

Sports

Aquinas, Mooney triumph in holiday hoop tournaments

By Lee Strong

Last year, five diocesan boys' basketball teams played in holiday tournaments. All five lost in the first rounds.

The same five teams tried again this year but with better results, as three played for tournament championships and two took home first-place trophies.

AQUINAS INSTITUTE'S Little Irish remained the surprise of the 1988-89 basketball season as they upped their record to 7-2 and took the championship of the Hilton Tournament, downing Irondequoit 53-40 and host Hilton 73-65.

In their first-round matchup, Aquinas applied defensive pressure, to control the entire game, forcing a number of turnovers and pressuring a poor-shooting Irondequoit team to score from the outside. Meanwhile, Paul Kucewicz and Alexander Coleman netted 16 and 12 points, respectively, to lead Aquinas.

Hilton put a scare into the Little Irish in the championship game, penetrating to the basket and taking an early 18-9 lead in the first quarter. Once again, however, Aquinas used a pressing defense and the quarter ended with Cadets leading only 20-19, and 36-34 at the half.

In the second half, the Aquinas defense took its toll as Hilton began to miss shots. The Little Irish controlled the boards, holding a 37-9 advantage and thus preventing the Cadets from getting second shots. "Hilton's a pretty athletic team, but I think the pace of the game caught up with them," Aquinas coach Mike Dianetti remarked.

Once again, Kucewicz and Coleman led the Little Irish. Kucewicz poured in 30 points. The senior forward, who was voted the tournament's most valuable player, also hauled in 16 rebounds. Coleman, who made the all-tournament team, contributed 15 points. Senior guard Todd Reynnders added 14 points.

Dianetti said that Coleman, a Marshall transfer, has been a catalyst in turning around a program that was 4-17 last season. "He's just a tremendous team player," the coach observed. Coleman brings to the team "that dimension of a guy who creates things on his own. We really didn't have a player like that before."

CARDINAL MOONEY WAS another team that rode a tough defense to a tournament title. The Cardinals downed Greece Olympia 45-43, then handed previously undefeated Greece Arcadia a 45-30 loss to win the Greece Athena Tournament.

In the first-round game, Cardinal point guard Sean Trapp hit an 18-foot shot with just six seconds left to secure the win for Mooney (5-4). The Cardinals had held the ball since the 1:24 mark, waiting until the final 15 seconds of the game for a player to get an open shot. Trapp finished the game with 12 points. Also scoring in double figures for the game was 6'9" senior center Mike McGwin with 14.

Trapp, who hit five three-pointers during the tournament, continued with a hot hand against Greece Arcadia, scoring 20 points. Mooney took control of the game early in the first half, building a 24-14 half-time lead, and maintaining defensive pressure throughout the second half to keep the Titans in check. McGwin scored 12 points and bagged nine rebounds.

Lack of size — with the exception of McGwin — and the loss of last year's leading scorers due to graduation has forced Cardinal Mooney to rely on tough defense and a ball-control offense this season, Nietopski said. He singled out senior guard Allan Ford for particular praise. "He doesn't get recognition because he doesn't score much," the coach said. "But he makes our defense go. He hustles. He chases balls. He goes for steals. Without him, our defense wouldn't be successful."

BISHOP KEARNEY'S Fighting Kings also played in a championship game, but they ran into small-school powerhouse Lyons in the Midlakes Tournament, suffering a 100-66 loss. The Kings (4-5) fell behind early and trailed 48-28 by the half. Efen Gause scored 13 points, and Billy Tehan tallied 10 for Kearney.

The Kings had an easier time in their first-round game, downing host Midlakes 78-68. The game was close throughout, with Kearney clinging to a 35-31 lead at the half. Midlakes pulled within five early in the fourth quarter, but two baskets by Gause, who finished with 20, and six points by Wendell Spiva, who ended the game with 17, kept BK in front. Joining Spiva and Gause in double figures was senior center Greg Mikell, with 11.

MCQUAID JESUIT Coach Joe Marchese took the Knights to Florida to play in the Sun Holiday Classic knowing that they would face tough competition, but he didn't expect to run into a buzz saw in the first round.

The Knights (4-4) were matched against

Toledo (Ohio) Scott, a team Marchese judged better than any team his players have faced this season — or even that McQuaid faced last year en route to winning the New York State Public High School Athletic Association Class A championship. The Ohio team downed the Knights 76-53.

Featuring a starting line-up of players all over 6-foot tall, Scott collapsed on the Knights' 6'9" center Drew Henderson. He picked up two quick fouls in the first quarter, and a third in the second quarter, forcing Marchese to bench him. Without Henderson on the inside, Scott controlled the boards and took charge of the game, building a 39-25 half-time lead. Even when Henderson returned in the second half, Scott's height and hustling defense prevented the center's teammates from getting him the ball. Forced to rely on outside shooting, the Knights were never able to get back into the game.

Despite limited playing time, Henderson ended the game with 12 points and 14 rebounds. Senior guard Reggie Wade led the Knights with 15 points.

The Knights tried to redeem themselves in their second-round game against Lake Gibson, Florida, but fell 69-68 when a last-second shot by senior guard Matt Parrinello rolled off the rim.

Led by the hot shooting of Henderson and Wade, both of whom finished the game with 21 points; McQuaid built an 11-point lead in the second quarter. However, second-half turnovers by the Knights allowed Lake Gibson to catch up, and an errant in-bound pass with less than a minute to go allowed the Florida team to take the lead. Marchese called time with six seconds left in an effort to set up a winning shot or draw a foul, but Parrinello's miss and Lake Gibson's clean defense ended McQuaid's hopes of victory.

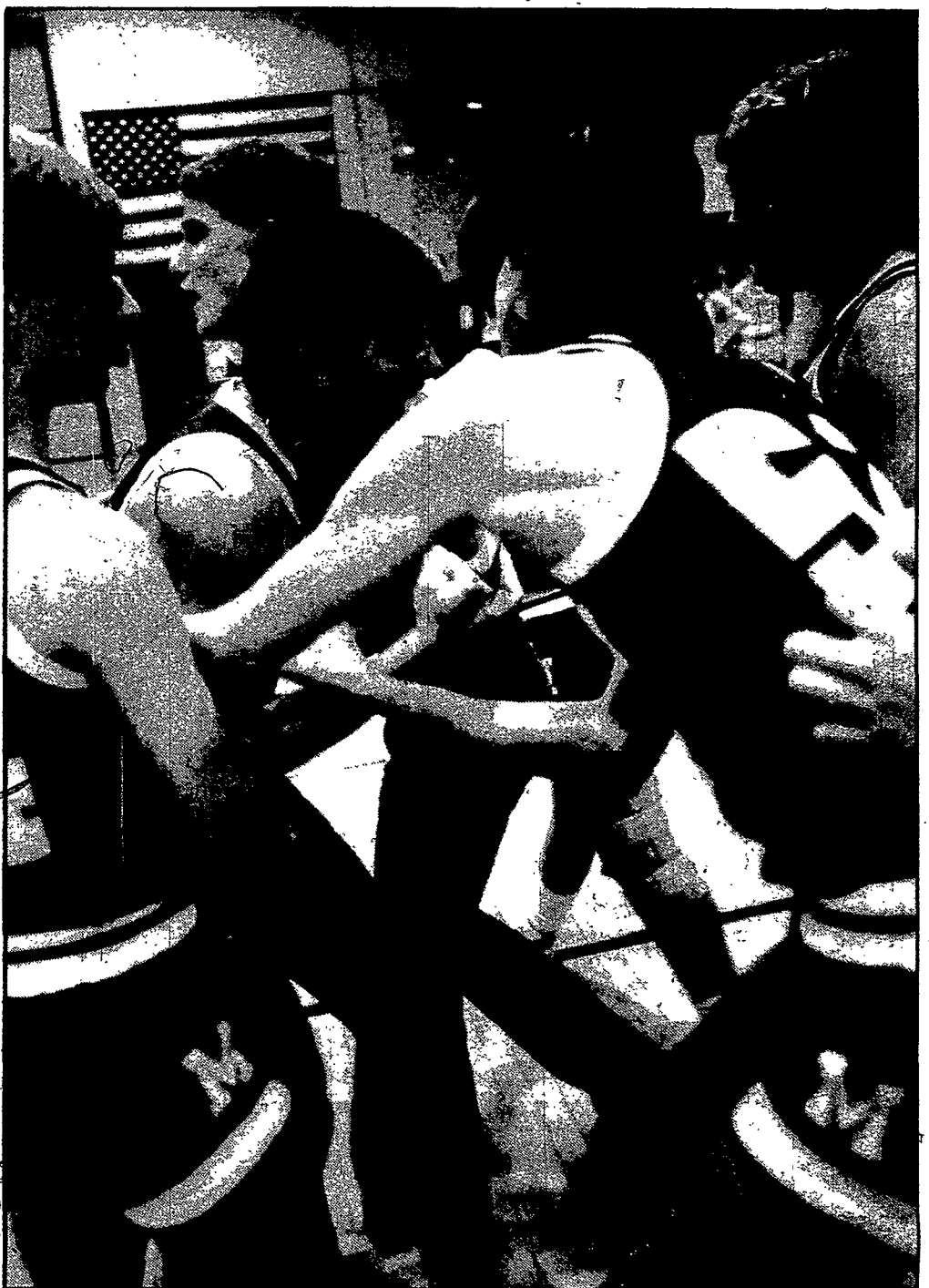
Marchese did see a silver lining in the two losses. "I think it's going to help us down the road," he predicted. "The kids have faced some great competition. That's going to help us come tournament time."

COACH MIKE JOHNSTON of Notre Dame, Elmira, is looking for a silver lining, but he may have to wait until next season. Using a starting line-up that features three sophomores, the Crusaders suffered two defeats in the Elmira Christmas Tournament, falling to Elmira Free Academy, 77-55, and Elmira Southside, 67-62.


Notre Dame (3-7) was holding its own against EFA until the final moments of the first half. With seven seconds left, the Blue Devils scored two points to go up by five, then stole the Crusaders' inbound pass and hit a three-pointer at the buzzer to take a 33-25 lead. "That kind of threw the momentum their way," Johnston acknowledged. In the second half, EFA used superior height to control the game and cruise to victory. Brian Sheehan led Notre Dame with 17 points. Mike Bennett and Geoff Woodworth added 11 and 10 points, respectively.

Against Southside, Notre Dame fell behind 39-20 at the half. In the third quarter, the Crusaders played a hustling defense and outscored Southside 24-9 to pull within four points. Notre Dame was able to close the gap to two in the fourth quarter, but was never able to pull even. Bennett scored 25 points in the losing cause. Brian Sheehan, who made the all-tournament team, had 13 points, and Bob Grosvenor netted 10. Because of his tenacious defense, Woodworth was given the tournament's "Mr. Hustle Award."

Because of Notre Dame's small, young line-up, and because the majority of the teams in the school's league are classed higher, the Crusaders are losing games and face the possibility that they will not qualify for the Class C sectionals. "Basically, we're going with a JV team against varsity teams," Johnston observed. He acknowledged that the Crusaders might not come into their own until next season when four of the current starters return.



Doug Meszler
Members of the Cardinal Mooney varsity basketball team celebrate a win over Greece Olympia during the Greece Athena Holiday Tournament last week. The Cards went on to beat Greece Athena and capture the tourney title.



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