

# East rolls in City-Catholic victory over Bishop Kearney

## Oriental's press proves too mighty for Kings

By Richard A. Kiley

What a difference a year makes.

Last high school basketball season, East High basketball Coach Sal Rizzo started a slew of juniors who, after finishing the regular season unbeaten, bowed early in the Section 5 Class AAA tournament to an Aquinas team that was dominated by seniors.

Well, those "timid" Oriental juniors have returned — with a vengeance. Last Friday's 85-48 mauling of the Fighting Kings of Bishop Kearney was an illustration of what Rizzo's squad is capable of doing, and his Orientals aren't even in mid-season form yet.

The game marked the first City-Catholic contest for Mike Ruff as head coach of the Kings. Ruff had led the Little Irish over the Orientals in the tourney last year.

Ruff must have thought he had gone back in time as he was watching the game's early moments. His squad — which consists of two seniors, two juniors and a sophomore point guard — roared out to an 8-2 lead with 2:29 gone in the contest and hit on its first four shots of the game.

The lead was shortlived, however, as Rizzo regrouped his players during a timeout and deployed a relentless trap defense the inexperienced Kearney squad just couldn't handle after the good start.

East senior guard Quinn Smith gave his team the lead for good with two minutes left in the opening quarter, when his jump shot put the Orientals on top, 13-12. Smith and East's other guard, Dave Rizzo, forced four steals between them to erase the early deficit and give the Orientals an 18-14 lead after one quarter.

"That first quarter was really a tribute to them (East)," Ruff said. "We were executing our offense well and handled their pressure, but they just kept coming at us. Early in the game we were able to get the ball into our big guys, but Dave Rizzo and Quinn Smith caused a lot of turnovers after that. Then it was like a snowball effect. It's tough to stop those two guards after they get going."

Ruff added that Smith, who scored a game-high 26 points, is being scouted by four Big East coaches, and should be even more tempting to college hoop coaches since he has developed a textbook jump shot.

"Quinn Smith is much improved from last year. Now he has a picture-perfect jump shot, which gives him an added offensive weapon," Ruff commented. "And Tony Scott is a lot stronger than last year also. He held us to one offensive rebound in the first half."

Rebounding was a key factor in the Kearney loss, as East dominated the boards at both ends.

The Fighting Kings were outscored 23-7 in the second quarter and went into the locker room down 41-21 at the half.

As if the scoreboard didn't indicate enough bad news for Ruff, he had to limit the play of transfer Marcel Vernon after the junior sprained his ankle in the early moments of the second quarter. Without Vernon on the floor, Scott became chairman of the boards, pulling down five of his 16 rebounds for the game to go along with his 17 points.

Ruff doesn't expect Vernon, who saw some action later in the game, to miss any games because of the injury.

Sean Gray was the big man for Rizzo's squad in the third quarter, scoring 10 of his 13 points for the game. With the score 67-35 with :18 left, however, Gray was carried off the floor by Scott after twisting his knee.

Gray's injury didn't seem to have any adverse effects on East in the fourth quarter though, as Patrice Robinson picked up the scoring slack in Gray's absence and scored nine points.

Ruff said that the mixture of bonafide future Division I players such as Smith and Scott with role players like Rizzo and Gray make East one of the top teams in the state.

And the Orientals aren't even at full strength. According to Ruff, 6'7" power forward David Williams, who is currently academically ineligible to play, will be back when East plays in the Penfield Tournament at Christmastime.

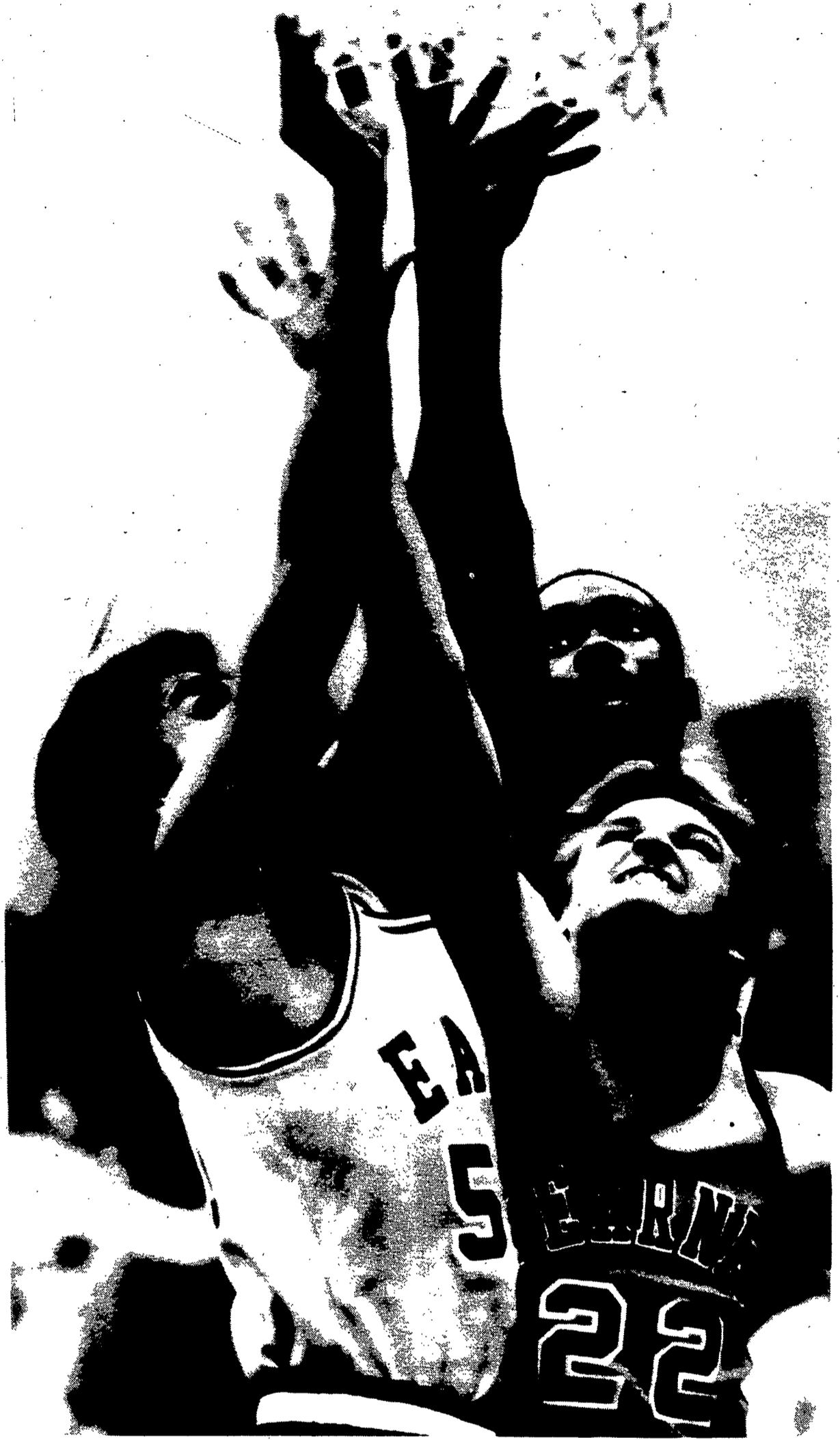
"Once they get him (Williams) back, I honestly don't see any weaknesses."

The first-year King coach said he will use the loss as a teaching medium for his team, which fell to 1-2 for the season.

"We played well in the first quarter, and the only way to improve is to build on what we did (right) in the first quarter. It's not all bad to start off against East High. Early in the game we got a chance to see that they are merely mortal. But they are a great team."

Max Currenton and Eric Jones paced Kearney with 12 and nine points, respectively.

The Kings square off against Cardinal Mooney on Friday, December 12, at the Kearney gym.



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Bishop Kearney's Peter Wolak finds himself surrounded by Orientals going up for a rebound late in the game at East High School. The Kings were unable to shake a relentless trap defense, and lost 85-48.

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