

Crusaders learn winning isn't easy

CC settles for hockey tie

It was all so... contagious. The optimism was flowing. Overflowing, really. Players looked at each other, assessing abilities, took a step back and said, "Man, we are good."

Didn't matter that almost none of them had played a single minute of college basketball. They had the attitude. They had the ability. They had the arrogance.

That was eight weeks ago. Before Madonna University's resurrected men's basketball team had played a single game. Before the losses started to mount.

I remember coach Bill Sharpe asking one of his players prior to the season-opener how many games the team was going to win. "All of them," was the candid reply.

Sharpe should have known better, but he allowed himself to get caught up in this misplaced optimism. He got sucked in by a bunch of freshmen who didn't know any better.

Only two of Madonna's players had any collegiate experience entering the season — and that was with junior college teams.

That alone should have set off a caution signal. But it didn't.

I remember a friend from way back, when asked why he was always so negative, recited this proverb: "A pessimist is never disappointed."

Does the opposite hold true? Are optimists doomed to disappointment?

The Fighting Crusaders might believe so. Now.

The confidence of eight weeks ago has long since eroded. It's been buried beneath an avalanche of losses almost all of them lopsided. Madonna has one win in 20 games. Only twice this season have opponents been held to under 100 points. The second came Saturday, in a 99-82 loss to University of Michigan-Dearborn.

The Crusaders have been ridiculed by ESPN sports commentator Dick Vitale. They have been laughed at after giving up 189 points to Oakland University — and the Pioneers' two best players didn't even dress for the game. Almost all of their losses have been by more than 10 points — most by much, much more.

"It's rough. Real rough," said Mike Stone, a 6-foot-5 freshman from Plymouth Salem. "I was just so used to winning."

In his three varsity seasons at Salem, he didn't lose this many games. It's not an easy lesson to learn.

J. Dimes, a 6-4 freshman forward from East Catholic, wasn't used to losing, either. "When we started 0-and-7, I said I'll have to get used to it. Now I just concentrate on each game."

Blame can be heaped almost everywhere: Sharpe's coaching (an inappropriate up-tempo offense that features poor shooters, with little rebounding and less defense, critics harp); a lack of team

leadership (Stone: "That's the problem with this team — there's no leadership, no togetherness"); even bad luck (injuries in particular).

Things began to unravel when, just before the season-opener, 6-7 forward-center Ken Taylor (from Westland John Glenn) was lost because of academic problems. That certainly hurt the Crusaders' inside game.

But Taylor couldn't have saved them.

It got so bad that, after the 82-point loss to OU Dec. 20, Sharpe started talking about resigning. That hardly buoyed his young team's now-fragile confidence.

Things have changed since then. The situation has settled some. Players have adopted an attitude Mike Dimes — one thing at a time. "I just have to focus on doing something else each game," Dimes said. "It might be defense one game, then shooting the next, until it all blends together."

Coming together... Sharpe realizes now that will take time. The Crusaders never seem to do one thing right for an entire game. In the loss Saturday to UM-Dearborn, Madonna battled back from a 16-point halftime deficit to tie the game with 10 minutes left.

But then the Crusaders let up

— and lost by 17.

It can't be easy for Sharpe. Monday's practice provided some insight into the problems facing his team. The half-court drill seemed simple enough: drive down the lane, drive down the lane. Sharpe repeated it half-dozen times. Still, players pulled up for jumpers from the three-point arc.

But it's a learning process, and these freshmen are learning. Slowly, maybe, but they are learning. And they aren't ready to quit.

"As long as (Sharpe) stays, I'll stay," said Stone. "If we keep losing games the way we're losing them, it'll be hard for all these guys to stay here."

"Eventually, this could be a good team, if everyone stays. But right now, I don't think that'll happen."

Dimes has heard the discontent, too. But he is determined to turn this program around. "Yes, I am (staying)," he said without hesitation. Do his teammates share his determination? "Hopefully they do. I hope they feel they can come back next season and contribute."

Reality suggests not all of them will. But those that do will be a year older and a whole lot wiser. Better, too — and better for it.

Redford Catholic Central's hockey team received a wake-up call Saturday night as the top-ranked team in Class B-C-D, Allen Park Cabrini, forged a 2-2 tie with the Shamrocks at Redford Ice Arena.

CC, which is 9-0-1 overall and entered the week as the No. 2-ranked team in Class A, allowed Cabrini to tie the score with a goal at 4:46 of the third period.

The Shamrocks had won their four games in the New Year by a combined score of 32-3.

"It's hard to keep the kids aware of the need to continuously be motivated," CC coach Gordie St. John said. "I thought that we had not played as demanding a schedule as some of the other teams and we're not quite as ready as we might have been."

"We were looking for a good, strong team with size. They'll learn a lot from this game, both mentally and physically."

Cabrini took a 1-0 lead with a goal by junior Pete Niphoratos, assisted by Deandre Cooper, at 5:42 of the first period.

CC tied the score as Jeff Lachapelle scored with assists to Jeff Helner and Mark Holdridge at 12:17. The Shamrocks gained a 2-1 lead in the second period when

Eric Vaquera was assisted by Holdridge and Jon Heady at 13:59.

Cabrini's Mike Weinberger tied the score at 2-2 in the third period.

Mike Brusseau was the CC goalkeeper, stopping 16 shots. Cabrini goalie Ray Aho stopped 24 CC shots.

■ RICE & PORTAGE NORTHERN 1: Undeclared Birmingham Brother Rice (10-0), the No.-1 ranked Class A team, overwhelmed Portage Northern in a game played Saturday at Oak Park Arena.

The Warriors scored two goals in each of the first two periods and led their 10th straight victory of the season with a four-goal final period.

The goals came from Pat Dakhi and Jeff Wojcik with two each, plus Dale Rominsky, Keith Harris, Owen Townsend and Brad Bass. Eric Karmuri registered three assists.

Cassey Oating and Kris Arthur were Rice's goaltenders.

Rice has dominated its opponents this season, outscoring them by a whopping 107-7 margin.

"We're skating well, passing well and moving the puck out of our zone well," said veteran Brother Rice coach Mike Brown. "We're playing good, team hockey right now."

The Warriors participate in the annual All-South State Marie hockey tournament this weekend. Rice was third last year after having won the four previous tournaments.

Matmen dual winners

Farmington High's Matt Michalski and Mike Prough were dual winners Friday when the Falcons competed against Romeo and Lake Orion in a pair of dual wrestling meets.

Michalski (103) pinned Romeo's Jim Kuchenmeister in 45 seconds and Lake Orion's Brian Thomas in four minutes. Prough (145) defeated Romeo's Simon Bradin 15-9 and Lake Orion's Chris Kaliz 13-4.

Michalski boasts a 14-4 record with nine pins, and Prough is 12-5 with six pins.

The only other Farmington winner was Chris Neville, who scored a technical fall over Aaron Walter of Lake Orion at 112.

■ Michalski and North Farmington's Mike Spiz were winners in dual meets against Plymouth Salem last week, not losers as was reported Monday.

Michalski (103) pinned Salem's Eric Coburn in 112, and Spiz (112) pinned Salem's Romeo Cairo in 119.

Victory eludes Madonna men despite comeback

There were promising aspects for Madonna University's men's basketball team in Saturday's home game against the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

The final outcome was not one of them.

The Crusaders overcame a 16-point halftime deficit, battling back to tie the score with 10 minutes left. And, for only the second time this season, they limited the opposition to under 100 points.

Neither was enough, however, to deliver a second victory. The beleaguered Crusaders let up after their valiant comeback and lost for the 19th time in 20 games, 99-82.

Madonna coach Bill Sharpe was impressed with his team's performance — some of the time. But old problems continue to haunt. Like poor shooting. The Crusaders converted just 31-of-98 floor shots (31.6 percent), and were a dismal 32.6 percent in the

first half when they fell behind 55-39.

Then there was defense. Although a strong defensive effort ignited the second-half comeback, Madonna could not sustain it. UM-D was 36-of-70 from the field (51.4 percent).

Madonna did get a strong performance from sophomore point guard Doug Soper, who scored 19 points and dished out seven assists. Mike Stone added 17 points and 11 rebounds, and J. Dimes

had 14 points and nine boards.

The Wolves (5-15 overall) were led by Josh Griggs' 28 points. Ron Stepmann had 19. Pat Hughes 15 and John Hoffmeyer 15.

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