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SPORTS

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Elgin's 1996 girls basketball state quarterfinal win



Elgin's Melissa Parker, front, and Leslie Schock celebrate during the IHSA state tournament at Redbird Arena in Normal the weekend of March 1, 1996.

As we all continue to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic that has suspended, among myriad other things, the high school sports spring season, the Daily Herald's high school sports staff is dedicated to bringing you, our loyal readers, stories of how our local student-athletes, coaches parents — our entire high school sports community — are coping with the pandemic.

But today, as part of our mission, we begin a series of stories that will look back on the favorite game each of our longtime staff members has covered for the Daily Herald.

We'll kick that off with my favorite game — Elgin High's 1996 Class AA girls basketball state quarterfinal win over Chicago Marshall at Redbird Arena in Normal.

The Maroons, led by hall of fame coach Lee Turek, all-stars Melissa Parker and Leslie Schock and Turek's senior daughter Karisa, had knocked on the state door the previous two seasons only to fall short in the supersectional round.

But in 1995-96, senior-dominated Elgin was not to be denied.

The Maroons rolled through their regional, got tested in the sectional, then beat Naperville North in a supersectional held before a frenetic crowd at Palatine High School.

For the first time since the end of St. Edward's state runs in 1991, the city of Elgin was sending a girls basketball team downstate. In fact, the Maroons' Elite Eight qualification marked the first time an Elgin public school had reached an IHSA state final tournament in girls basketball.

Arriving at Redbird, the Maroons faced a daunting task. They were matched up in the quarterfinals against Chicago Marshall and legendary coach Dorothy Gaters, who was bringing the Commandos to a state tournament for the 17th time.

But, again, Elgin was on a mission and the Maroons played possibly their most complete game of the season, winning 61-52. They went on to beat previously unbeaten Morris in the semifinals before falling to Stevenson in the state championship contest.

Why is the Elgin-Marshall game the favorite game I've covered for the Daily Herald? Well, first of all, I'm an Elginite and from a personal standpoint it gave me a great sense of hometown pride. That was also my first year with the Daily Herald and covering that state tournament with former colleague Jim Wojciechowski will always be one of the treasured memories of my career.

It was also good to see a team that had come so close to state the previous two seasons finally get there, and by beating Marshall the Maroons ensured themselves of a state trophy.

A job well done, and an entire season filled with memories that will live on forever.

For a recap of that season, check out YouTube —
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyInZJWeuNM&t=753s>

Elgin's practice pays off at state

By: John Radtke



Elgin girls basketball coach Lee Turek, left, and Melissa Parker with their trophy during the IHSA state tournament at Redbird Arena in Normal the weekend of March 1, 1996. The Maroons lost the title game to Stevenson.

Editor's note: Below is an edited version of the Elgin girls basketball team's win over Marshall in the Class AA state quarterfinals of 1996.

NORMAL — They say practice makes perfect and Elgin proved it on Friday, March 1, 1996.

Handling Chicago Marshall's vaunted press with relative ease early on, Elgin broke out to a 20-11 first quarter lead and used that as a catapult to a 61-52 win in the state Class AA quarterfinals at Redbird Arena.

The win puts the No. 2 Maroons (30-1) in the state semifinals against undefeated Morris. The Maroons went on to defeat Morris before losing to Stevenson in the state championship game.

“We knew (Marshall) gets a lot of their points off the press,” said Elgin all-state guard Melissa Parker, who had a game-high 21 points as well as 8 assists and 10 rebounds. “It was a good feeling to get out there and break the press and get the ball up the floor.”

The Maroons may have had some early butterflies in their first Elite Eight appearance but it didn't show.

All-state center Leslie Schock (18 points, 9 rebounds) scored off a Parker feed, Parker hit a jumper off an inbounds pass from Schock and followed up with a 3-pointer and the Maroons had a 7-0 lead before the large contingent of Elgin fans could get comfortable in their seats.

“Jumping out early like that let us relax a little and slow down,” said Elgin coach Lee Turek. “We came out with a lot of poise and defensively we did a real nice job of stopping Marshall's penetration.”

Much of that defense came from junior standout Tina Wenckaitis. Matched up against Marshall's leading scorer, sophomore Sabrina Minter, Wenckaitis was never better. Minter failed to score in the first half and had only 3 shots.

Marshall (24-6) did nothing to help its own cause. The Commandos shot a horrific 25 percent (10 of 39) in the first half and 30 percent (22 of 74) for the game. They were 3 of 21 from 3-point range. Elgin, meanwhile, did a nice job on shot selection and was 13 of 24 (54 percent) in each half.

“We were too concerned with shooting 3-pointers,” said Marshall coach Dorothy Gaters, who brought her 17th team to the state tournament in 20 years. “Elgin was very prepared for what we wanted to do. Parker played an outstanding game.”