No holiday cheer for sad Ocelots

Tis the season to be jolly . . . Honest. It is. To be painfully accurate, these could indeed be the final days of joy for Dave Bogataj, as pitiful as they seem.

It takes a long step away from conventional understanding to describe what Bogataj has endured thus far this basketball season as joyous. His Schoolcraft College men's team is, in his own terminology, "O-for-December."

If you're mathematical, that adds up to seven losses in seven December games. Merry Christmas.

The Ocelots are 3-10 overall (they've lost eight straight, going back to November). They are 0-4 in the Eastern Conference.

Unless something very dramatic happens very quickly, they will finish this season as they have the last four under Bogataj's direction: with a losing record, a non-threat in the playoffs.

In heartless, but precise, terms — a pity. How can this team start so optimistically each season, then fold up? Said Bogataj, showing his frustration: "Every year, it's something different."

There is one similarity in the last 4 1/2 years of losing, however, and it happens every January. Which also tells you how things can get even worse this year. Because January is here.

Time to pay dues

Anyone remotely familiar with SC men's basketball knows what happens the first week of January. First-semester grades are posted.

Every year, that has cost Bogataj players. And on a team that rarely possesses the talent to compete in the Eastern Conference, the loss of any player hurts.

A couple of seasons ago, Bogataj lost so many players at the semester break, he had to recruit the guy working as his scorekeeper — Leo Hunt, a soccer player at SC — to join the team.

Believe me, it was a pitiful sight. No slight to Hunt — he wasn't a bad ballplayer. Before joining the SC varsity, he used to play with a bunch of his old guys on Thursday mornings, and he was easily as good as any of us.

But, somehow, I don't think many in that group would fare too well against Eastern Conference-caliber talent.

Nor is this a slam at Bogataj. His position borders on impossible. Academic standards are higher at SC than at most other NJCAA schools in the state, the enrollment is lower, and administration support and interest is, at best, mediocre.

So — a nightmare without an end, right?

Worse times ahead

The situation is deteriorating. Bogataj started pre-season practice with 14 players on his roster. Eight remain.

Two (Quincy Mitchell and Jon Fitzpatrick) were casualties before the season opened. Jerome Carter played a couple of games, then tore up his knee. He's out for the year.

Frank McCray played several games, but a series of family tragedies forced him to leave. Craig Bowdry and John Lathan each had a disagreement with their coach and were suspended, for what Bogataj said were "disciplinary reasons."

Of the eight remaining, only one — center Jarvis Murray — played at SC last year. Now the question is, how many will be around when SC returns to action Jan. 9 at home against Alpena CC.

If Bogataj loses just two players — and that would match SC's previous best performance since he's been coaching — he would be left with six.

Who would play? Well, one guy has been added: Dan Stevens, a 6-foot guard from Plymouth Salem. Problem is, Stevens never played for Salem's varsity.

The Ocelots have been unable to win with a full team. How will they win with even less? Bogataj will tell you, they play 30 to 35 minutes of solid basketball a game, but for five minutes they go vacillating and it costs them.

"I don't know what it is," said Bogataj. "You can go back every game to a point where we go four or five or six minutes without scoring. It's perplexing."

It's worse than that, really. It's shameful. This team has talent, with Murray, Courtney Williamson, Steve Whitlow, Bryant Markowicz, Mohammed Abdrabboh and Vincent Turner. Those guys can all play.

Problem is, they never show up at the same time. They certainly never did during December. Consistency is lacking.

How Bogataj maintains an upbeat attitude — and he does — amazes me. It will amaze me even more if everyone on the team makes grades, injuries subside, and there's a team-wide winning attitude implant.

Then, maybe, SC can turn this thing around. But that's a big maybe.

Looking back

Ten years later: Ever wonder what became of the 1982-1983 All-Area basketball players, like Lewis Scott of Redford Bishop Borgess (right) and Tom Domako of Livonia Stevenson (below)?



All-Area '83: 10 years after



Ten years ago they were the brightest stars on the Observerland basketball scene. They left the area for various colleges and universities, each armed with an athletic scholarship and a dream.

By CHRIS MCCOSKY
STAFF WRITER

One is a pilot. Another is a successful auto executive who spends his off hours counseling high school kids. One is still chasing a dream of playing in the NBA. One has foreseen all sports except hunting. Another is still trying to find and forge a career path.

Ten years ago, they were the brightest stars on the Observerland basketball scene. Mike Maleske of Redford Catholic Central, Lewis Scott of Redford Bishop Borgess, Tom Domako of Livonia Stevenson, Dave Houle of Plymouth Salem and George Sibol of Redford Thurston comprised the 1982-1983 Observer All-Area team.

"This is good," said Scott. "I always wondered what paths all these guys chose. I'll bet we've gone in all different directions."

Yes and no. All five went to college with athletic scholarships. Four of the five endured injuries at some point along the way. Three of the five left athletics somewhat bitter or disappointed. Four of the five are married but none have children. Some made a smooth transition from athletics to the real world. Others struggled. All seem to be living happy and productive lives.

Here, then, is a 10th anniversary look at the 1982-1983 All-Area basketball team — where have they been and where are they going.

MIKE MALESKE

The 17.5 points and 13 rebounds per game he averaged during his senior year at CC proved to be his peak production, thanks to a host of injuries, most notably a surgically re-

paired knee that all but ruined his four-year career at Bowling Green.

"I knew right then that my basketball career was pretty much over," Maleske said of the surgery in his sophomore year. "When the mind wants you to do something and your body won't do it, it's time to go."

The problem wasn't so much the sudden ending of his basketball career but the uncertainty of what to do next.

"I kind of foundered a bit," he said. "I figured I would just play ball in Europe or someplace and postpone getting a real job for as long as I could. Luckily, I found aviation."

He found aviation the hard way. He left Bowling Green without a degree and took a job as a ramp laborer at Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

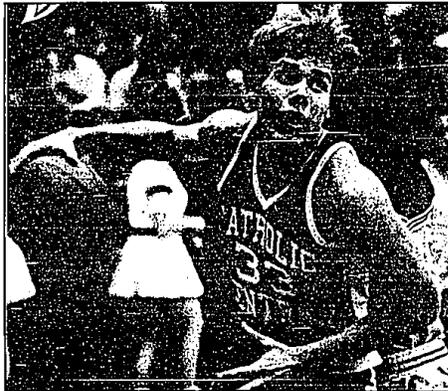
"I would be out there busting my butt and I would look up and see those pilots," he said. "I said to myself, 'I can do that.'"

He saved his money and enrolled in flight school in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He learned his lessons so well that he became a flight instructor. He got a job with a computer airline in Miami flying shuttles to the Bahamas and Key West. But the airline, Bar Harbor, went out of business two years ago.

"The major airlines require their pilots to have a four-year degree, so I had to go back to Bowling Green and finish up," he said.

Maleske, who has been commuting back and forth from Bowling Green to southern Florida where his parents and his girlfriend of four years live, will have a degree in aeronautic technology in May.

"I'm doing real well right now," he



BILL BREAKER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Glory days: Basketball was never as much fun for Mike Maleske as it was back in 1983 when he led Catholic Central to the Catholic League championship and a Class A district title.

said. "Once I get the degree out of the way, I'll be back on track. You might want to put in the article that I'm available and looking for work."

LEWIS SCOTT

In the All-Area story 10 years ago, Borgess coach Mike Fusco was quoted as saying that Scott was totally focused in two areas: basketball and books. And now, after a highly successful basketball and academic career at Eastern Michigan University, Scott is coming back to his old stomping grounds as living proof that

basketball is only a means to success, not the end itself.

"Myself and Joe Gregory (another basketball standout from Borgess) come back to the school about once a month to talk to the kids. We are trying to establish a mentor program," said Scott, who is 18th on Eastern's all-time scoring list with 1,014 points. "We try to let them know that they don't have to play ball to do OK for themselves. We have to get these kids to realize that academics and basketball are related. We

See LOOKING BACK, 2C

Russell makes Division III All-American team

By CHRIS MCCOSKY
STAFF WRITER

Labels. Athletes acquire them early and often spend the rest of their careers trying to lose or live up to them. Sometimes, though, the label fits like a birth mark.

People started calling Jennifer Russell things like, "leader" and "winner," about the time she first stepped on the soccer field for Plymouth Canton. People called her "intense," "intelligent" and "committed." By the time she was a senior, all those traits were thrown together to form one all-encompassing label: All-American.

Three years into her collegiate career at Kalamazoo College, the All-American tag has again been affixed to Jennifer Russell. She was named a NCAA Division III second team All-American by the

National Soccer Coaches Association.

"This was a big surprise to me," said Russell, who is back home in Plymouth for the holidays. "Especially since we didn't make it to nationals this season."

Actually, there are those who were surprised that Russell only received second team honors. Here's why:

She has led K-College to three straight unbeaten MIAA championship seasons. The team has posted an overall record of 48-7-1 since Russell arrived. Last fall, she was the leading scorer on a team that outscored its conference 75-2.

She has been a first-team all-MIAA honoree all three years and was the league's most valuable player the last two seasons.

She is the MIAA's all-time

scoring leader with 63 goals and 154 points. She holds the Kalamazoo record for goals (63) and points (200).

"I don't like to dehumanize a player, but when Jenny gets on the field she is a machine," said Kalamazoo coach Scott Forrester. "She's got her rhythm and it is not going to change. She is intense all the time."

Certainly people who saw her play or played against her in high school will remember that intensity, that indomitable will to get to the net, to score and to win.

Very little about Russell the soccer player has changed in three years. She is as fast and strong as ever. She simply cannot be knocked off the ball or off her feet. And her shots are still hard and true.

"There is nothing anybody can

do to interrupt her focus or to break her concentration," Forrester said. "She'll get hammered and just fight right on through it."

Also unchanged is Russell's unselfishness and her complete belief in "the team."

"My scoring so many goals and being named an All-American all reflects on the team," she said. "One person doesn't score a goal.

It starts with the goalie making a save, and the defense pushing the ball to midfield and the midfielders getting the ball to the strikers. It isn't Jenny Russell scoring the goals. The whole team did it. Everybody is in on every goal. Everybody is in on every win."

When you see her play or hear her talk about soccer, you'll think it's the same old Jenny Russell.

See RUSSELL, 2C