

# Mooney overcomes shaky start to capture crown from Mercy

By Richard A. Kiley

It was a second guesser's delight Tuesday night, February 24, during the first half of the Private-Parochial League championship game between Cardinal Mooney and Mercy.

The Lady Cardinals' cold outside shooting was causing grumblings among the Mooney faithful who were packed into the gym. The loyal fans were wondering why third-year coach Scott Morrison wasn't changing his game plan by trying to work the ball inside for a higher percentage shot.

But their cheers were as loud as anyone else's after Cathy Nietopski's rainbow shot with 45 seconds remaining in overtime carried in off the backboard. That basket, coupled with two clutch free throws from Nietopski's teammate Tracy Schmidt, boosted Mooney to a thrilling 49-45 overtime victory over the Monarchs.

The win, which brought Mooney's record to 17-1 for the season, showed why Morrison is the number-one man on the girl's varsity basketball team at the Greece high school and why some fans make lousy second guessers.

Mercy forced the overtime after Beth Wambach, whom the Mooney coach has frequently called the best all-around player in Section 5, nailed two jumpers in the final :28 of regulation, to knot things up at 43-43.

The Mercy standout evened the score again in the extra period at 45-45, undoing the short-lived 45-43 lead created by Theresa Nietopski's two free throws.

The key bucket came with :45 left on the clock when Cathy Nietopski, one of several players Morrison permits to shoot from almost anywhere, gave her teammates the lead for good. Her shot, which was taken from well beyond the foul line, banked directly off the backboard and in, sending the Mooney gym into a frenzy. Schmidt iced the win with two free throws before time ran out.

"They were really putting it up from the outside, weren't they?" Morrison asked, seeming somewhat astounded. With this win, his Mooney team took the all-Catholic division title from the Monarchs for the first time in four

years, and marked the first time in recent years that the Cardinals snatched both games of the season series from Mercy. Mooney defeated Boughton's squad earlier in the year, 41-38. "You could have built a house with all the bricks we were throwing up," Morrison noted.

And a good-sized house, at that. The Cardinals were uncharacteristically frigid from the floor in the first quarter, shooting a miserable three-for-14. Yet despite his girls' difficulty finding their range, Morrison's squad only trailed 12-6 after the first eight minutes.

"After the first quarter, I told them we couldn't shoot any worse and (that) we were still in it," Morrison said. "I told them to keep playing good defense."

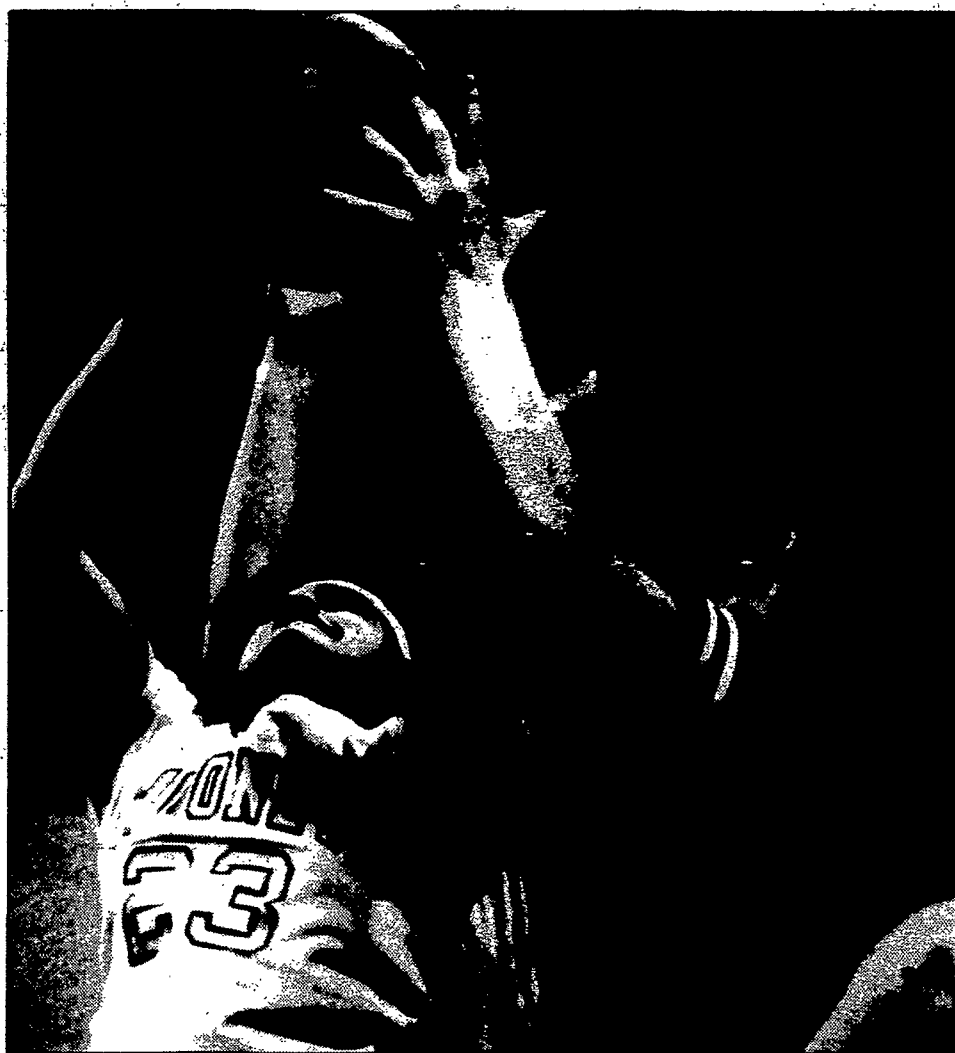
The Mooney coach went to his bench in the second quarter, and was able to trim a 20-10 deficit to four points at intermission. The two principal players off the bench for Morrison were Marge McGuire and Cheryl Lennox.

Lennox made her presence felt right away, entering the game with an outside jumper to cut the lead to eight. Then McGuire hit two consecutive shots right before halftime, to make the score 24-20.

"She (McGuire) and Cheryl Lennox played a great game for us," said Morrison, who added the two Cardinal teammates also played an integral role in the first win over Mercy. "They both gave us a lot of confidence at halftime. I knew I had to change my lineup because of the quick pace of the game."

Boughton's squad upped the margin to seven in the third quarter after Katie Doyle sank a basket with six minutes remaining. Mooney slowly trimmed the lead, however, moving ahead 32-31 at the end of the third stanza when Alisa Brookins converted two free throws with :02 left in the quarter.

The final eight minutes saw Mooney open up a five-point lead with four minutes left, but Mercy battled back. Doyle pulled the Monarchs to within two points at 41-29, before Mooney's Schmidt nailed two free throws



Michael Neccet Aydogan

Mooney's Lori Padulo and Bernadette Fagan of Mercy battle for possession during second quarter action.

to up the lead to four. Wambach's heroics in the final half-minute then made the extra period necessary, but her lone field goal was all the Monarchs could muster in the overtime.

Boughton said that the loss makes her Monarchs one of the underdogs in this year's Section 5 Class AA tourney, but that suits her fine. Despite an impressive regular season last

year, the Monarchs were the dark horse of the tournament. Boughton's squad went on to its third consecutive Section 5 Class AA title.

"We'll be the underdog in every game, just like we were last year," said Boughton, whose team went on to overwhelm Rush-Henrietta in the 1986 Class AA championship game. "I just have to be the motivator; that's what got us into overtime."

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