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Photo by Tracy Dreslinski
 Players on the Mercy basketball team stand and cheer during a district win against North Farmington. The Marlins advanced to their third regional final in four years before falling to Livonia Franklin.

A season of streaks

Up and down season ends with district title, trip to regional final

By Mike Moore
 C & G Sports Writer

FARMINGTON HILLS — He, like any coach still playing at this time of the playoff season, wanted his team to advance.

He wanted his girls to experience what it was like to take that next step.

Yet, just hours after his Farmington Hills Mercy basketball team was eliminated from a Class A regional final March 12, coach Gary Morris was noticeably upbeat and unmistakably proud.

“They were the better team tonight,” Morris said of Livonia Franklin, which topped his squad 49-31. “But it takes nothing away from the season we had. ... All in all, this was a pretty good year for us.”

Asked to describe the 2008-09 campaign, Morris equated it to a typical day at Cedar Point.

“Up and down, to say the least,” he laughed. “There were times where we were very, very good. At other times, we struggled a bit.”

To Morris’ point, the Marlins began the season 6-0 and looked nearly unbeatable. The next nine games, however, included a 2-7 record and a team suddenly questioning itself.

“It was at that point when I think our four seniors really took over,” Morris said of Jordan Mueller, Danica Verderbar, Bridget Hickey and Marion Rodriguez. “They’re all such great leaders anyway, but I think it came to a point when they realized their last season of basketball was fading, and the team wasn’t playing like it should have.”

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After the 2-7 streak, Mercy ended its season with wins in eight of its final 10 games, claiming a district title and advancing to the regional final for the third time in four years.

“It’s tough to lose, and it’s tough to have any season come to an end,” Morris explained. “But as I look back on everything, I’m so proud of how our team responded. They made something great out of what could have been a disappointment.”

And looking ahead, Morris remained optimistic.

In graduating his four seniors, the Marlins will lose more than just leadership; they’ll lose a group of girls who played a ton of minutes. Still, with as many as nine girls set to return, the future remains bright.

“We’re going to have a good core coming back,” Morris added. “It’ll be a good group of girls. They’ll need some time to take on their new roles, but I think the success we had is the type of season we can expect again.”

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