

Spotlight, lure of big bucks starting too early for preps

I can see it now. It's 2010, and some hot-shot eighth-grader starts being wooed by the NBA as the next LeBron James, if only he'd skip high school and go right to the show.

Don't snicker, because with the ever-multiplying media circus — cable sports highlight programs in one tent; ratings-grabbing sports talk radio in another — it could happen.

Hey, remember the Little League World Series and all the hullabaloo about some player chiming down the third base line after hitting a home run?

Last Thursday night was all about high school superstar basketball player LeBron James, a 17-year-old kid who had Dick Vitale gushing after slapping home 31 points for Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary.

The following morning, the radio airwaves were filled with debate about high school athletes going pro. Forget college,

there's major mooch to be made RIGHT NOW!

Congratulations. Our fame- and wealth-obsessed society is now targeting prep student-athletes such as James. (Remember the good old days, when college athletes were leaving with a year or two of eligibility remaining, just to sign on the fat bottom line?)

I just hope your typical sports-playing high school kid doesn't now forget about SAT, AP or MEAP, all because of ESPN. And what about the rest of the players who might be talented, but will never be courted or photographed, or glorified on a radio show?

They must be able to compete hard and compete well for the tradition that is high school athletics, for their school, without worry about a future contract. Where the focus must continue to be on making meaningful memories on the court, field or ice, with medals

and trophies the payoff.

West Bloomfield's girls basketball team could be used as an example of the ups and downs of the preps. The Lakers were all smiles when they defeated Plymouth Canton for the Class A regional title. But when that same team's season ended against Fraser in the state quarterfinals, players were in tears as they made their way to the locker room.

When the Country Day football team let a 13-0 halftime lead evaporate, costing the Yellow Jackets a chance to play for a title in the Pontiac Silverdome, coaches and players almost seemed in disbelief that a great opportunity slipped away. It is hard to think any of those players were thinking college scholarship or "pro future" during those moments.

James is the exception. Obviously, he is leaps and bounds above anybody else in the prep hoops game. He's big

ratings and all that crazy stuff. But parents and coaches all over the country should be realistic and even pretty nervous about this whole thing and make sure the young players at their schools are aware of the true facts of sporting life.

That is, just a minuscule number of athletes ever make it to the big leagues in any sport, regardless of college background. OK, I guess it is possible for baseball and hockey players to jump to the bigs right after high school graduation, but the likelihood of that happening is about as rare as a Pete Rose apology.

But the camera lights are starting to glare too early onto the lives of our athletes. Yes, many of them are gifted. But it cannot be forgotten that high school and even college are part of their developmental process, as athletes and people.

Of course, who cares about any of that if million-dollar contracts are routinely waved around like pop quizzes.

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Host teams play well at net tourney

BY BRAD MONASTIERE
STAFF WRITER

The hosts for Saturday's Farmington Volleyball Invitational weren't very generous to the several visiting teams present.

Farmington Hills Harrison and Farmington High both had excellent days at the Saturday tournament, finishing among the top four out of 12 teams participating. The Falcons advanced through a tough field to the finals before losing to Harper Woods Notre Dame, 15-12, 18-16.

The match of the day may have been in the semifinals, when old Western Lakes rivals Plymouth Salem and Farmington hooked up in a game that featured tons of side outs on both sides.

The Falcons won the match, 12-16, 15-9, 15-4, but the match took its toll on the Falcon players, according to coach Alex Perrin.

"You could tell in the finals, the girls' legs were going," Perrin said. "We weren't getting the digs we normally get, but by that point, we didn't have much left."

Farmington jumped out to a 10-6 lead in the first game against ND, but was outscored 10-2 to end the first game. That

trend continued into the second game, when the Falcons were on the wrong end of a 12-2 start. Despite some incredible defensive plays, particularly by Katie Johnson, the Falcons rallied to tie the game at 12-12, but couldn't get over the top to win the match and tournament.

Melissa Patterson led the rally with 10 straight service points in the finals for Farmington.

Patterson and senior Jessica Janowicz were named to the All-Tournament team for Farmington. Janowicz led the team with 61 kills, and had six blocks and 56 digs in the six matches. Patterson added 25 kills and 33 digs.

The Falcons picked up wins over Redford Union (15-5, 15-11) and Waterford Mott (15-5, 17-6) while splitting a match with the Rockets (15-9, 7-15).

Salem went on to defeat Holly 15-13, 15-14 in round-robin play, while the Falcons defeated Rochester Adams in a tough match, 15-5, 12-15, 15-9.

Harrison also had an excellent day on the court, defeating Ann Arbor Pioneer and Westland John Glenn in pool play. In round-robin play, the Hawks avenged a pool-play loss to Warren Woods Tower before losing to Notre Dame in the tournament semifinals.

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WRESTLING

FROM PAGE D1

Southfield, Southfield Lathrup, Troy and Troy Athens.

The top eight wrestlers in each weight class advance to Saturday's consolation and championship matches at Clarkston.

Farmington coach Al Beyer said his team is capable of getting a couple of wrestlers to the second day of competition.

"Last year we only had one guy make it to the second day," he said. "We're hoping to do better than that."

The Wolves are the odds-on favorite with one state champion (Clint DeGalin), six other

returning state individual qualifiers (Tony LaJoie, Joe Wood, John Langdon, Elliott May, Braden L'Amoreaux and Jason Talbot) and all 14 starters in each weight class back from last year's team. That team lost in the regionals to eventual state champion Davison.

Clarkston's team is ranked No. 2 in the state behind — you guessed it — Davison.

Nationally, Davison is ranked No. 5, and Clarkston is ranked No. 34, according to Clarkston coach Mike DeGalin.

Clarkston has a team with lofty expectations and the confidence to meet them head on, DeGalin said.

"This is probably the best prepared team coming in after

they wrestled in the summer," DeGalin said. "We took nine guys to Fargo (USA Wrestling National Championships) and I don't know anyone else who took that many."

"Everyone worked extra hard this summer. We're real happy with the way everyone's wrestled so far. They're wrestling really strong."

Clarkston won the Howell Invitational on Saturday with 247 1/2 points. Lowell finished second with 169 points. Clarkston already beat Hartland (66-6), Bay City Western (66-17), Lowell (49-27) and Catholic Central (64-12) in matches or tournaments this year.

By its coach's measures, Lake Orion's wrestling team is faring all right during the season's first month. The real question concerning veteran coach Doug Kline is what team will show up at any given match?

"That's been a concern for me," he said. "When we come to compete, we're a pretty good team. But we lost some people and we're young in the lower weight classes."

A year ago, Lake Orion finished a respectable 18-8 overall and in second place in the always-competitive Oakland Activities Association Division I. The Dragons spent "a good deal of the season ranked in the top 10 in the state," Kline said.

"We were pretty good and we gave Clarkston a run for their money in our dual with them last year; we only lost by one point," he said.

Avondale and senior-laden Rochester are tagged as the next two top teams. Kline figures his squad will battle Troy, Rochester Adams and West Bloomfield for the middle of the pack, but doesn't hesitate to say that nothing is given in the OAA's top division.

"Everybody up here is good," he said. "If we continue to improve, there's no way of telling where we will finish up."

Lake Orion's senior captain Jesse Smith (145) is 12-0 on the young season heading into this weekend's competition, while senior 215-pounder Jesse Osborne (11-1) and senior Robert Grupido (140), a state qualifier last season who is also 11 this year, give the Dragons a formidable threesome.

Junior Rocky Rochelleau (10-2 at 171) is also having a strong season, while junior Wes Metcalf (160), T.J. DeGeorge (150), senior Adam Kennard (125) and junior James Turner (189) also saw action last year and in the early going this year.

Other top county wrestlers include: Danny Mason of Troy, Tim Breyer and Tony Lysolits of Oxford, Chris Woolley of Avondale, Adam Krieger and Nathan Meredith of Seabolt, Joe Delia and James Campbell of Rochester and Jon Farley of Adams.

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