

C-J Sports

Engineers trot to state final with win over Crusaders

By Richard A. Kiley

All season long, the Elmira Notre Dame boys' basketball team frustrated its opponents with relentless man-to-man pressure on defense, a strategy that enabled the Crusaders to finish as runner-up in the Sullivan Trail Conference. The team's defensive tactics also catapulted the Catholic high school into the New York State Public High Schools Athletic Association semifinal game against Niagara Falls Trott Vocational.

In the Class C semifinal game at Glens Falls last Friday, March 20, the tables turned.

After building a 28-15 first-half lead, Coach Mike Johnston's squad hit a wall against the Engineers. Trott successfully deployed some merciless pressure of its own at the three-minute mark of the second quarter, and went on to defeat Notre Dame, 66-51.

Trott, which had staged a late rally to beat Wheatland-Chili in a Western Regional game a week earlier, won the NYSPHSAA Class C state championship with a 71-61 victory over Center Moriches (Section 11) on Saturday, March 21. Center Moriches gained the state final with a 56-52 win over Stillwater.

The Engineers will now go on to the Federation Tournament — also to be played at Glens Falls — this weekend.

Trott was led by Rod Page's 26 points on 11-for-17 shooting. Carlos Williams also paced the Engineers with 16 points.

In his final game in a Crusader uniform, senior standout Dave Ferris shared game-high honors with Page as he led Notre Dame with 26 points. Ferris also shot 11-for-17, and converted four of seven free throws.

Notre Dame finished at 19-8, after playing more games this past season than it had played during any other in the history of the school.

The Crusaders had roared to wins over General Brown (Syracuse area) and

Norwood-Norfolk (St. Lawrence area) to reach the state's Final Four, and appeared to have Trott in trouble in the game's first 10 minutes.

As in its previous tourney wins, Johnston's squad continued to work the ball in to Ferris, who, in addition to scoring 26 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and blocked numerous Engineer shots. The champions of Section 6 (Buffalo area) elected to play a loose zone-defense until the game's 11-minute mark. The Crusaders, who held a seven-point lead after one quarter, had swelled the margin to 13 at 28-15, with five minutes left in the half.

Then came the pivotal timeout for the Engineers. A switch in defense, combined with uncharacteristically cold shooting by the Crusaders, ended any hopes of Notre Dame's reaching the state championship game. It would have been the team's first shot at the title since winning the championship in 1978.

Johnston's squad could muster just 23 points over the final two and a half quarters of play, shooting a frigid 19-for-48 (39 percent), including four of 16 from the floor in the final eight minutes.

"They (Trott) were using a soft zone-press early, and we were able to get the ball inside to Dave Ferris. But that changed after they called the timeout," Johnston said. "They went to a hard man-to-man (defense), and we started to throw the ball away. Then we would get going too fast, and we would try to stop (to set up a play), and we would be called for traveling."

Johnston watched helplessly as the once-comfortable 13-point margin was cut to two points, 30-28, at intermission.

"They took us out of our offense. We couldn't get the ball in to Dave any more," Johnston said. "Their defense became their best offense."

The Notre Dame coach also didn't receive the balanced scoring he and his team had

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Notre Dame boys' basketball coach

enjoyed in the few games that preceded the semifinal contest. Ferris was the only Crusader to reach double figures.

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Notre Dame was able to trim the deficit to six points with a little more than a minute and a half remaining, but Trott made its free throws down the stretch to close out the win.

Not even in his wildest dreams did Johnston think his club would get as far as they did. At the beginning of the season back in December, the Crusader coach set a goal of winning the title in Section 4 Class C, something he didn't know his squad could do after losing four guards to graduation.

"I felt we had an extremely strong inside game, but I knew it was going to be tough replacing four senior guards," Johnston said.

But his players were able to complement each other's individual weaknesses, and made a run for the title in the Sullivan Trail Conference as a Class C school, amid such Class A and Class B titans as Horseheads and Hornell.

"That's where our success came from," said Johnston, referring to his team's ability to overcome individual shortcomings and stand on its own in the rugged STC. "They (his players) would stay with their strengths, and stay away from weaknesses. It was self-discipline. They didn't get into things

they didn't do well. And we saw results."

But those results were not always good. Johnston remembered a game at Horseheads in January, when the Crusaders lost by 18 points. "We kind of had to size ourselves up after that," he said. "We knew we had to do something about it."

Notre Dame came back to beat Horseheads at home, 67-60, later in the season.

His team's ability to deal with all the ups and down during the regular season was another major factor in making it to the state semifinal game.

"There's something about a team game. We've been together for four months, and we experienced a lot of peaks and valleys within those four months," Johnston said. "And that's what everyday (life) is like. That, to me, is where athletics come in. You learn to deal with the valleys, and that's exactly what this team did. They were able to pull themselves up, and marched on to the state tournament."

Johnston said a parent of one of the players he coached back in 1978, when Notre Dame won the state championship, said it best.

"He said, 'You've given another 16 people something they'll always remember,'" said Johnston of the conversation after Friday night's loss.

"We stress hard work," the coach concluded. "We want them to work. If they do it here, they'll see the value of it later in life. You can learn from athletics."

DINING AROUND THE DIOCESE



IS BACK...

And Better Than Ever!

Beginning with the issue of April 2nd, and in the first issue of each month there after, the Courier-Journal will be resuming a monthly feature of some prime dining spots in and around the Rochester diocese.

We will be alphabetically listing the restaurants who participate in our guide, and tell a brief story about each establishment; their location, menu entrees, specialties, etc.

If you, or someone you know owns a restaurant, and would like to be included in our **Dining Guide**, call the Courier-Journal at 328-4340.

If not, look for our **Dining Guide** in the upcoming months, and pay a visit to the restaurant of your choice, and enjoy a pleasant evening of **"Dining Around the Diocese."**

Sport Shorts

Some overall observations on this year's boys' high school basketball tournament:

A tearful Brian Keenan of Fairport showed real class in the doorway outside the Red Raider locker room when he hugged Knight Coach Joe Marchese and said, "You guys deserved it," after his team's 69-64 loss to McQuaid.

East center Tony Scott forgot his manners when he received a technical foul after fouling out with two minutes to go, in McQuaid's romp with the Orientals in the Class AA semifinal

game.

The most memorable moment came when Tom Veltz scored a basket while on his back, during the first quarter of McQuaid's win over East.

The most outstanding single-game performance was turned in by Rick Torgalski of Nichols, as he scored 38 points and added 12 assists in the Class A playoff against McQuaid.

The most outstanding tourney overall goes to Dave Ferris of Elmira Notre Dame. The senior Crusader scored 127 points in his last five games (25.4 average), including a career-high 33 points in a Section 4 Class C semifinal game against Sidney.

Once again, the hoop tourney proved to be an exciting and memorable spectacle.

All-star hoop games scheduled for War Memorial on Saturday

The second-annual Ronald McDonald House Exceptional Senior All-Star basketball games are scheduled for Saturday, March 28, at the Rochester-Monroe County War Memorial in Rochester. The girls will play at 6 p.m., followed by the boys' game at 8 p.m.

Tickets, which are \$3 in advance and \$4 at the door, are available at Rochester-area McDonald's restaurants and at high schools of participating players. Proceeds will be donated to the future Ronald McDonald House of Rochester.

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