

In the Purchase and Pennyrite

Frances Dazzles Foes In Purchase

Sophomore Hart Shines Brightest With Average of 27 Points a Game

By HARRY BOLSER, Courier-Journal Staff Writer.

Frances, Ky., Dec. 30.—Not all of Western Kentucky's little schools with big basketball teams bloom in Marshall County.

This small community of Francis in Crittenden County, within easy "hollerin'" distance of the Caldwell County line, boasts of one of the strongest, fastest net teams in Western Kentucky this season.

Coached by Louis Litchfield, long a name in downstate basketball coaching circles, Frances had a perfect record of 13 victories going into the finals of the annual Marion Junior Chamber of Commerce tournament Saturday night. They lost the tourney victory trophy and their 14th battle to their keenest rival, Fredonia, the team they trounced earlier in the season. They lost it the hard way, too. Frances led through most of the game only to lose 50-49 in the last five seconds on a free throw.

But the story behind the Frances team is more unusual than the way they dropped their first game. There are only 23 boys in the small rural high school and Litchfield has plenty of trouble rounding up enough kids each fall to fashion a team. However, the boys who turn out for practice are the type who virtually live on basketball, the type who'll toss anything round and small enough, from rocks to ears of corn, at anything that resembles a hoop.

BARNYARD BALL

The Frances first team, for example, is composed of kids who have been playing basketball since they were old enough to toss a hunk of hide around the barnyard. They've developed keen, accurate eyes and can hit the hoops.

The sharpest pair of eyes in the First and Second Regions, and, perhaps, in Western Kentucky, is owned by 16-year-old George Hart, Frances forward. In the Marion invitational, he snatched individual scoring honors for the downstate sector from Brewers' Van Mathis when he ripped the ropes for 39 points against Salem.

In 14 games against the toughest teams in the Fifth and Sixth Districts, Hart piled up 378 points, an average of 27 per game. That mark surely must be the most outstanding in Western Kentucky. This boy's record seems even more remarkable after you learn that he is only a sophomore. In his freshman year, Hart hit 400 points. His two-year total will top the 1,000 mark if he maintains his present scoring pace.

Hart is 5 feet 10 inches tall and weighs about 160 pounds. Bailey, Frances center and Hart's high-scoring mate, sank 19 points against Fredonia Saturday night. Other Frances players with razor-edge eyes are Moran, Brasher, Davenport and Kemper.

Frances' next real home test will be January 9, when they meet Pete Wagner's Nortonville Badgers, a power in the Seventh District.

GUARDS: Tosh 1, DeBoe 11,
Kemper 3, Simpkins.
Tolu (39)
FORWARDS: Winters 4, Moore 12.
CENTER: Bettus 14.
GUARDS: Nation 5, Croft 4.

AND NOW BASEBALL

Writing a column is something like refereeing a basketball game without the whistle and the striped shirt. And today we feel like the ref who was accused by both coaches after a big game of giving all the breaks to the other side. Which, obviously, he couldn't do.

When the search for a manager for the Hopkinsville Hoppers was getting steam a couple of weeks ago, this column printed so much hot stove baseball news that a county basketball coach remarked: "Hey, don't you have your seasons mixed up? This isn't July. Let's read something about basketball."

Along came a couple of cage tournaments and apparently everybody must have had too much basketball, because Saturday a man said: "Ye gods, let's talk some baseball!"

So baseball it'll be, but not without a parting, darn about basketball and the incomparable George Hart of the Frances team.

After Hart had scored 28 points against Salem in the opening game of the regional tournament here last week, Hoptown carefully erected a defense against Hart but the sophomore from Crittenden County still tallied 21 points against the Tigers.

Came the championship game with Madisonville Saturday night and Hart fouled out of the contest in the early minutes of the third quarter. As the Frances star disappeared on his way to the dressing room, one Hoptown fan remarked: "Well, Hart finally ran into a defense that stopped him—the referees. We shoulda thought of that last night instead of putting five guards on him. He can't score points in the dressing room."

To which his companion replied: "Wouldn't be too sure of that. I bet by this time that guy Hart has tacked up a hoop down there in the dressing room and is already pushing those one-handed shots through it."

SWISH, IT SAYS HERE

Hart, the 16-year-old Frances sophomore from Crittenden County, is strictly a hitsman in a basketball suit. He is not impressive on defense and he does not do too much skirmishing to gain possession of the basketball, but when he does get the sphere and levels down at the basket, it's mostly a case of swish, and two points.

If ever there was an athletic hero in his community, it's this Hart. We purposely got in the Frances section of the gym and as soon as the game started, it was a case of "Let George have it!" and "Give it to George."

And George came through to the tune of 23 points, one of the highest totals ever made in the Central Avenue gym. He connected for 13 field goals while firing at the hoops 28 times during the game. That mark of nearly 50 per cent would not be considered bad in any league.

But Hart, who still appears plenty modest for all the publicity he has received this winter, took the congratulations in order when he dressed and came up into the stands to watch the second game last night. "Just lucky," he told well-wishers, and changed the subject.

And he confided to us, "We really didn't play much ball tonight. This is the fifth time we've played Salem this winter. That's too often. You get to be old long lost buddies, or something."

Hart's modesty is legend around Frances, and his friends began to tell me about the time he made 32 points one night when his team routed a hot rival.