

It's survival of the fittest as Kearney downs Nazareth.

By Richard A. Kiley

At times, last Thursday's Private-Parochial showdown between Bishop Kearney and Nazareth looked more like a women's roller derby match than a girls' high school basketball game.

And after all the bumping and shoving was done, it was the Lady Fighting Kings who won the first battle between the Private-Parochial foes, by a score of 49-32. They'll wage war again on February 24.

Nazareth Coach Walt Gordinier probably summed up the character of the game best when he and Kearney's No. 1 man, Joe Kenney, shook hands after the heated battle. "No prisoners," Gordinier joked after the two-hour marathon contest.

"This kind of intense play has really developed in our league," said Gordinier, whose girls fell to 1-6 with this loss. "Unless the referees establish themselves early and call things universally, things will get out of hand. They (the referees) were calling occasional fouls underneath, but they also let a lot go."

The Kearney coach, whose squad boosted its record to 2-3 for the season, agreed wholeheartedly. "It was a real battle. What I think happened was that you had two very physical teams — neither one of them greatly skilled — and the refs kind of let things get out of hand," Kenney said.

The action became so intense and out of control late in the game that Kenney found himself in the awkward position of having to call a timeout with his team up by 21 points. "I just told my kids to cool off and not say anything (to the Nazareth players).

"My girls play very, very physically, but they don't play dirty," the second-year Kearney coach said. The same could be said for Nazareth. Yet, as Kenney added, "The physical play pays off. It gets us rebounds and gets the girls in the game. I think what made it look so physical out there was the size of the (Nazareth) gym."

And how. Not only were players bumping into each other, but into walls as well. The game originally was to be played at Bishop Kearney, but a scheduling conflict with the boys' wrestling squad forced the change of site.

And although the teams that comprise the Private-Parochial League are accustomed to playing at such schools as Mercy and Aquinas — whose courts are considerably smaller than those of most city schools — the gym at the all-girls' school on Lake Avenue is undoubtedly the smallest of all.

The small gym creates big problems for Gordinier, who was able to schedule just six home games out of 18 games this season. "I've had coaches tell me they'll never play me at home," said Gordinier, who is in his fourth year with the varsity girls. The Nazareth coach recalled a time when the girls' hoop coach at Churchville-Chili told him to never call on him to play at Nazareth again. "I had to remind him that he called me," Gordinier joked.

The Lady Kings couldn't get off that easy, and judging from the game's early moments, they might have wished they could. The contest began inauspiciously for Kearney, as Nazareth roared out to a 9-3 lead in the game's first four minutes.

Gordinier deployed a swarming 1-3-1 defense, which, when combined with the small confines of his home court, forced Kearney to commit several turnovers. "It took us a little while to get adjusted," said Kenney, whose team was also inhibited because two key players, Angie Madama and Sally Gillespie, came down with the flu and missed the game.

"It was tough to spread out," Kenney said. "They (Nazareth players) were covering our wings well. And some of our girls started playing better when the game got real physical."

The Lady Fighting Kings trailed 10-8 after one quarter, but turned the game around completely in the second stanza, outscoring their hosts 17-2. Linda Nienhius' two free throws put her teammates up for good with 5:30 to go in the first half. The lead ballooned to nine when Wendy Maher's in-bounds pass to Tedi Walsh led to an easy layup and a 19-10 score. Walsh paced Kearney with 13 points and 19 rebounds.

Maher scored 10 points in the first half alone. "Wendy's our catalyst out there; she's really steady emotionally," Kenney said. "She and Tedi played soccer together so they really know each other."

Four of Maher's points came from the free-throw line. In all, Kearney was 20-for-41 from the stripe, and Nazareth was 12-for-23.

After Nazareth's Amy Budd converted two free throws to pull her team to within eight at 20-12, Kearney went on a 5-0 run in the final minute to lead 25-12 at the half.

The Lady Fighting Kings continued their scoring run in the second half, outscoring Nazareth 8-0 in the first 2:48 to widen the margin to 21 points. Walsh scored six of her team's 16 points in the third quarter, putting the game out of the home team's reach.



Kearney's Wendy Maher looked for a receiver through a maze of players during last Thursday's Private-Parochial battle against Bishop Kearney.

The score was 39-14 before Nazareth's Margaret Sawyko and Lesley Salladin sank five out of six free throws between them to pull their teammates to within 20. But Pam Buddendeck raced coast to coast and scored a bucket to give her team a comfortable 41-19 lead after three.

Nazareth was led by Salladin's 12 points, and Ana Perez Marin's eight points and 11 rebounds.

With a much tougher part of the schedule still ahead, Kenney is hoping his Kearney team will be able to maintain the momentum of the Nazareth game throughout the coming weeks. After a nine-day layoff, which coincides with the school's midterms, his squad goes up against Franklin, Mooney, Aquinas and Mercy in the subsequent 10 days.

The Lady Fighting Kings also have tournaments at Edison and Webster to contend with in February. "We've got some real tests coming up for us," Kenney said. "We're hoping to be at 3-3 after Franklin, and then we play a real team to beat in Mooney. Scott (Cardinal Mooney Coach Scott Morrison) always does a great job over there."

At one point in February — a month which will make or break the season for Kearney girls — Kearney plays six games in nine days.

For Gordinier, whose team played tough throughout regardless of what the score was, the season gets somewhat easier for awhile, before such league opponents as Mercy, Mooney and Aquinas pop up again.


"The schedule gets somewhat easier; this



The ball is the center of attention as Bishop Kearney and Nazareth players battle for possession during second-quarter action.

was really a tough month for us," said Gordinier, whose team has had to endure a grueling Penn Yan tourney, as well as games against Aquinas and Cardinal Mooney. "It eases up in February, and we've got some (easier) games coming up against some city schools."

Until then, both teams will recover from a game that couldn't get much tougher. Unless you play roller derby, of course.



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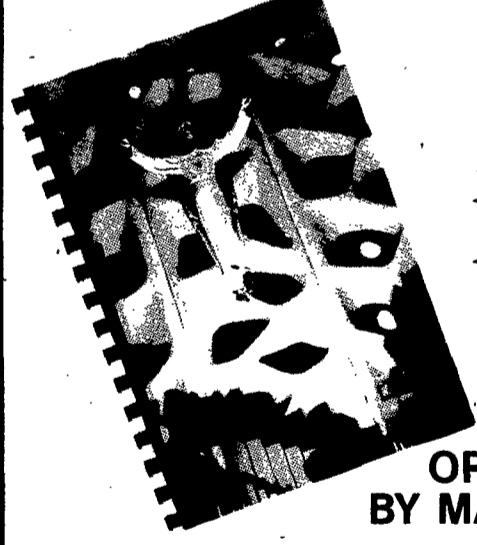
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