

DAN O'MEARA

It was good year for Farmington's boys hoop teams

With the winter sports season now ended in Farmington, I offer here a few thoughts on the recent boys basketball season.

As a whole, taking into consideration the performance of all three Farmington teams, I think 1997-98 was the best season, the most competitive and entertaining, during my time working at the Observer.

All three finished with winning records for a total of 44 wins and 22 losses, and all three made the Western Lakes Activities Association tournament.

Of the latter point, I don't think that has ever happened previously, certainly not in my 11 years on the scene.

Remember December? The three teams were a combined 10-1 heading into the holiday recess. Harrison won its first six games and Farmington its first five. That was an indication of good things to come in the New Year.

Gaines made big gains

The most memorable and outstanding aspect of '98 was the impressive play of Farmington's Trevor Gaines, the 6-foot-6 senior center who will play Division I basketball for the University of Vermont next season.

Farmington coach Denny Mikel said last November that Gaines was much improved, and that wasn't just idle talk. The first time I saw the Falcons and Gaines play confirmed it.

In fact, I don't think I've ever seen a player, never anyone on an Observerland boys basketball team, improve as much as Gaines did from his junior to his senior year.

Gaines was a three-year starter for Farmington, but he blossomed into one of the best players in the area this year, averaging more than 20 points and at least 16 rebounds a game.

If I were asked, Gaines would get my vote as the most improved player and the most valuable player in the WLAA.

I'm not alone. I know a lot of coaches and people who know basketball think the same.

He became more assertive

As I recall and compare his play as a sophomore and junior to that of his senior year, I think Gaines' play under the offensive board best exemplified his improvement.

Whereas, he didn't have a strong presence in the post and allowed opposing players to take the ball without a serious challenge, he was just the opposite this year.

Gaines was now an aggressive competitor, one of the best rebounders I've seen in the high school game. He could grab a rebound away from an opposing player and put the ball in the cylinder before the other player knew where it was or what had happened.

And one other thing! Gaines was the ultimate sportsman, too.

In all the games I saw, as many times as he took a hard foul or got tangled under the boards, Gaines never reacted in an unsportsmanlike manner.

I never saw any in-your-face, trash talking from him, or any of the other Farmington players for that matter.

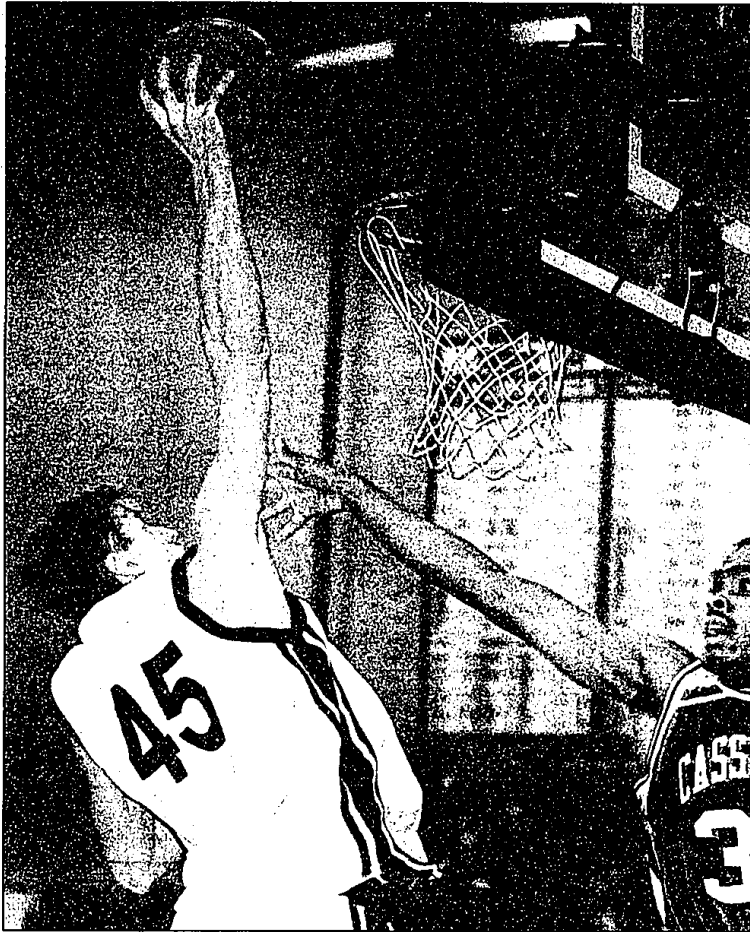
Gaines' response was always to step directly to the foul line or reposition himself to continue playing. He never allowed opponents to take him off his game, and that degree of maturity was impressive. A lot of college and professional players could learn a lesson from him in that regard.

Team helped by role players

Gaines deserves the accolades and to be praised for working hard at his game between seasons, bringing an I-want-to-win attitude to each game and desiring to do all he could with his talent. And making the Falcons a fun team to watch!

With Gaines, you knew the Falcons (16-8) always had a chance, as evi-

Please see O'MEARA, D2



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBELLI

Going to the hoop: Six-foot-10 center Chris Young (45) scored 39 points, grabbed 20 rebounds and blocked 12 shots for CC, which lost in double overtime. Hilton Napoleon defends for Cass Tech.

Cass tops CC in two OTs



Catholic Central High School fell just short of winning a Class A regional championship in boys basketball Friday, losing to Detroit Cass Tech in double overtime at Dearborn Fordson High School, 116-115.

BY BRAD EMONS
STAFF WRITER

Can anybody top this one?

In a game that will go down as one of the greatest in Michigan schoolboy basketball history, Detroit Cass Tech outlasted Redford Catholic Central in double-overtime, 116-115, to claim the

Class A regional basketball championship before a jam-packed crowd Friday night at Dearborn Fordson.

To say it was a shootout would be a gross understatement.

It was 46-46 at halftime, 76-70 Cass Tech in the lead after three quarters, 94-94 at the end of regulation, and 105-

105 after the first overtime.

In the second OT, Marlon Williamson split a pair of free throws with 32 seconds left to provide the final margin of victory.

But not before CC's 6-foot-10 senior center Chris Young, in perhaps his finest hour as a Shamrock (with a game-high 39 points, 20 rebounds and 12 blocks), rammed home his fifth dunk of the night to pull his team within one, 116-115, with 13 seconds remaining.

Letting just two seconds go off the

Please see SHAMROCKS, D3

Whalers roll, 7-1, in series

BY C.J. RISAK
STAFF WRITER

Just when you think you have things figured out, at least partially so, along comes the unexpected.

Thursday's Ontario Hockey League playoff game, between the Sarnia Sting and the Plymouth Whalers at Plymouth's Compuware Arena, was supposed to be similar to the first two in the best-of-seven series — close, edge-of-the-seat, tightly-played.

Some relevant stats from the first two games: The home team won both; times, the game wasn't decided until the winners scored an empty-net goal in the final minute, each team scored seven goals.

HOCKEY

Here's the only relevant stat from game No. 3: Whalers 7, Sarnia 1.

Completely unanticipated. It put Plymouth up one game going into last night's match at Sarnia. Game five will be at 6:30 p.m. tonight at Compuware.

"There's nothing like home ice," said a smiling Pete DeBoer, the Whalers' coach, after the game. "We had a ref who was calling all the stuff that happens after the whistle, the stuff you're supposed to call."

That meant 21 penalties called against Sarnia (and 16 against Plymouth). It also meant five power-play goals for the Whalers.

And that was the game. No comebacks this time to disillusion the home team, the kind they'd been prone to surrendering the last month of the season.

The Sting solved that problem for the Whalers. They ruined any hopes they had for a rally by taking silly penalties. And they did it over and over and over.

The game was pretty much decided, it's true, by the time the third period started. Plymouth led 5-0 after two, then David Legwand jammed a rebound past Sarnia's back-up goalie, Greg Hewitt, to make it 6-0.

But the Sting did battle back, with Jeff Heeroma finally putting a puck past Whaler goalie Robert Esche to make it 6-1. And there was 16 minutes left to play.

But 92 seconds later, Sarnia's Shane Kenny was called for cross checking. Harold Bruken followed by scoring his second power-play goal of the game for the Whalers, knocking home a pass that was actually a deflection off Andrew Taylor's skate.

Before the puck could be dropped for the ensuing face-off, Sarnia was penalized again, this one on the bench for delay of game. And 2:41 after that the Sting bench was penalized again, this time for too many men on the ice.

It was not going to be Sarnia's night, that was for certain.

But then, that was apparent from the start. The Whalers scored twice (on

Please see WHALERS, D3

Youth hockey player pens winning essay in contest

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER

Nine-year-old David Pniwski of Farmington Hills is a hockey player and an accomplished writer.

His ability to combine the two earned him first place in the Sprint PCS Youth Hockey Clear Leader Contest.

All youth hockey players (ages 6 to 14) in southeast Michigan and the Toledo area were eligible to write an essay of 100 words or less telling why his or her coach is a clear leader on and off the ice.

Pniwski, the lone winner chosen from all mite, squirt, pee wee and bantam players in the above area, wrote about Ben Jaeger, the coach of the Terminators in the house league at Farmington Hills Ice Arena.

Pniwski, a first-year squirt player, and Jaeger were honored at center ice during halftime of the Central Collegiate Hockey Association championship game Saturday at Joe Louis Arena.

Sprint PCS presented Pniwski with an award for winning the essay contest, and Jaeger received the Clear Leader Award.

Pniwski also received a \$500 scholarship, and the Farmington Hills Hockey Association received \$500 for its equipment fund.

In addition, all the Terminators players and coaches were guests of Sprint PCS at the COHA game Saturday. Each player also received two tickets for his parents or guardians.

Following is the essay written by Pniwski, who also is an Observer newspaper carrier:

"Coach Jaeger is my favorite coach on my hockey team. He has inspired me to do different things that help me play better hockey. Also, he compliments me on how I play and on my skills.

"When I got my first hat trick, coach Jaeger told me that I worked hard for it. That made me feel great.

"He has taught me different ways to make hockey a lot more fun and easier to play. He built a huge outdoor ice rink in his yard and invited the whole team to his house to practice."

Pniwski hopes to join a squirt team for the spring season. Anyone in need of a player should call (248) 208-0415.



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEONARD

Contest winners: David Pniwski (left) explained why he thinks his coach, Ben Jaeger, is a clear leader in his winning essay.