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Marian defends Catholic League title

BY MARTY BUDNER
 • FEBRUARY 24, 2009

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Birmingham Marian captured its record 11th Catholic League championship Sunday at University of Detroit-Mercy's Calihan Hall with a 46-25 triumph over Dearborn Divine Child.

It was the Mustangs' second straight tournament title and their fourth since 2001. Livonia Ladywood is a distant second to Marian with five Catholic League tournament crowns.

"We had the Catholic League championship as one of our goals," said Marian head coach Mary Cicerone. "The pressure was on us to win this year, and the girls met the challenge."

Defense was dominant in a tightly-played first half. Marian held a 9-4 lead after the opening quarter and each team scored 10 points in the second quarter as the Mustangs took a 19-14 lead into the second half.

Marian took control with a 13-4 scoring advantage in the third quarter and held the lead as they outscored the Falcons by seven points in the final quarter.

"In the second half we executed on offense better and were able to get the ball to some mismatches," said Cicerone. "Everyone started to play more confidently."

Junior guard Rachel Melcher netted a game-high 14 points and was the only Mustang player to reach double figures. Senior guard Michelle Lindsey was next high with eight points.

Dearborn Divine Child was led by Lauren Malinowski's 10 points — most of which came in the game's final few minutes.

It marked the third time the teams played this season, with Marian sweeping the series. The Mustangs won by 10 points on Feb. 6 and 17 points on Jan. 19.

Marian and Divine Child have met in the Catholic League title game four times. The Mustangs own a 3-1 advantage in those games, winning in 1988, 1993 and this season. The Falcons defeated Marian for the crown in 1989.

Marian takes an 18-1 overall record into tomorrow's Operation Friendship game scheduled for 7 p.m. tomorrow against Detroit Public School League champion Renaissance. The Mustangs open Division 1 state tournament play 7:15 p.m. the following Monday against Pontiac Northern.

Both games will be played in Marian's gym.

"We have two very tough matchups coming up," said Cicerone. "We will have to play super basketball to win those games."

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