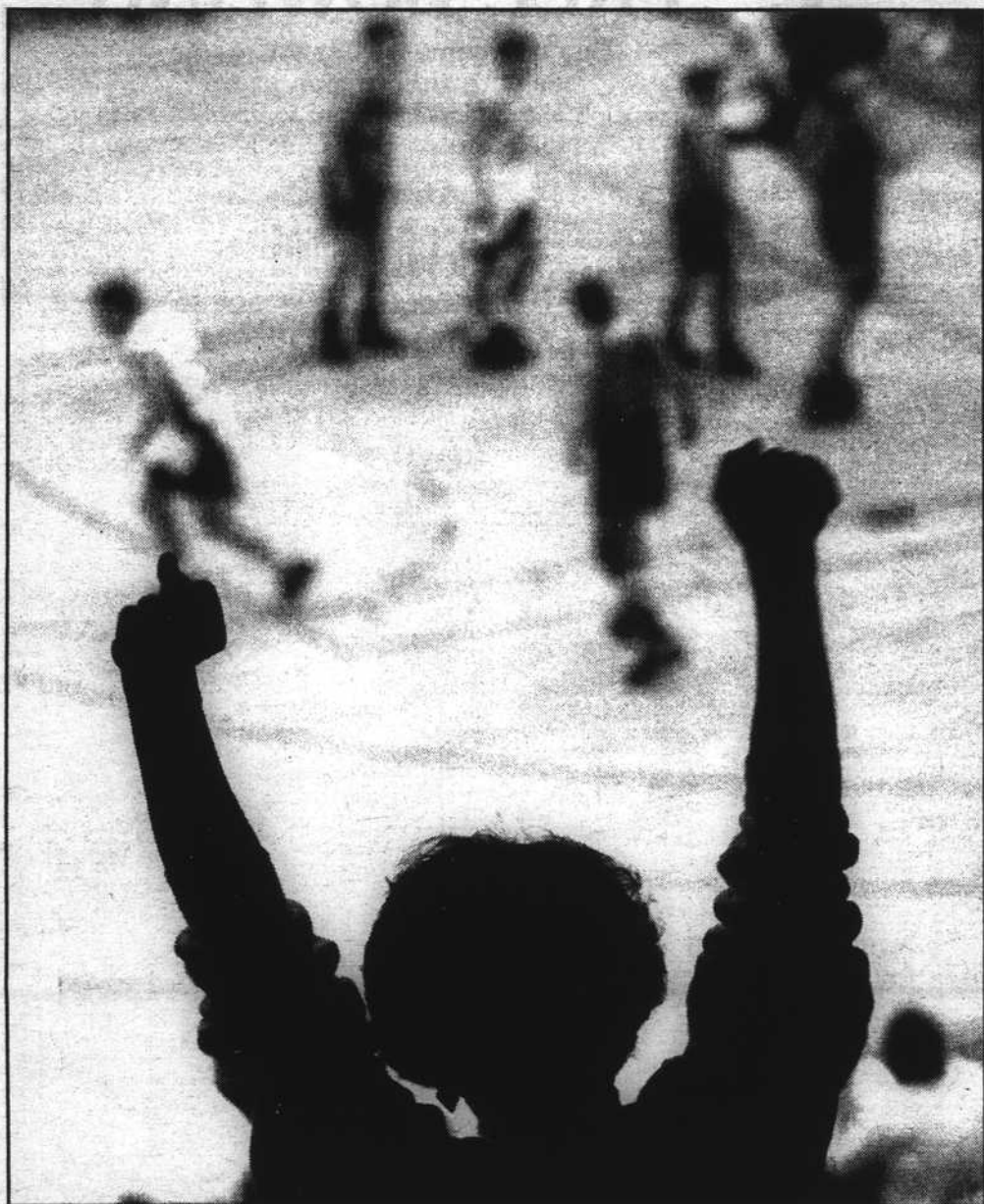


STATE TOURNAMENT

Monday, March 13, 1995

Page 7

Photos by Travis Heying



Clockwise from left: An exuberant fan raises her arms after a three-point shot in the second-round game. In small schools, everyone plays a part. Cheerleader Tara Johnson subs as a sax player in the pep band before the start of the first game. Head Coach Del Schoenfish gives his players instructions during a timeout late in the first game.



Later that evening, the team attended a pizza feed with other tournament teams at Pershing Auditorium.

Now they wait.

The cheerleaders return from their shopping trip. They rush through the hotel door and see their classmates' familiar faces.

Carrie, a petite girl with long blonde hair pulled back into a barrette, spots her boyfriend, Brian Holtze, a senior on the team, sitting on a sofa and goes to sit next to him.

Bobbie, 18, a thin girl with shoulder-length blonde hair pulled back into a barrette, also spots her boyfriend, Greg Borland, a junior on the team, sitting in a chair and moves toward him.

Coletton Shifflet, a junior team member, relaxes on another sofa in front of lighted fireplace. He's nervous.

"I'll have trouble sleeping tonight," he admits.

At 6-foot, 3-inches, Shifflet doesn't look nervous as he stretches out across the sofa wearing black shorts and a Chicago Bulls T-shirt, his stocking feet resting on the coffee table.

He remembers his coach's advice: "If we lose, give it all you got and leave it on the court. It's nothing to be ashamed of."

But he knows it isn't always that easy.

"It will be a new feeling if we do lose," he says.

By 10 p.m. the players are in their rooms. The cheerleaders, still in the lobby, camp out in front of the television to watch the news.

They clasp when the score from the

Cambridge game comes on the screen.

"That's us."

"Woo, woo."

One by one, the tired cheerleaders go up to their room. They need their sleep, too. Tomorrow is a big day.

By 8:30 Friday morning, the cheerleaders and some of the players are in the lobby again. Some of the cheerleaders have their uniforms on already.

They crowd together on two sofas in front of the television. One player sitting on the sofa eats a bowl of cornflakes while two teammates have breakfast at a table nearby.

Another player gets up and tips through the channels. He finally settles on "Three's Company."

Carrie and Brian sit on a sofa away from the group, looking somber. Carrie leans in toward Brian and puts her arm around him.

"Does anyone have a crowbar?" one player asks. "We need to separate Carrie and Brian."

At 8:50 a.m., the players go upstairs for a meeting in the coach's room. They crowd into the room, sitting on the beds and the dresser, leaning against the walls. The coach is sitting at the table, making notes in a folder.

The coach's wife, Veronica, leaves as the meeting is about to begin.

"Good luck, troop," she says before turning out the door.

"Thanks," the team responds.

Assistant Coach John Johnson briefs the team on its opponent.

Clipboard in hand, Coach Schoenfish then gives the boys a pep talk.

"Hey, anything can happen down here," he says. He tells them to look at the game as a challenge and an opportunity.

"Let's see what we can do. It's a challenge for you to go out and do the best job you can. In order to be the best, you've got to play with the best."

After the meeting, Schoenfish says he's not nervous but admits he's a little apprehensive.

"That's what athletics is all about," he says.

The team walks slowly down the hallway to the elevator, uniforms clutched in their hands, duffle bags draped across their shoulders. No one says a word.

In the lobby again, the players wait silently for a few minutes before they leave for Pershing Auditorium, where they will watch the Laurel-Concord Bears and the Sandy Creek Cougars vie for a spot in the Class C-2 finals.

"We want Cambridge. We want Cambridge."

Laurel-Concord fans chant after their team's sweeping victory over Sandy Creek. They let everyone know who they want to play in the finals.

The Cambridge Trojans don't intend to disappoint them. Except for the thump of a basketball hitting the cement floor, silence pierces the air of the Trojan's dressing room. Coach Schoenfish offers the team a few final words before it meets the Lincoln

Christian Crusaders on the court.

"They're people, too, and they're no better than you are," he says. "They're 17. They put their pants on just like everyone else."

The waiting is over.

"Let's go," the players shout before they run out of the dressing room and onto the court.

The orange and black sea is in motion.

"C-A-M-B-R-I-D-G-E. Cambridge," the sea roars above the music of the band.

Ten-year-old Whitney Jones runs in front of the crowd waving an orange and black flag that is twice the size he is. The same signs that decorated the gym the day before color the walls again.

Another storm is brewing.

Victory slipped away.

The Crusaders stole ahead early to claim a 12-point lead at halftime.

The orange and black sea is restless.

"When that last buzzer rings and they have more points than we, then I'll accept defeat, but until that buzzer rings, we're still in it," Veronica Schoenfish says at halftime.

The clock ticks away. Cambridge never recovers.

The orange and black sea is calm now. The storm has lost its fury.

"Geez, this is bad," one fan says under his breath. "Come on."

Whitney Jones has put down his flag.

"We'll never catch up, not like this. They won by 20 points. Ugh," he says

as he slides his back down the wall and plunks down on the cement floor.

Tonya, wearing the gold earrings she bought the day before, puts her hands together as if praying and lifts them to her face.

On the sidelines the team is quiet. The players lean forward in their chairs and rest their chins in the palms of their hands. A few players wipe their brows with a towel.

Some Cambridge fans start chanting, "Let's play football," as Crusader fans chant, "Overrated."

Buzzzzzz. The game is over.

The seniors on the team hug on the sidelines and then slap hands with the underclassmen on the team.

As they walk off the court, expressionless, the cheerleaders do their final cheer of the season.

"We are proud of you, hey we are proud of you."

The orange and black sea spills out onto the floor to slap hands with the players, pat them on the back and congratulate them on a job well done.

Tonya and Bobbie embrace as tears escape from their eyes.

A woman begins tearing down the signs on the walls.

Carrie holds Brian's hand.

"We don't know how to lose," she says. "It's weird."

Greg emerges from the dressing room carrying his uniform and duffle bag.

"It's like all the dreams I've had all year long right down the tubes," he says.

He turns to find Bobbie standing behind him. He takes her hand and she whispers, "I love you."