

Bona coach has traveled successful journey

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

OLEAN — In the big picture, Jim Baron doesn't see a difference between a 20-point victory and a double-overtime defeat.

And neither does he approach college basketball much differently than life in general.

"To be optimistic and positive, and to have faith — if you do those things, you can be successful in a number of ways," said Baron, the first-year men's head coach at St. Bonaventure University.

"Winning is icing on the cake, but the journey to get there is the most exciting ingredient of one's life," the 38-year-old Baron added.

These words are spoken by a man who has certainly earned his position as a Division I coach. Yet his roots and convictions will forever prevent Baron from drifting off in the sea of egomania that engulfs many of his peers.

Baron's childhood years were spent in a Brooklyn housing project, where he and his parents, six brothers and one sister were surrounded by the constant threat of crime and violence.

"When you grow up in that type of environment, you grow up quick. A lot of us utilized sports as a way to get out," Baron remarked.

Baron's attraction to St. Bonaventure began during this period, when he was an altar boy at St. Cecilia's Church in Brooklyn.



St. Bonaventure Coach Jim Baron shouts instructions during his team's double-overtime loss to Atlantic 10 Conference foe Rutgers at Olean last Thursday, Jan. 7.

Mike Latona

"The priest there, Father McKeenan, used to take me to games at Madison Square Garden. Bonaventure came down for the Holiday Festival Tournament, and that's when they had (future National Basketball Association Hall of Fame center) Bob Lanier. It was like a dream come true to see him."

After playing point guard in high school at St. John's Prep, Baron fulfilled his childhood fantasy by attending St. Bonaventure. In his three-year varsity career at the Cattaraugus County-based college, "Bo" dished out 279 assists — a feat which ranks him seventh on the school's all-time list.

When he was a senior, yet another dream came true for Baron: he captained the 1977 club which won the National Invitation Tournament championship. Bona defeated the University of Houston, 94-91, in the NIT title game as Baron made a triumphant return to Madison Square Garden.

Baron relishes the memory of the championship victory: "It was fabulous, phenomenal. It happened on my birthday, and it happened back in New York. For me, coming in (to college) as a no-name from Brooklyn, who would have thought?"

After graduating from St. Bonaventure that spring, Baron moved north to Monroe County. His first coaching job was as the 23-year-old head of the Aquinas Institute program, where he posted a 14-13 record during the 1977-78 season.

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Knights ice Little Irish, 4-1, to force first-place deadlock

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Here's a team which began the year with seven straight victories, and still has a month's worth of its regular-season games remaining.

And yet, the McQuaid Jesuit hockey squad knew it could not afford to lose this past weekend.

This urgency factor was brought on partially because of the Knights' three-game losing streak that followed their hot start. And McQ's next opponent happened to be Aquinas Institute,

which could have moved out to a two-game lead in the Monroe County Division I standings by defeating the Knights.

But McQuaid reversed its fortunes in a big way, posting a 4-1 victory over the Little Irish on Saturday, Jan. 9, at Lakeshore Rinks. The win created a three-way tie for first place in Division I with McQuaid, Aquinas and Irondequoit all owning 6-2 league records.

"I was afraid we were never going to win again," admitted Knights' Coach Al Vyverberg, whose Knights improved to 8-3 overall while AQ fell

to 8-2-2.

Sean Ritchlin gave McQuaid a 1-0 lead with a shorthanded goal late in the first period. He also scored early in the second period before AQ's Shane Kavanagh made it 2-1 later in that period.

McQuaid, however, pulled away as Marty Reasoner scored to give his team a 3-1 edge heading into the third period. Reasoner added another goal midway through the final stanza to close out the scoring, and goalie Ron Lamendola did his part by stopping 24 of 25 shots for the afternoon.

Aquinas was playing its third game in as many days. The Irish had won 6-0 over Pittsford on Jan. 7 at Lakeshore, and also played to a 3-3 tie against Rome Free Academy on Jan. 8 at Rochester Institute of Technology.

In other recent sports highlights involving Catholic high schools in the diocese:

The Bishop Kearney hockey team (3-5, 4-6) was a 6-3 winner over Penfield in a Monroe County Division II game on Jan. 5 at Lakeshore.

The Aquinas boys' swim squad (5-0) kept its record perfect with a 51-32 win over visiting Harley Allendale-Columbia on Jan. 6. Mike McNelis led the Little Irish by winning the 200-yard individual medley and 100-yard breaststroke events.

McQuaid's swimmers (2-4) defeated host East, 53-30, on Jan. 7, as Doug Kazley (200 IM, 100 freestyle) and John Halligan (50 free, 100 butterfly) took two events each.

The Elmira Notre Dame wrestling team came through with a 35-30 victory over visiting Elmira Free Academy on Jan. 7. ND's Dan Wilson scored a 13-4 win over EFA's Tom Dinny at 167 pounds, and Paul Tompkins pinned Steve Hawkins in the final match at 215 pounds, as the Crusaders rallied from a 30-25 deficit.

ND went on to place ninth among 34 schools in the Geneseo Tournament, held Jan. 8-9 at Geneseo High School. The Crusaders' Chris Kamas placed first in his division at 119 pounds.

Bishop Kearney's wrestling team featured two weight-class winners, Carl Zizzo (91 pounds) and Sam Lopez (132), in the Jan. 9 Irondequoit Tournament.

In indoor track, McQuaid took five events en route to a first-place showing at the Hamilton Invitational, held on Jan. 9 in Clinton, N.Y.

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