

Knights net title in dramatic style

Undefeated McQuaid preparing for next test

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

To understand what the Knights have accomplished, start by counting back from five, as in five police cars, four fire engines, three titles, a No. 2 ranking and a No. 1 title.

Five police cars and four fire trucks reportedly accompanied the basketball team's bus as it made its way down Elmwood Avenue to McQuaid Jesuit High School in Brighton on the night of March 16. A crowd of 300 was waiting at the school to celebrate the team's 57-50, come-from-behind victory over Mount Vernon that afternoon in the New York State Public High School Athletic Association Tournament Class A championship game, held at the Glens Falls Civic Center.

The title was the third under coach Joe Marchese, who also guided the Knights to state titles in 1988 and 1997.

McQuaid is ranked second in the nation by *USA Today*, and is again ranked No. 1 in the state.

Oh, and don't forget one other number: zero, as in zero losses this year.

With less than five minutes to go, McQuaid, 27-0, nearly added a one to that last statistic, falling behind 48-41 in the championship game. But the Knights rallied to score 16 points to Mount Vernon's two in the remaining minutes and claim their third championship, the most for any Section 5 team.

"This team just doesn't cease to amaze me," Marchese said. "Even when the game is in doubt, they nev-



Relph (left) and teammate Justin Magee celebrate after winning the state championship.

er give up."

The low-scoring game was a display of both teams' defensive skills, Marchese added.

"We didn't give up a lot of shots inside, and they didn't give up a lot of shots inside," he said. "What's amazing is (our) ability to play great defense, especially when the game's on the line."

Marchese credited the team's senior leaders, Marty O'Sullivan, Ryan Pettinella and Tyler Relph, for their leadership in the game, but added that the game's top scorer, junior Jack Leasure, played a crucial role in the victory.

"He hit two critical three-point shots that cut the lead from seven to one, one with a kid right in his face," Marchese said of Leasure, who was four-for-four from the three-point line — and plays with a rosary in his pocket.

During semifinal play in Glens Falls March 15, Pettinella scored 13 points against Syracuse's Christian Brothers Academy in a hard-fought win that saw McQuaid edge their opponents 58-52. He scored another 13



McQuaid Knight Tyler Relph takes a shot during the state championship game against Mount Vernon High School at the Glens Falls Civic Center

Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

in the final, and also got 14 rebounds.

"He did a great job for us on the boards," Marchese said.

O'Sullivan turned in another stellar post-season performance, scoring 13 points, including the basket that put McQuaid ahead for good after a three-pointer by Leasure. Both O'Sullivan and Pettinella were named All-Tournament players. Marchese noted that O'Sullivan rose above his feelings of frustration after missing a few shots in the first half.

"I just told him, Marty, forget about the first half; the cream always rises to the top," Marchese said.

Relph, point guard and the tournament's Most Valuable Player, scored 15 points, including two three-pointers.

"You can't put a value on him," Marchese said.

Overall, the Knights' coach said he was pleased with all of his players.

"It was a team effort, which is

what makes us so difficult to defend," he said.

But the season isn't over yet. McQuaid is slated to play in one more tournament this year, this weekend's New York State Federation Tournament of Champions, which brings together the winners of four separate state tournaments. McQuaid will face New York City Public School Athletic Champion Lincoln (29-4) in a semifinal game at 6:45 p.m. on Friday, March 21, in Glens Falls. The winner goes on to play in the Class A final at 5 p.m. on Saturday, March 22.

The Lincoln game promises to be a crucial test of McQuaid, as Lincoln is ranked No. 7 in the East by *USA Today*. Indeed, some consider winning the federation tournament to be the true mark of a state champion, but Marchese said his players are champions already.

"Either way, we're state champions, that's the way I look at it," he said.

AQ's Gordon wins state track title

Aquinas Institute's Arel Gordon obviously feels quite at home running inside the Carrier Dome.

The senior has been a star running back on Aquinas football teams that have earned two consecutive state championships under the bubble at Syracuse University. Now, Gordon has added a state title in indoor track.

Gordon captured first place in the 55-meter dash at the New York State Track and Field Championships held Saturday, March 8. He posted a time of 6.35 seconds to win by nearly one-fifth of a second.

Also faring strongly at the state

meet were the Little Irish 800-meter quartet, which posted a fifth-place finish by running a time of 1:33.98. Relay members were Gordon, Jason O'Mara, John Brennan and Ryan Brennan.

Gordon, as well as the 800 relay, had become eligible for states by placing first in their respective events during the Section 5 state-qualifier meet March 2. Two weekends earlier, these athletes were part of an Aquinas team that brought home first place in the Section 5 boys' Class B championship meet.

— Mike Latona