

Page 4 — NCHS Basketball Dream Maker

## Lady Jackets fall in quarter finals to state champ Mercy

By Josh Sheverson  
of The Carolina Mercury Staff

RICHMOND — With Nicholas County in the final eight, the Lady Jackets were left to face the number two ranked team in the tournament, Louisville's Mercy Academy.

Mercy was coming into the state Sweet Sixteen for its fourth appearance and had claimed only one previous trip, the final championship game in 1981.

As Nicholas County Jacks fans jammed one end of McBrayer Arena pin hopes of seeing the Lady Jackets post possibly the biggest tournament upset.

Others were prepared to see a height battle between Kim Denkins and Mercy Academy's 6'3" senior center Kristie Stuckenberg.

In the end, however, it would be the lightning quick defense of Mercy's Christina Jansen who would stem Nicholas' advance to the final four as she posted six steals, three blocked shots, and 11 points, including four three pointers, against the Lady Jackets.

The Mercy Jaguars rolled over the Jackets, 52-29, on their way to their 1992 State championship victory.

But it took the second half for them to do it.

The pace of the game in the opening minutes was fast. Though Stuckenberg hit a two within seven seconds of play the Lady Jackets weren't going to fall quickly.

Christie Hatten rebounded her own missed jumper to tie the score. On the next trip down, Hatten found Earlywine on the key to tie the game again, 4-4.

Then Mercy rolled. Jansen bombed a three pointer, followed by two from Katie Haskins and another two from Stuckenberg. With an additional four, the Jaguars had mounted an 11-0 run going into the final minutes of the first.

To come back, the Lady Jackets needed a boost, a big one.

Nikki Smoot delivered. From 43 feet out, several feet beyond even the pro three point line, Smoot hit go with a last second three pointer that caught all out. Nicholas fans went wild. The score going into the second quarter was 12-9.

The second quarter almost entirely belonged to a charged up Lady Jackets team.

Renee Linville proved lethal on defense, coming up with the rebounds and hitting for the first Lady Jackets second quarter push.

Smoot carried the momentum home at the 5:00 mark with an old fashioned three point play to put the Jackets into position for the lead, 17-16.

Kim Denkins rounded out the 9-0 run with two from the charity stripe for an 18-12 Lady Jackets lead.

Even though Clay County kept it close in the final championship game, even they could not claim to have led Mercy during the course of a state tournament game.

Karmin Kupper and Angie Strothman reclaimed Mercy's lead in the waning minutes of the half. By the end, the Jackets trailed by seven, 25-18.

But the Jackets were not yet out of it. Fifteen seconds into the third quarter, Denkins turned around and buried a three pointer from the side for a 25-21 game.

Unfortunately, the three failed to knock Mercy off balance.

Matching Denkins three shot was Jansen. The next 9-0 run belonged to the Jaguars and the Lady Jackets catch up game stalled.

Linville, however, continued to shine through the course of the third, hitting for four points before logging her first foul in the final six seconds of the quarter.

Hatten hit Earlywine for an early fourth quarter score, but Mercy's offense continued to gain ground. By the 3:27 mark, the Jaguars led 50-29.

The pace had slowed to a deliberate game, with Nicholas

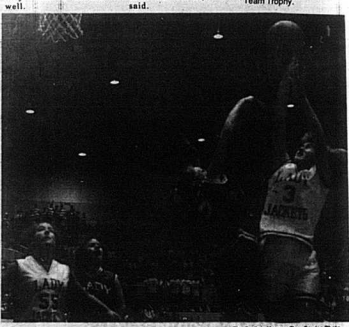
defence forcing the Jaguars to pick and choose tough shots. But they still made them when they found them.

One final goal on the Mercy side finished the game.

"Tony Brats and I have coached these girls through Junior High and High School. For seven years they have been with us and our relationship is much more than coach/player. We're friends, every one of us. And it's that personal feeling between us that I will cherish long after the 1992 state championship is just a sweet memory."

"This is the end of the greatest season for the Lady Jackets so far, but I hope to be back. Next time, I hope we can make it all the way," Kenne-

Team Trophy.



The Charlotte Mercury/Pam Beutler Photo

For two, the seasons end gloriously

Seniors Kristie Barton and Tacy Earlywine in their traditional positions on the floor. Earlywine going for the shot and Barton blocking out and prepared for the rebound. Those seven years as Nicholas County Lady Jackets finally led them to the point only a few hops to reach, the state Sweet Sixteen.

## NCHS Basketball Dream Maker — Page 5

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