

IND, Mercy seniors bring different perspectives to their final installment of ‘The Game’

It might be Catholic Schools Week in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, but at two high schools for girls, it's also Spirit Week.

The Institute of Notre Dame and Mercy High School are gearing up for “The Game” Feb. 2, when they will play their 52nd annual basketball showcase at Towson University’s SECU Arena.

Amid a crowd in the vicinity of 3,000 and pomp and circumstance that includes commemorative t-shirts, fundraisers and dance teams, is the game itself. For Ja’Lyn Armstrong, Madison DuBose and the other Penguin seniors, it’s a chance to extend IND’s win streak in The Game to five years. For Rachael Huebler and other Magic seniors, it’s the last chance to beat their rival.

While Huebler is bound to do just that, Armstrong and DuBose are equally determined to avoid their listless play from last year. The teams entered from the extremes of the Interscholastic Athletic Association of Maryland B Conference - IND unbeaten and Mercy winless - only to find themselves tied with six minutes remaining before the Penguins pulled away for a 39-26 victory.

“Last year,” Armstrong said, “it was almost as if we said, ‘we’ve got this in the bag,’ and we were flat. That was a big life lesson.”

“Always be prepared,” DuBose said. “You know they (Mercy) are going to come out and give 100 percent against us. We’ve got to do the same.”

Dubose helped start the Fashion Club and the Black Student Union at IND, and is a track and field standout. Armstrong is a member of the Asian Culture and French clubs, and, on the service front, active with Hildie's Helpers.

They'll remain teammates in college, as both will play at the NCAA Division II level for LIU Post, the C.W. Post campus of Long Island University.

They were in the crowd when the IND streak began in 2013, Armstrong as a wide-eyed eighth-grader at St. Pius X School in Rodgers Forge, DuBose as a student at Kipp Academy. Her father, Robert DuBose, was a Penguin assistant coach then, but about to become the head coach.

The Penguins want to beat the Magic again, but they're also vying for the school's first conference title in 26 years. IND's only loss in B Conference play came at defending champion St. John's Catholic Prep in Frederick Jan. 5.

Mercy has closed the accomplishment gap on IND, as coach Steve Anderson's team began the week with four wins in the B Conference. The Magic had no seniors last season, when Huebler gained the nickname "Mom," for the manner in which she guides her teammates.

"I keep everyone's ducks in a row," Huebler said. "I make sure their laundry's done, and wash their jerseys if I have to. They're growing up. I'm proud of them. "

Those teammates include her sister, Mary, a junior.

A parishioner of Our Lady of the Chesapeake in Lake Shore who attended St. John the Evangelist School in Severna Park, Huebler chose Mercy for the "sisterhood you can't find anywhere else."

Vice president of the student council, Huebler helped Mercy to a banner 2017 year

in lacrosse, the sport she will play at York College. Lacrosse being a big deal in Maryland, what does she tell her club teammates about The Game?

“The concept of having that many people with eyes on you, unless you’re there, it’s hard to envision,” Huebler said. “Our preparation (for The Game) begins in the preseason and continues in the regular season. We even make noise when our teammates are at the free throw line.”

Huebler admits to having some restless nights after last year’s loss.

“I’d go back,” Huebler said, “and look at film, and say, ‘if this happens, the game’s ours.’ We know what we have to do. We’ve been waiting for this.”

Tickets can be purchased through the schools for \$13 on or before Feb. 1, and for \$15 at the gate.

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