

Marine City, Allen Park Cabrini and Lake City captured MHSAA titles 30 years ago

Legends of the Games



In an effort to promote educational athletics by showcasing some of the great teams of past years, the Michigan High School Athletic Association instituted a program called "Legends Of The Games" in 1997. This year, 1976 champions Marine City, Allen Park Cabrini and Lake City will be honored at halftime of the Class C Final. 1976 Class A champion Marquette was honored in 2001.

While only a child in the grand scheme of things at age 34, the MHSAA Girls Basketball Tournament has now left an indelible mark on multiple generations. With perspective of more than three decades, members of the MHSAA titlist sorority often reflect on the achievement and now realize that the journey has become the destination. The crisp detail of autumns past has faded and, for many, the specifics of the title game have become a footnote; the journey is what they remember and relish most.

In 1976, the path to an MHSAA title was only four years old, but only Class B champion Marine City had yet to take the journey. Marquette, Lake City and Allen Park Cabrini had all advanced to the Semifinal round of the tournament a year previous then returned to win titles that fall. Honored by the MHSAA as "Legends of the Game" in 2001, **Marquette** had dominated girls basketball in the Upper Peninsula prior to its tournament run. Thanks to hard work, dedication and an off-season filled with scrimmages with strong down-state opponents, the Redettes



Photo courtesy of Lois Quist Schripsema

After a brush with destiny in 1975, Lake City (in white) completed the journey with an appointment in the '76 Final vs. Perkins. The rest is history.

avenged a stinging 62-57 loss to Farmington Our Lady of Mercy with a convincing 68-41 win for the Class A crown.

The story was different for little **Lake City**. Tournament tradition of any kind at the small northern school began late in life. Although the boys basketball tournament had been around since 1917, the Trojans had advanced to Regional play on only one occasion prior to 1972. That winter, Lake City's boys team rolled to the Semifinals, and then reached the Quarterfinals in 1973.

Coincidentally, thanks to the passage of Title IX, the girls program took root that same year. Led by Coach Linda McGinness, the team

progressed rapidly and put together an outstanding season in 1975. After an impressive run through the early rounds, Lake City ran into a powerful Flint Holy Rosary team in the Semifinals, bowing out with a 62-40 loss, but the foundation had been set.

"It was a great year," recalled McGinness. "We had one senior on that team, my sister Terri, so we thought we might have a chance to come back. In fact, the girls made a pact or a promise among themselves: 'We'll be back.'"

"We had a great team spirit and always played the game as a team," noted Lake City point guard Raeann Musson.

Among the returnees was Abby Currier, described by McGinness and her teammates as a shy pioneer in the world of women's athletics.

Currier's brother, Bob, was a small for-



Photo courtesy of Cabrini HS

Allen Park Cabrini poses with the 1976 Class C trophy one year after narrowly missing the opportunity. Coach Quire and his team completed the mission with a convincing win over Mason County Central, 48-33.

ward on the Lake City squads that had advanced in 1972 and 1973, and earned all-state honors in Class D in 1973. The court at the Currier home was lighted, and served as a training ground for Currier and her teammates.

"It was the only place we could work on our game outside of practice," recalled Shelly Armstead Marcusse. "Guys from those teams, including Abby's brother, as well as our classmates, helped us develop our game."

The Trojans battled through a tough schedule in 1976 and again advanced to the final round. After downing a strong contingent from Mio in the Quarterfinals, the team once again found itself face-to-face with Holy Rosary.

After opening up a 17-7 lead in the opening minutes, the Trojans clung to a 24-23 lead at the half. During the intermission, McGiness reminded the girls that they needed to control the tempo of the game and stay out of foul trouble. However, the lead slipped away in the third period of play. Trailing 41-37, McGiness switched her defense from man to zone, igniting a comeback. Trailing 55-53, Currier fouled with five seconds remaining and the senior calmly sank two free throws to tie the game and send it into overtime.

"How we ever did it, I'll never know," said McGiness, now coaching the 8th-grade girls at Lake City. "The girls had the skills; I just had to get the strategies. I was only third-year coach, and I guess the chemistry worked for us."

Lynne Smith, who had been held scoreless since the first quarter, and Currier each scored in the extra frame, allowing the team to advance with a 59-57 win. A 58-48 victory over Perkins on the following morning gave the school its first-ever MHSAA title in any sport. The girls returned home in their "old yellow school bus greeted with a police escort to a huge reception" from the delighted community.

"The games were intense," said Armstead. "Coach did not sit during the game. Everyone had a role. And the Semifinal against Flint Holy Rosary...Wow! Parents from the community took care of us."

For the girls from **Marine City**, the Semifinals also meant overtime, but for the Mariners, the path to East Kentwood was a once-in-a-lifetime journey. It was the first time the squad had advanced to the final round of the tournament. More than 30 years later, the team remains the only Marine City squad to reach the big dance.

While Marine City was expected to have a solid season in the fall of 1976, a millage failure in nearby Algonac altered the complexion of sports in the district. In 1974, Algonac had advanced to Class B Quarterfinals of the girls tournament. With the tax defeat, the district shut down the varsity sports program, and three players from Algonac High School, Doreen Grote, GiGi Yax and Brenda Venhuizen moved to Marine City. Rivals were suddenly teammates and, with the influx of talent, local expectations for

the team soared.

Yet, with less than a month to go before the season, the Mariners still lacked an important ingredient – a head coach.

Len Goulding, who had coached freshman football and basketball, was approached as a candidate for the position. However, he was reluctant. He had never coached girls before, and although he knew he would inherit talent, he would also inherit the pressures of high expectations. Ultimately, he accepted the job.

It was a match made in heaven.

"The first day of practice was scary," recalled Yax, "with the three Algonac girls at one end of the gym and everyone else at the other, which now only seems natural. But at the time it was anything but. The way we all came together as one was unbelievable. Coach Goulding made it an easy transformation."

Indeed Goulding turned what might have been a disaster in the making into a team that met, and perhaps even exceeded, everyone's expectations.

Much to his delight, he found an unselfish squad with a tremendous work ethic, willing to take instruction.

"I always had a pretty good rapport with the athletes," said

Goulding. "They blended well, really willing to sacrifice for the good of the team. They made it easy."

"We were sitting in a classroom at one of our very first team meetings of the year," said Wendy Kellehan, a senior at the time, "and Coach Goulding wrote the words 'State Champions' on the chalkboard. The room went silent and we all just looked at each other. It was at that meeting our season changed."

The blend of talent was unstoppable during the regular season. A determined squad from Marysville put up a challenge before falling by the wayside in double overtime. The tournament was much the same until the Semifinal game with unbeaten Jenison, hosted before a huge crowd at Grand Rapids Christian. The Wildcats were making their third consecutive appearance in the Semifinal round.

For the first time, the Mariners were in a fight for their basketball lives. Despite opening up an early lead and dominating the boards, Marine City could never build a comfortable lead against the Wildcats, and trailed 23-22 at the half. Grote scored four field goals in the first 2:09 of the third quarter for a 30-23 lead and pushed the lead to 40-31 with 1:09 remaining in the frame. However, with Grote and Debbie Brown on the bench with foul trouble, and with Yax out with a slight injury, the tide changed.

By the end of the third, Jenison pulled within three 40-37. Two quick buckets by the Wildcats in the opening minute of the fourth quarter gave Jenison the lead. Jenison moved out to a five-point lead before Marine City cut it to two points, 55-53. A desperation foul sent Jenison to the line for a one-and-one with 35 seconds remaining. The attempt missed, and Vicki Sharrow's rebound gave the Mariners life.



Photo courtesy of Lois Quist Schripsema



Photo courtesy of Lois Quist Schripsema

Abby Currier (above) and Lois Quist (right) helped lead Lake City to its most storied girls basketball season in school history.

Venhuizen's 15-foot jump shot bounced off the rim, but Grote's put back with 12 seconds remaining tied the game at 55-55.

Grote scored twice in the extra period for a game-high 25 points before fouling out with 1:12 to go. Venhuizen, whose father was a standout at Grand Rapids Christian 20 years previous, sank four straight clutch field goals to seal a 64-57 win.

"I was a sub for the starters," remembered Susan Wiinikainen. "Usually I was eager to play. But that game, being so close (with) so much riding on it, I did not want Coach to pick me to go in."

While the team as a whole recalls the drama and tension tied to the Semifinal win, the 52-38 victory over Three Oaks River Valley in the Final at East Kentwood High School is remembered as the final leg of a sweet journey.

"I remember cutting down the net after we won," recalled Venhuizen. "We each took a turn and cut a string at a time."

"I don't remember much of the game but I remember the celebration afterward," noted Yax. "Parents, family and friends watching us cut down the net. (Pulling) Coach Goulding into the shower. The feeling that we finally achieved our goal of winning state."

"There was a long lineup of cars with fans standing outside of them holding signs and cheering us home," recalled Kellehan. "The lineup ran the entire 12-mile stretch from I-94 to town. It was a great feeling and site; one that I will never forget. They make movies out of stories like ours now."

Like Lake City and Marquette, 1975 meant defeat in the Semifinals for **Allen Park Cabrini**.

"The previous year, we lost in the semis with a senior-laden team," recalled Carol Valchine, the starting point guard in 1976. "We sat up that night and the other juniors and I vowed to each other that we'd work hard every day and push each other to be the best that we could be. That emotional promise we made to each other was the overriding goal of our 1976 team."

The late Ken Quire filled the role as head coach of both the boys and girls basketball squads for the Monarchs. Running a disciplined offense with each player filling a role, Cabrini was led by seniors Janet Goschinski, Barbara Schulte, Anne

Sommerville, Karen Suda and Traci Syer. Valchine was the lone junior among the starters.

"It was a group that supported each other with friendships that prevailed both on and off the court," recalled Martha DeLisle.

"Ken Quire was a very good coach," said Joyce Burns, a freshman brought up for the tournament. "He got the most out of all of his players. They wanted to do their best for him. The team was very close and made me feel a part of them. They were very welcoming."

Cabrini rolled through the regular season with a single loss that came against Farmington Our Lady of Mercy, the runner-up for the Class A crown in 1974, 1975 and 1976.

Tournament time was much the same. The Monarchs coasted to an easy victory over Lake Fenton in the Quarterfinal, 53-27, thanks to lockdown defensive play by DeLisle and Karen Suda and a 26-point performance by Goschinski. Against Kalamazoo Christian in the Semifinal, Goschinski scored 20 points in the 50-34 win. Valchine added 11 points while Suda scored three and added whopping 16 rebounds.

In the MHSAA title game against Mason County Central, the road was a little rougher for Cabrini, at least for the first two quarters of play.

After opening up a 12-6 lead in the first quarter, the Monarchs were outscored 13-10 in the second and held a slim 22-19 lead at the half. Coach Quire made his displeasure known at the half.

"I let 'em have it loud, as loud as I could yell," said Quire at the time. "The team wasn't executing the offense like I knew they could. I always yell at them anyway. They

expect it, but they know I do it for their sake."

The girls responded immediately with 12 unanswered points to open the third quarter. The Spartans' outstanding guard Glenda Gruno, broke the run with a bucket with a minute remaining in the period, but the damage was done. The Monarchs ran off with a 48-35 win and the Class C crown.

Goschinski ended with 20 points, while Valchine tallied 16 points, including three of her eight field goals during the 12-point rally. The junior added seven assists and three steals, but most importantly, she held Gruno to 15 points on the day.

"The defense has been superb all season," said Quire following the game. "They had been averaging 60 points a game so I think we did pretty well against them."

Thirty years later, the memories run deep for the team members.

"The weekend of the Finals, I remember being amazed at how many of our families, friends, classmates and teachers came to support us," said DeLisle.

"I remember my sister presenting each of us with a red rose after the final game," added Karen O'Rourke. "She made sure my parents were at that game, and she generated excitement in the family for the event."

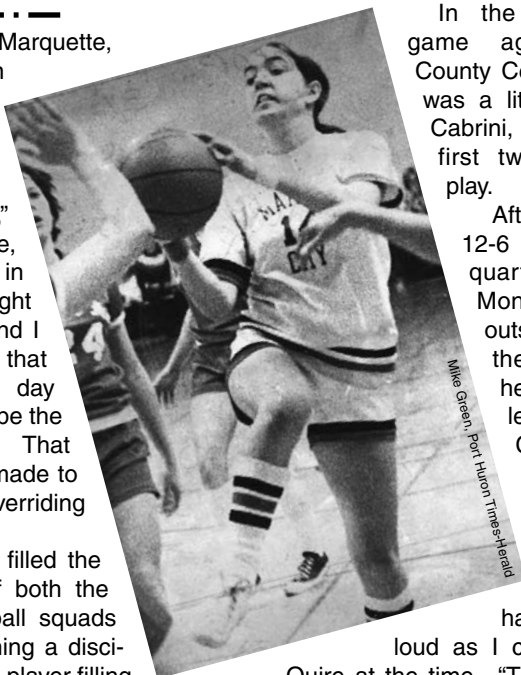
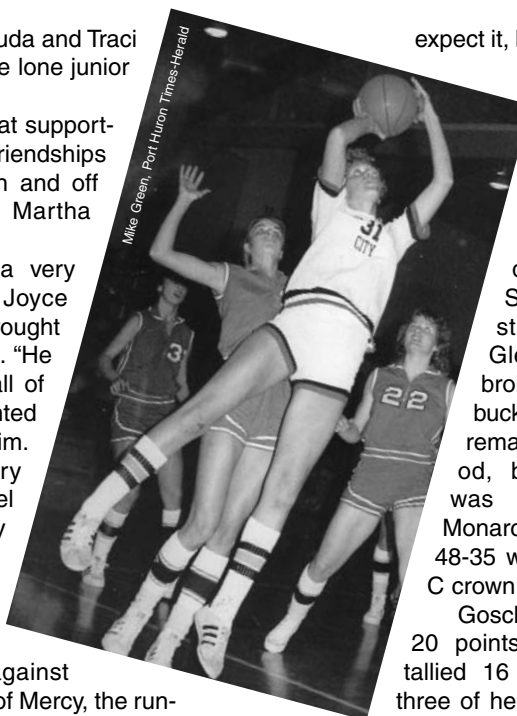
"Being a freshman," noted Burns, "I didn't play in a lot of games. But in a District game, Coach Quire told me to go in and I got so excited I didn't check in and got a technical foul. I'll never forget that."

"We each had a role and we were all willing to play that role so the team would win," continued Valchine. "It was a special group of girls who understood the meaning of team."

— Ron Pesch

Ron Pesch is the historian for the MHSAA. To submit story ideas and potential statistical records, write to: records@mhsaa.com

Editor's Note: For team photos, please see page 57



Doreen Grote (31, above) and GiGi Yax (14) were key forces in driving Marine City to the 1976 MHSAA Class B championship under the guidance of first-year coach Len Goulding.

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Marine City

"I will never forget the tremendous community support we had in Marine City and throughout the Blue Water Area. The team's tremendous work ethic and willingness to sacrifice for the good of the team whowed throughout the season." – Len Goulding, Marine City Coach

Allen Park Cabrini

"We wanted to win so much, and we just got down to business—playing our game, our way, the way Coach Quire taught us." – Martha DeLisle Hubbard, Allen Park Cabrini



"Our team was modest, reserved and conscientious on the court. We took the game seriously, but only in the sense of trying to do our best. I don't remember anyone ever losing their cool or showing poor sportsmanship." – Lois Quist Schripsema, Lake City



Lake City

BACK ON THE COURT

Expected to be in attendance for today's ceremonies are the following:

MARINE CITY

Len Goulding - Coach
Pam Leitch Dueweke - G
Doreen Grote - C
Susan Wiinikainen Hayes - F
Jeanine Kaye - G
Wendy Kellehan - G
Marian Livesay - G
Jean Polio - F
Vickie Sharrow - G
Georgette Yax - G

ALLEN PARK CABRINI

Rita Quire - (Coach Ken Quire)
Joyce Burns Benso - F
Martha DeLisle Hubbard - F
Carol Valchine Brewis - G
Karen Marks O'Rourke - F

LAKE CITY

Linda McGinness - Coach
Jody Everett Hofstra - G
Marilyn Booms Kuntz - C/F
Shelly Armstead Marcusse - F
Raeann Musson - G
Lois Quist Schripsema - F