



"Leprechauns" John Nuccitelli and Art Arieno cheer on Aquinas in Saturday's loss to Franklin.

Quakers romp

A night to forget for Little Irish

By Richard A. Kiley

Section 5 high school basketball teams have to travel a long, hard road in order to play in a championship game at the War Memorial.

Saturday night, it appeared that road had taken a bigger toll on the Little Irish of Aquinas than it had taken on the Franklin Quakers.

After battling to a 14-12 lead after one quarter against Franklin, Aquinas was overpowered 19-6 in the second stanza, and the Quakers never looked back in an awesome 67-48 win.

Franklin, 17-5, represents Section 5 Class A in the Western Regionals at the Buffalo Auditorium this Saturday night at 7:15 p.m.

It was a season to remember but a night to forget for Mike Ruff's squad, who had recorded two major upsets in this year's tournament by knocking off defending champion East and No. 3 Webster, before falling to the "run-and-gun" Quakers.

After Wakili Moore nailed three corner jump shots for almost half of the Little Irish points in the opening quarter, Franklin coach Trent Jackson made defensive adjustments which virtually shut the senior guard out the rest of the way. (He did, however, add two free-throws in the fourth quarter when the game was out of reach.)

"We used a trap defense to double team Moore because you can't give him any room to shoot, he'll burn you every time," Jackson said, after his Quakers captured their second sectional crown in three years.

Jackson admitted he was somewhat surprised by the margin of victory, but discounted the revenge factor (Aquinas had defeated Franklin 76-71 earlier in the season) for his team's romp and attributed it to his squad's tenacious and diligent play.

"We just wanted to win this one, that other game didn't matter," Jackson said. "We worked hard for this win, and that's what sectionals is all about."

Eric Thomas was a one-man dynamo for the Quakers in the second quarter when he poured in eight of his 16 points for the night. Those eight points were two more than the entire Aquinas squad could muster as it was left flat-footed on numerous occasions and trailed 31-20 at halftime.

Aquinas' Chris Thomas (no relation to Eric) was 80 percent of his team's offense in the third quarter, when he scored eight of its 10 points. But the two points that Thomas didn't get stood out most. It was a sequence of events with 6:30 to go in the third quarter that typified the night, not for Thomas, but for the Little Irish.

An uncontested drive to the basket was marred when the 6-2 senior "muffed a stuff" that would have most definitely inspired his team as well as the rather quiet Aquinas fans.

On the ensuing rebound, teammate Eric Loewenguth missed a seemingly simple layup that would have narrowed the lead to 10, after Franklin had led by as many as 13. It was that kind of night for the Little Irish.

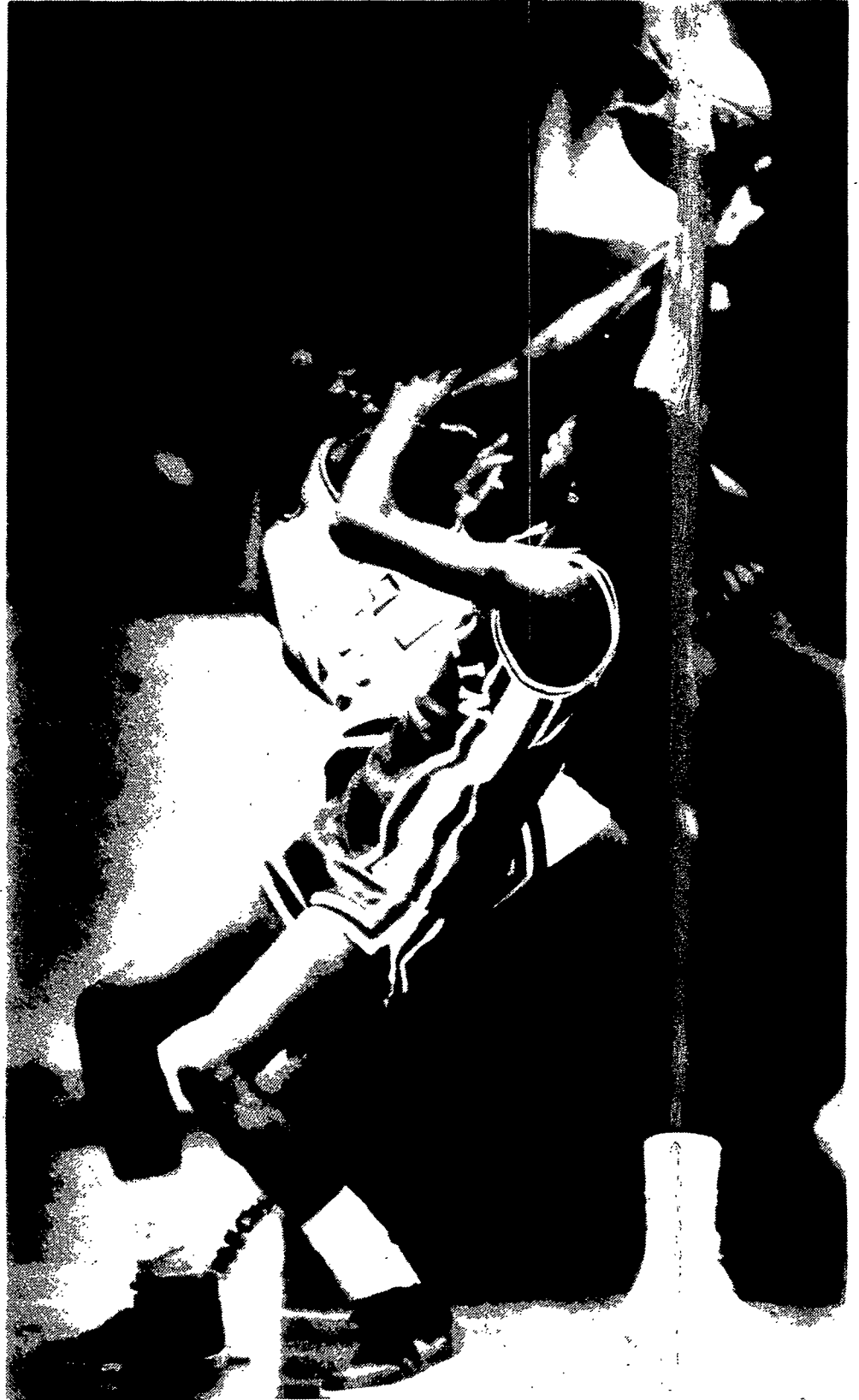
Eric Thomas added insult to injury at the end of the quarter when he nipped the buzzer to give the Quakers a 45-30 bulge going into the final eight minutes.

It was show time for Franklin in the final quarter as Aquinas resembled a defenseless boxer on the ropes in front of the announced crowd of 5,334. The Quakers upped the lead to as many as 24, before the Little Irish trimmed it before time ran out. Franklin's 6'4" center Tori Poindexter was "chairman of the boards" for the Quakers, as he grabbed 10 rebounds for the night and was an intimidating force inside.

Three players from both squads were honored in post-game ceremonies naming the 1986 All-Tournament Team. Paul Mancarella, Moore and Thomas were tabbed for Aquinas, while Poindexter, Ken McLain and Most Valuable Player Tim Washington were named from Franklin. The 5'10" Washington scored 10 of his team's 12 points in the opening quarter and had 16 points and 10 rebounds for the night.

AQUINAS EARNED ITS WAY into the sectional final with an exciting come-from-behind win over Webster, 63-60, in the "big house" Wednesday, Feb. 26.

The night did not begin on such a good note for coach Ruff's squad, which showed up for the game in its home maroon colors rather than its visiting white uniforms. In a classy and sympathetic gesture, Warrior coach Bill O'Rourke Jr. declined the five technical shots called for in this situation.



Jeff Goulding/Courier Journal

Chris Thomas, 42, of Aquinas fights for the ball with Franklin's Tori Poindexter during Saturday's Section 5 championship game.

O'Rourke's squad was anything but sympathetic once the game started as they jumped out to a quick 4-0 lead, thanks to Steve Dewey's two jump-shots. Dewey scored nine points in the first quarter alone en route to a 21-point evening.

The Little Irish regained their composure and led 17-15 after one.

Aquinas' shooting went cold in the second quarter, while Webster's Dewey and 6'7" senior center John Szumiloski began to dominate play in powering the Warriors to a seven-point lead, 33-26. Webster's G.T. Helbig also enjoyed a fine quarter, nailing eight of his 13 points.

Aquinas senior Mancarella domineered

play in the third stanza, scoring 10 points and pulling the Little Irish to within two after three quarters, 47-45. The gutsy center hit consecutive hook shots in the final minute to give Aquinas all-important momentum heading into the final eight minutes.

The score was tied three times in the first 3:30 of the final period, until Mancarella took things into his own hands once again and converted yet another running hook shot in the lane to put Aquinas ahead, 55-53.

The score was then tied at 55 and 57 before Tim Reynders hit nothing but net with 2:53 to play and put Aquinas ahead to stay. Clutch free throws by Moore, who finished with 16 points, and Thomas spelled the end of the line for the Warriors.

Odessa-Montour upsets Notre Dame Crusaders, 56-54, in seesaw battle

By Peter Iglinski

Elmira Notre Dame coach Mike Johnston predicted a tough game for last Saturday at the Broome County Veterans Memorial Arena. And Odessa-Montour obliged for the boys' high school basketball championship in Section 4, Class C.

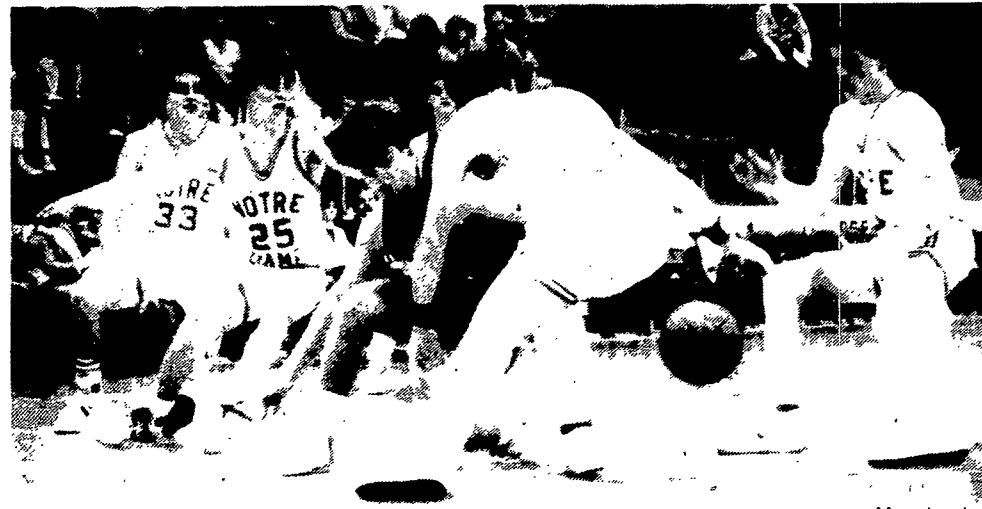
The road to the arena had been an easy one for Notre Dame, which won its first three tournament games by an average of 25.7 points. Odessa-Montour, on the other hand, was no stranger to nail-biting finishes, having won its two previous games by one-point margins.

Saturday's game seemed tailor-made for the Odessa-Montour Indians.

The lead changed hands six times in the final three-and-a-half minutes before second-seeded Odessa-Montour scored the last point in the game with :06 showing on the clock to pull out a 56-54 victory.

Going into the game, Crusaders' coach Johnston said his team would do nothing different against Odessa-Montour. "We use a pressure defense and like to fast break a lot," he said. The game plan worked perfectly for most of the first quarter.

The Crusaders built an 11-2 lead and



Marie Lawler

Ball gets away from Shawn and Kevin Vecellio in Saturday's action. Championship eluded Crusaders also, 56-54.

appeared to be on the way to their fourth romp of the tournament and the championship trophy. Then came an eight-minute dry spell. The Indians scored 16 unanswered points on their way to an 18-13 halftime

advantage.

Winning coach Roger Myers said it seemed that Notre Dame became complacent after building a nine-point lead in the first quarter. "Our team tried to hurry too much in the

beginning," Myers said.

The pace of the ballgame picked up in the third quarter. Three times, Notre Dame pulled to within one point, only to have Odessa-Montour pull away to a 39-33 lead going into the final eight minutes of play.

The Crusaders used a high-pressure man-to-man defense most of the game, and the work started paying off in the fourth quarter. The margin increased to eight points in the early going. The Crusaders then went to work, outscoring the Indians 13-4 over the next three minutes to retake the lead on a steal and fast break with 3:38 left on the clock.

"We gave it everything we had and scrapped our way back into the game," Johnston said.

The game seesawed the rest of the way. The deciding score came with seven seconds left. Odessa-Montour center Owen Burgess went up for a layup. Burgess was fouled, and defensive interference was called on Notre Dame's Shawn Vecellio for touching the ball and the net while the ball in the cylinder of the basket. Burgess made the foul shot to cap a three-point play.

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