

Monarchs misfire again in girls' title contest

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — It's the same hardwood on which they embraced the thrill of victory in 1992 and 1993.

Yet in two subsequent years at the Rochester Community War Memorial, post-game hugs exchanged by Gina Montesano and Kelly O'Neill have come on a much more somber note.

Long after their teammates had quietly headed for the locker room last Thursday, March 2, Our Lady of Mercy's senior duo remained on the court attempting to console each other.

And wondering, once again, what exactly had gone wrong in their sectional title game.

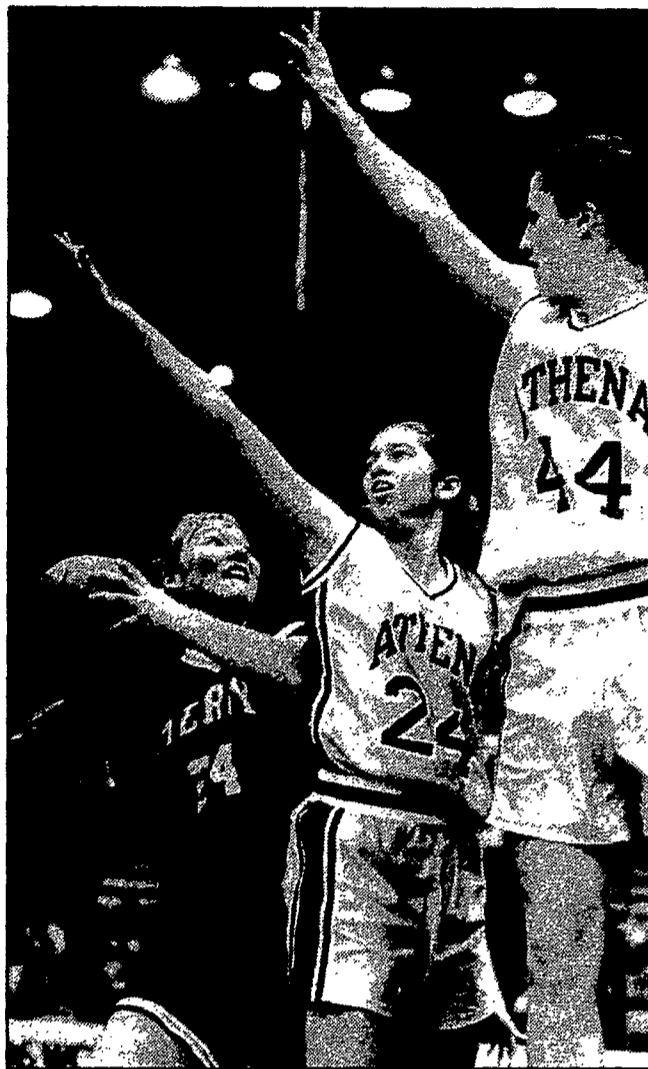
The once-comfortable War Memorial setting has become a house of horrors lately for the Monarch girls' basketball team. In a game all too similar to last year's finals, Mercy experienced a cold shooting night and was dealt a 65-58 loss by Greece Athena in their Section 5 Class A championship clash.

Mercy shot 24-for-84 from the field (28.6 percent) last Thursday after going 18-for-72 (25 percent) during a 58-41 loss to the Trojans in last year's finals. Having a particularly rough night was Montesano, a guard, who finished with 12 points — approximately half her season average — on 5-for-25 shooting.

O'Neill kept Mercy in the game by hitting for 27 points from her forward position. Yet a title trophy eluded her and Montesano for the second straight winter after they enjoyed sectional crowns as freshmen (a 53-36 win over Brockport) and sophomores (a memorable 72-66 double-overtime thriller against Athena.)

"Throughout the year we shot as high as 50 percent. It's just discouraging when you get in that War Memorial; you've worked so hard and won all those games," Coach Kathy Boughton lamented.

Although her Monarchs posted a brilliant 20-2 record this season, Boughton said she'd "rather lose 10 games during the year and win (the championship game)."



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Our Lady Of Mercy's Kelly O'Neill looks to the basket as Greece Athena's Krista Damann (24) and Amy Drechsler block her path. O'Neill led all scorers with 27 points in the championship game.



Mercy stars Gina Montesano (left) and Kelly O'Neill comfort one another after the Monarchs' 65-58 loss to Athena.

Mercy, the tournament's No. 2 seed, never led against No. 1 Athena despite only trailing 32-28 at halftime. The Trojans went on a 10-2 run for a 12-point lead to begin the second half, and Mercy could get no closer than seven points after that.

Athena's well-rounded attack featured four players in double figures, including a 17-point, 16-rebound night

from tourney MVP Shawna Williams. Montesano and O'Neill closed out their high-school basketball careers by being chosen to the all-tournament team as well.

Despite last Thursday's defeat, Montesano/O'Neill will long be remembered as one of the greatest tandems in school history.

Montesano, from her striker position, and O'Neill, a goalie, also helped Mercy to sectional Class A soccer titles in 1992 and 1993. Montesano will attend the University of Pittsburgh next year on a basketball scholarship, and O'Neill has been offered scholarships from Duquesne University for soccer and West Virginia Wesleyan for basketball.

"I think they're two of the best athletes to walk through Mercy at one time," said Boughton.

Notre Dame

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Stephens kept the Crusaders within striking range by scoring 19 of his game-high 23 points after halftime, while fellow senior forward Mike Berrettini finished with 15 for the game.

Although the Crusaders made 15 consecutive free throws at one juncture and shot 20-for-27 from the line (including 10-for-10 by Stephens and 7-for-8 by Berrettini), they missed on several short-range chances from the field.

"We could never get one of our guys into an offensive rhythm," remarked ND Coach Mike D'Aloisio.

And so ends a highly successful year for a gritty club that wasn't expected to contend in the Sullivan Trail Conference. But the Crusaders went 9-3 during regular-season league play, finishing in a three-way tie for first place before losing to Elmira Free Academy in a league playoff. ND then made the sectional finals with an average victory margin of 18 points in playoff wins over Downsville, Margaretville and Milford.

"In 80 percent of our games we played bigger teams," said D'Aloisio. "I'm proud of the kids."

— Mike Latona



Mike Latona
ND's Mike Berrettini (left) struggles against Deposit's Shafi Abdul-Jabbar.

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