

IND vs. Mercy: 'The Game' resonates in parish basketball league

By Nancy Menefee Jackson

Special to the Review

TOWSON - Just beyond the sounds of basketball - squeaking shoes, the ref's whistle, shouted encouragement - an old rivalry echoes.

It's a Thursday night at the Mothers' Basketball League at Immaculate Heart of Mary in Baynesville. Some players are former standouts - one scored more than 1,000 points at Loyola University Maryland, another had a full scholarship to an NCAA Division I program. Others were cut after JV or have no previous playing experience.

With the 50th anniversary of the "The Game," the traditional rivalry showcase between the Institute of Notre Dame and Mercy High School among the highlights of the local winter sports calendar, graduates of both schools still find themselves playing against each other - and sometimes, together. The game is set for 7:30 p.m. Jan. 29 at Towson University's SECU Arena, with Archbishop William E. Lori offering a blessing beforehand.

"It's funny to joke; we say things like, 'That's a Mercy girl for you,' " said Mary Colleen Buettner, who graduated in 2003 from Mercy, where she played four years of varsity basketball.

She played this season for the Green Angels - denoted by T-shirt color - with Alicia Morgan-Cooper, M.D., a four-year standout from IND (Class of '88) who earned a basketball scholarship to American University and helped coach IND when Buettner played for Mercy.



Shannon Skopp Schriefer, who played for the Institute of Notre Dame in the mid-1990s, is the all-time leading scorer in the Mothers' League at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish. (John Strohsacker/Special to the Review)

Shannon Skopp-Schriefer just completed her 16th season in the league and is its all-time leading scorer. She played for IND (Class of '95), then for what is now Notre Dame of Maryland University. Coaching CYO for IHM, her players included Danielle Abell, who played two years at Mercy and was on the Orange Bishops team in the

Moms' League.

"Once you graduate from school," Skopp-Schriefer said, "you can be friendly with them," she joked.

Another mom added, "I went to Seton - the original Seton." Players teased her that she's showing her age, as that school was part of a 1988 merger that created The Seton Keough High School.

"That's what's so fun - it's all these women from different schools coming together," Buettner said.

Morgan-Cooper admitted that playing in the league was an adjustment, but at 45, she finds it easier to take it down a notch.

"I did have to rein it in a bit," she said. "It was hard at first, playing with people who hadn't played in college, but the purpose was to get exercise and have fun one night a week."

"Everyone is always happy if no one gets hurt," Skopp-Schriefer said of the action in the parish school's gymnasium. "Everyone understands what the league's for - but it's still nice to get a win."

What makes the league work is an even distribution of players and rules that dictate equal playing time. No teams are allowed in on their own. Instead, volunteer coaches draft players for six teams. That, said league commissioner Andy Pyzik, keeps teams competitive and allows the women to make new friends, since they're on a different team each year.

"I was intimidated at first," said Lisa Salvatore, a Mercy grad who played softball and ran cross country and track and was invited to play by a friend. "I'm not a mom ... but it doesn't matter. Every year, you're on a different team."

IHM parishioners, parents and alumni get first preference. If there are roster openings, guests older than 30 are welcome.

Players pay a fee, which covers the referees; the remainder is donated to the school. Between the eight-team Fathers' League, which runs from January into April, and the Mothers' League, which runs from September to December, approximately \$4,500 is raised for the school each year.

Jim and Evelyn Carlineo donate their time, keeping score and running the clock. The average age in the Fathers' League is 45; it's 41 in the Mothers' League.

The Mothers' League crowned its champion Dec. 10, when the Purple Friars completed a 13-0 season by beating the sixth-seeded Green Angels, 39-36. The victors got eight points from player-coach Maureen Martin.

It all goes back to 1992, when Pyzik organized 10 fathers to play in a charity Men In Black game against clergy. Meanwhile, his wife urged him to get involved at IHM School, which their three children attended. He started the father's league in 1993. His daughter, Theresa, was looking for something to do after college, so he started

the women's league in 1998.

"People have made a lot of friends over the years," Pyzik said. And every year, many of its players still attend "The Game."

THE GAME

IND vs. Mercy

When: Friday, Jan. 29

Where: SECU Arena, Towson University

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Also see:

Parishes dig out, social outreach programs continue despite record-breaking blizzard

Finding healing after an abortion in the Archdiocese of Baltimore

The running pastor: Monsignor Hilgartner evangelizes on the road, too