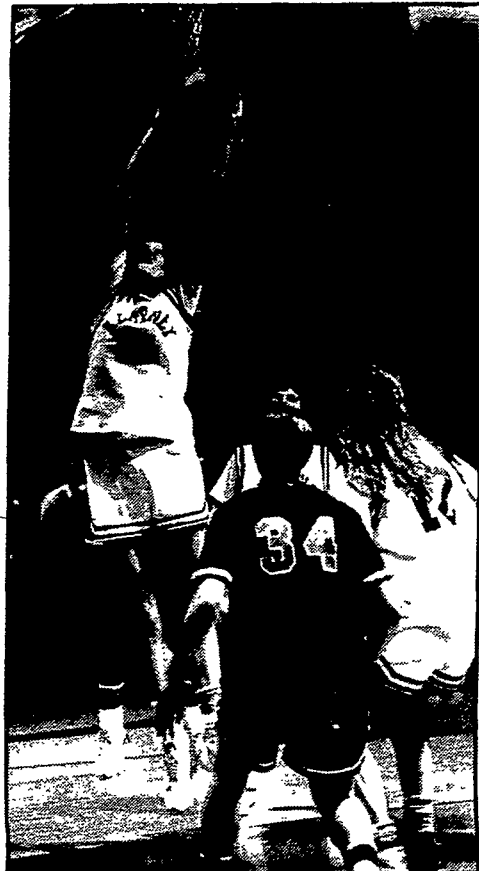


Mercy set to defend title; ND in hunt for STC crown

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

Aquinas has returned all of its starters. Nazareth's leading scorer is back. Bishop Kearney added former Mooney star Marisa Shackelford — one of the best girls' basketball players in Section 5 — to an already strong team. But defending Section 5 Class A champion Mercy remains the team to beat in the Private-Parochial League, and a prime contender for yet another sectional crown. Meanwhile, in the Finger Lakes West League, a young DeSales team seeks to improve on last year's record.



Eileen Jensen pulls down a rebound for host Bishop Kearney in the second quarter of Kearney's win over Wilson Dec. 8. Jensen finished the game with 12 points and 12 rebounds.

And in Section 4, Elmira Notre Dame appears to have the guns to vie for the Sullivan Trail Conference championship, and to go far in post-season play.

For the past two seasons, Mercy relied on the many skills of Julie Buntich in accruing a 42-6 record.

Buntich has taken her game to Canisius College, but shed no tears for the Monarchs.

Mercy returns four starters from last year's 24-2 team, which advanced to the state Class A tournament before losing to Troy.

"I think that since those four played with (Buntich), they learned so much from her," observed Mercy coach Kathy

Boughton.

The four players include 5-11 junior center Natalie White and 5-7 senior Katherine Robinson, who combine to give the Monarchs scoring and rebounding strength in the paint.

Returning at guard will be junior guard Mary Cleary and sophomore Sheila Doyle, who will play point guard. Joining them will be senior Kim Caccamise, giving the Monarchs the greyhounds to run the opposition ragged.

The Monarchs gave a preview of their run-and-gun style Saturday, Dec. 9, during a 68-42 win over Lockport in the title game of the Honeoye Tournament. Doyle scored 16 of her 18 points off fast-break baskets.

Doyle was named to the all-tournament team along with Robinson, who had a team-high 21 points in the title game.

In an opening-round game, Mercy (2-0) blew out host Honeoye, 73-29. Cleary led the team with 18 points, while White poured in 14.

Boughton pointed to the fact that there are four players capable of carrying Mercy on any given night, meaning that opposing teams won't be able to key on any one player as they did with Buntich last season.

The Monarchs' major weakness is size. If White and Robinson run into foul trouble or injuries, Mercy will be weak inside.

Key players off the bench will be 5-8 senior Theresa Cutter and 5-8 freshman Amy Martin.

The Monarchs' weakness will be one of the key strengths of Bishop Kearney. The Kings return 6-2 junior center Eileen Jensen from last year's 12-9 team.

And the closing of Cardinal Mooney has given Kearney 6-0 senior Marisa Shackelford, who has already signed to play college ball at Division I Delaware.

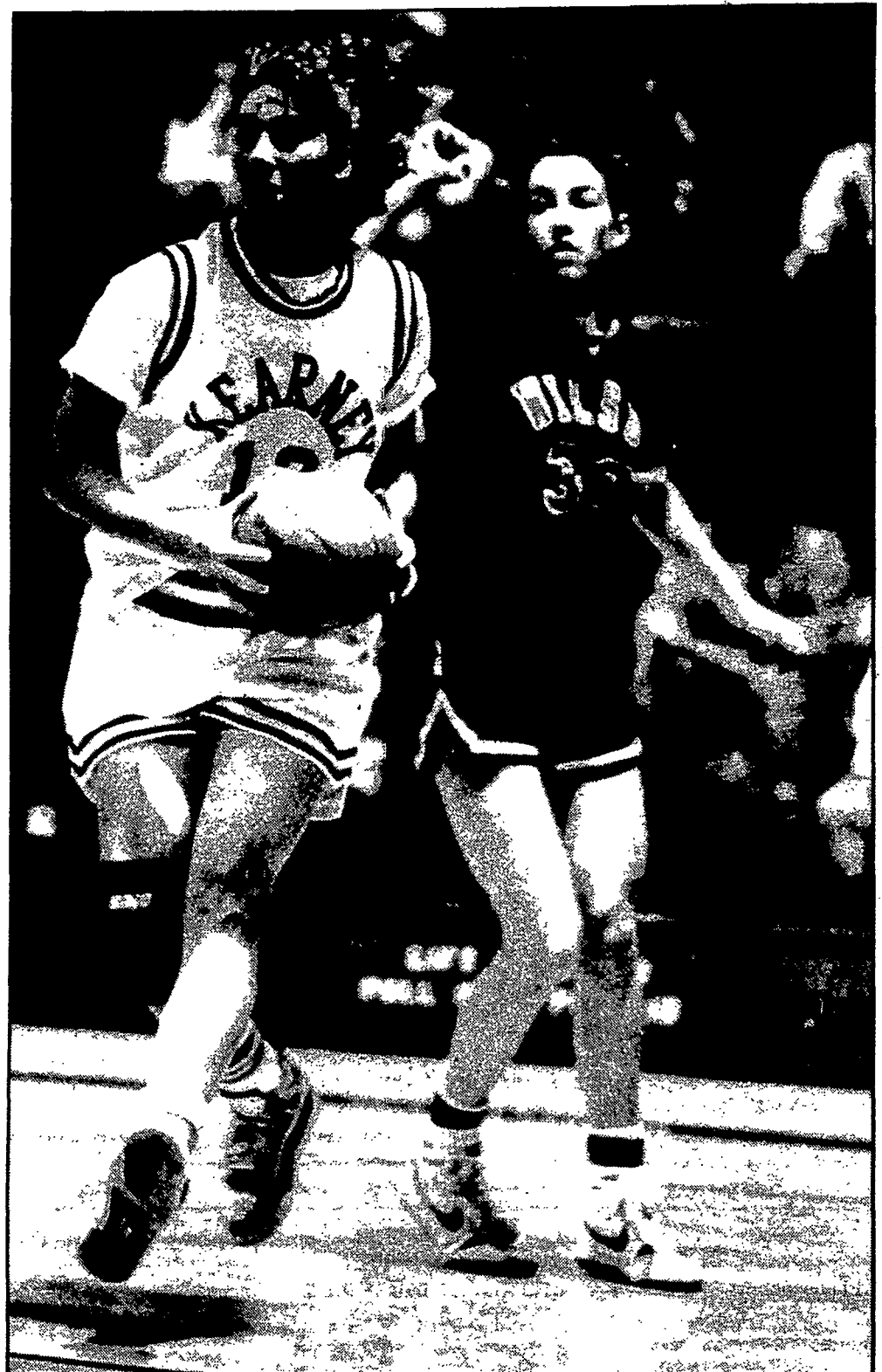
But first-year coach Paul Forte — another Mooney import — predicted that opponents will be making a big mistake if they key on Jensen and Shackelford. Junior guards Kathy Pero and Beth Marino, and 5-10 senior forward Theresa Dudley can all score.

Other key players include 5-10 senior Mary Wideman, last year's leading rebounder and defender, currently hampered by a sprained ankle. Senior guard Sandy Supple can also score points.

After opening their season with a 66-15 rout of Brighton, the Kings (2-1) fell to host Attica 58-55 on Wednesday, Dec. 6. After trailing by 12 points at one point in the first half, Kearney came back to take the lead in the third quarter only to fall short in the end.

Forte noted that the team shot a myopic 10 for 23 from the foul line against Attica. Shackelford scored 21 points and Jensen had 15.

The Kings rebounded from the loss with a 53-39 win over visiting Wilson on Dec.



Marisa Shackelford drives the baseline for two points in Bishop Kearney's 53-39 win over Wilson Dec. 8. Shackelford finished with 21 points for the night.

8. Shackelford poured in 21 points, and Jensen combined 12 points with 12 rebounds.

Aquinas may be hard-pressed to substantially improve on last year's 12-10 record.

The Little Irish have a brutal schedule, which includes not only league rivals Mercy and Kearney, but also non-league games against Penfield, Mendon, Wayne and Marshall.

"In order to be the best, you've got to play and beat the best," coach Dan Bates said.

Aquinas may have the players to win some of those games, and to make some noise in the sectionals.

Sophomore Amy Reynders, who averaged 12 points a game last year, senior center Tammy Rice and junior point guard Mary Radford are back. Bates said that Reynders and Radford will give the Little Irish a strong backcourt.

Other key players will be senior forward Kathy Thies, sophomore guard Marcie Meagher, and two Mooney transfers — junior forward Jill Banaszewski and junior Beth Kelly.

Questions about Little Irish center on their ability to rebound and score inside.

Aquinas opened its season against Nazareth on Tuesday, Dec. 12.

Scoring enough points may be a problem for Nazareth this season. The team only averaged between 24 and 26 points while finishing 4-15 last year.

Returning for another season are 5-6 senior forward Kathy Doran, who averaged nine points and approximately 10 rebounds last year. During a 39-20 win over visiting Harley Allendale Columbia on Dec. 6, Doran had 12 points and 10 rebounds.

Coach Walt Gordinier will be looking to 5-0 senior point guard Lorra Salamone, 5-10 senior forward Julie Sojka, 5-7 senior

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