

Lancaster County's First State Championship

by Edgar A. Musser

"IT TOOK OUR GIRLS TO DO IT"

When Coach Knute Rockne once was asked about his secret in the perfect execution of plays for which his Notre Dame teams were noted, his answer was terse and to the point: "Hard work."

On their memorable night of Saturday, March 23, 1974, in Harrisburg, before many thousands of spectators in the huge Farm Show Arena, the Lancaster Catholic High School Girls' basketball team — the **Crusaderettes** — reached a high plateau of athletic achievement in the State of Pennsylvania, one never before attained by a Lancaster County scholastic team—boys or girls.

On that night they won the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) Girls' High School Basketball Championship, when they defeated a good Baldwin High School team from suburban Pittsburgh, by a score of 75 to 32, in the final game of the State Basketball Tournament. Had any girl on the victorious team been asked that night: "How did you ever manage to get this far?" she probably would have answered: "We worked pretty hard."

Their season's record was 27 and 0, and among the nearly 400 competing high school girls' teams in the state, they alone had a perfect record. With all of the state's high school boys' teams included in the reckoning, they were still the only undefeated team

On top of it all, they were the only Lancaster County athletic team ever to win a scholastic state championship in any sport. The many hours they spent in disciplined practice paid rewarding dividends in the crucial final hour — the ultimate victory and the spectacular gold trophy emblematic of the championship.

Collectively and individually the team displayed talent, discipline, intelligence and courage, all of which were present in good measure and skillfully combined by superior coaching. The result was a team with character. There were times earlier in the tournament when they had difficulty "putting it all together," as the saying goes, yet they maintained their poise consistently enough to be on top whenever the signal ending the game sounded. Their inspired late surges, when the score was close or they were behind with time running out, were episodes of beauty for their supporters to behold.

The co-captains of the Lancaster Catholic team were seniors Kathy Butz and Mimi Senkowski. Kathy suffered a severe knee injury in January and was lost to the team as a player throughout the remainder of the season.

Round One play in the tournament to determine the **Number One** girls' high school basketball team in the state, began Saturday, February 22 at Manheim Township High School, against Schuylkill Valley High School. At the end of the first quarter the Crusaderettes led 27-9, and at halftime 43-13. The final score was 69-35. Paula Kambic and Mimi Senkowski were the high scorers with 26 and 21 points respectively.

On Wednesday, February 26, in **Round Two**, they opposed Warwick Township High School on the Manor Township High School court. They had to play without the services of one of their regular forwards, Helen Balasavage, who was injured. Monica Curtin started in her stead in the first half; Linda Butz played the position in the second half. The going was difficult in the first quarter, but notwithstanding the slow start the Crusaderettes led at halftime, 32-23. The final score was 58-35. Paula Kambic again led the scoring, with 20 points, while Mimi Senkowski, Lynn Parks and Leslie Diehl also scored in double figures.

On to **Round Three** and the girls of Cedar Crest High School, from Lebanon County. The game was played in the Middletown High School Gymnasium on Saturday, March 2. The teams played each other very closely, and at halftime Lancaster led by the low score of 20-15. The Crusaderette running game began to take its toll in the second half, and by the time play ended they were out in front 54-36. Mimi Senkowski was the leading scorer with 20 points, followed by Leslie Diehl with 15 and Paula Kambic with 10. The two taller girls, Helen Balasavage and Lynne Parks, controlled most of the rebounds. Monica Curtin and Linda Butz also took part in the action.

And now it was on to Harrisburg and **Round Four**, to meet

Lebanon High School in the District Semi-Finals. The game was played Wednesday, March 6 in the Farm Show Arena, and turned out to be a rout. The Crusaderettes ran up a 45-7 halftime lead, and the game ended with a score of 70-20. Mimi Senkowski was the leading point-getter with 22, followed by Paula Kambic with 18 and Helen Balasavage with 10. Leslie Diehl held Lebanon star, Helen Schlegel, to six points. Lynne Parks, despite a knee injury, led the team in rebounds.

Next came the "Indians" of Susquehanna Township High School, Dauphin County, in the District Three Final. The game was played in the Hershey Sports Arena on Saturday, March 11 and was a near disaster for Lancaster Catholic.

The taller Susquehanna girls presented a very live and effective zone defense, and the Crusaderettes found few opportunities to get a clear shot at the basket. They scored only six points in the first quarter, and made only 5 out of 41 shots throughout the first half to fall behind 21-12. At the end of the third quarter they still trailed 26-20, and the Indians proceeded to score the first goal in the fourth quarter for a 28-20 lead. They were the final points scored by Susquehanna in the game.

Helen Balasavage then tipped in a missed shot and Mimi Senkowski hit with a foul try. Leslie Diehl followed with two more to cut the margin to 28-25 with 3:58 minutes to go. Paula Kambic, who played though ill with influenza, hit a jump shot and the score was 28-27. At 2:58 Mimi Senkowski intercepted a pass and drove in for the score that put the Crusaderettes in front, 29-28. Shortly thereafter Lancaster Catholic went into a stall and drew a foul which Mimi Senkowski converted to make the score 30-28. During the final minute each team lost the ball twice, but neither could score during the closing seconds. Lancaster Catholic had scored ten successive points to win the game and the District Three Championship.

As District Three champions they now advanced to the Eastern Inter-District Semi-Finals, with Plymouth-Whitemarsh, from suburban Philadelphia, undefeated champions of District One as their next opponents. They represented a school with a rich basketball heritage.

This game was played in Mayser Gymnasium at Franklin and Marshall College, Saturday, March 16 at two o'clock, before a large crowd that included many from the Philadelphia area.

Lancaster Catholic started off fast and gained an early lead. However, as the game progressed their lead dwindled, and by the end of the first half they held only a single point advantage, 27-26. Once again their normally good shooting had gone cold, very cold.

During the second and third quarters they missed shot after shot, outside and inside. They gained possession of the ball over and over again, kept driving toward the basket but could not score.

Midway in the fourth quarter they suddenly "found themselves." Paula Kambic began to hit with her shots; she made a free throw, followed by two driving layups and then another free throw. Mimi Senkowski came through with an interception and drove in for another field goal, followed by still another by Paula, and the outcome was decided. The final score was 46-40.

Paula Kambic had 19 points, followed by Mimi Senkowski with 14. Leslie Diehl had a perfect day at the foul line where she made 5 out of 5 tries. Helen Balasavage and Lynne Parks were outstanding on defense. When their own team could not score, they kept blocking their opponents' shots and grabbing rebounds—they would not let them score either.

Barbara Hudson, the versatile six-foot center of the Plymouth-Whitemarsh team, scored 17 points. The only defense against her was to keep her from getting the ball, since it was virtually impossible to keep her from getting off her jump shots.

Editorially the *Lancaster Intelligencer* said: "The Catholic High Girls drew an outstanding crowd for their game against Plymouth-Whitemarsh at F & M. Estimates of attendance ran as high as 2,000 . . . girls' basketball has come of age in this area."

And now it was back to Harrisburg and the Farm Show Arena, there to meet the undefeated "Blue Jays" of Central Columbia High School, champions of District 4, in the Eastern Inter-District Final.

Several days in advance, all of the teams that made the Finals, boys and girls, were instructed to report to the Penn Harris Motor Inn, at Camp Hill, by noon on Thursday, March 21. There they were housed and cared for under the supervision of the PIAA. The players were given meal tickets with the privilege of eating anything their coaches would permit.

On Thursday night, in the ballroom of the inn, all of the teams were honored at a banquet. The Finals of the tournament were scheduled to begin the next morning, Friday, March 22. Lancaster Catholic would play Central Columbia at 12:30 in the afternoon.

The game started with a good crowd in the stands. After a close first quarter the Crusaderette full-court press began to pay off. They began making numerous steals and interceptions, some of which resulted in 3 on 1 fast breaks and easy layup shots. The score at halftime was 28-16 and the rout was about to begin.

Throughout the game the Crusaderettes outshot their opponents by a 3 to 1 margin; owned control of both backboards with Helen Balasavage in the forefront, and used their zone trap press to force an unbelievable 49 turnovers.

Paula Kambic and jump-shot artist Mimi Senkowski both had 7 field goals, but Paula was high in scoring with 18 points and grabbed 9 rebounds. Playmaker guard Leslie Diehl, "the girl who



**Lancaster Catholic High School
PIAA Girls' State Basketball Champions: 1973-74**

Front row, left to right: Co-Captain Mimi Senkowski, Pam Lautsch, Co-Captain Kathy Butz, Leslie Diehl and Sue Kirchner.

Middle row: Becky Riley, Ellen Senkowski, Sue Bitts, Lynne Parks, Helen Balasavage, Paula Kambic, Linda Butz and Coach Pat Wallace.

Top row: Manager Ann Kirchner, Manager Chris Glah, Manager Jeanne Musser, Kathy Pillion, Mary Glah and Monica Curtin. Intell Photo by Larry Nixdorf.

brings the ball up the court," once again was the perfect ballhandler in the Crusaderette attack.

Lynne Parks had to leave the game after two minutes when her ailing knee began giving her trouble. Her replacement, Monica Curtin, contributed to the victory with a steady floor game. During the fourth quarter the Crusaderette personnel that opposed Central Columbia on the court included Pam Lautsch, Linda Butz, Sue Bitts, Mary Glah, Sue Kirchner, Kathy Pillion, Becky Riley and Ellen Senkowski.

Central Columbia had a 17-0 record going into the game. They had never been behind all year; had won all of their games by 20 to 30 points, and had never been tested. Their coach said after the game: "They (Lancaster Catholic) penetrated the zone well. We wanted them to take the outside shots. We didn't expect them to be

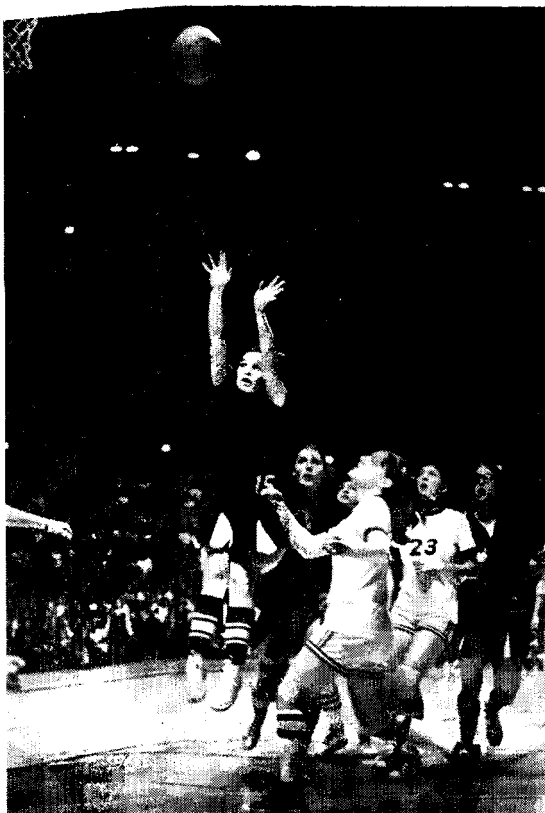
able to go inside that easily." On the other hand, the Blue Jays had difficulty getting close to the basket; at times they could not even advance the ball past midcourt.

At last the final hour of the day of days was at hand. Radio microphones were strung along the 90-foot long press table, and television cameras could be seen in various locations around the Farm Show Arena.

The Crusaderettes now were rated one of the two best girls' teams in the state; yesterday they were one of the best four. As Eastern Regional Champions they were about to meet, here in now familiar surroundings, the Western Regional champions, the Baldwin High School "Highlanders" from suburban Pittsburgh, in the final game of the tournament. Could they do it one more time?

Notwithstanding the tense atmosphere that prevailed, they started the game with an impressive display of shooting, and during the first half sent 50 per cent of their shots zipping through the cords. They ran over their opponents with devastating fast breaks led by Mimi Senkowski, penetrated their zone defense and scored

Left Photo: Monica Curtin, sixth girl on the team roster, started against Baldwin and played into the fourth quarter. **Right Photo:** Guard Mimi Senkowski (5'7") gets off a jumper over Baldwin center, Patti Bucklew (6'1"). Photos by Charles A. Blahusch.





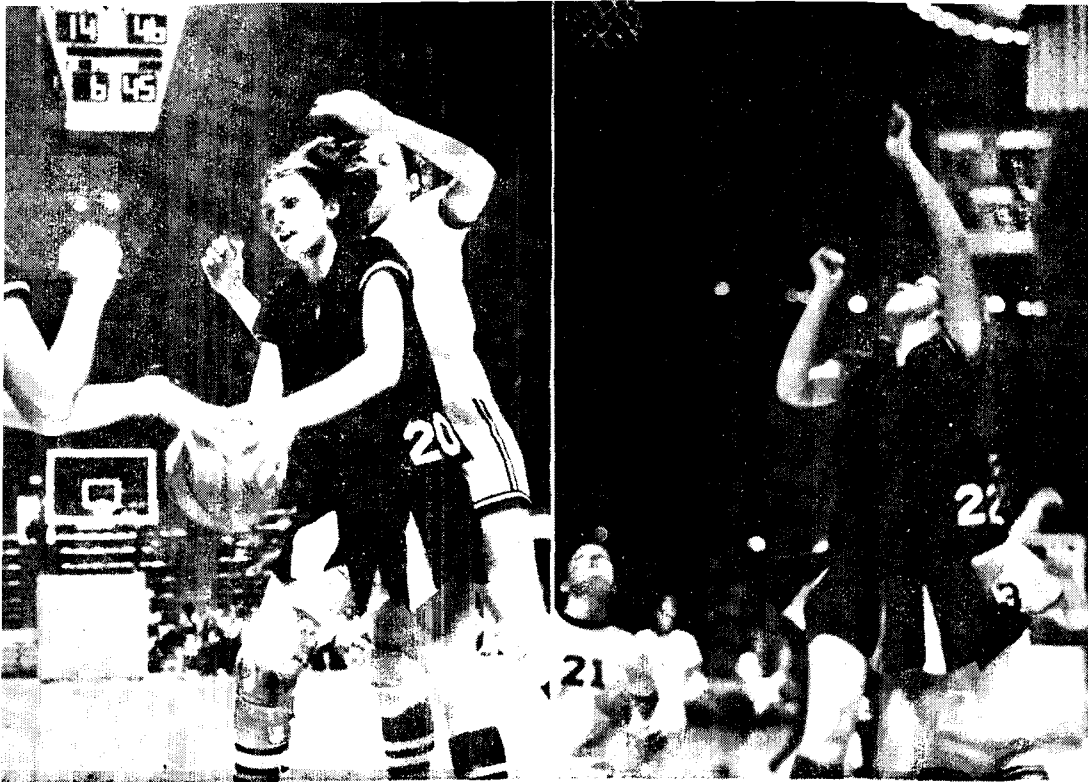
Left Photo: Guard Leslie Diehl drops in a 10-footer. Right Photo: Center Paula Kambic jump-shoots for two more against Baldwin center, Patti Bucklew. Photos by Charles A. Blahusch.

consistently with outside jump shots. At halftime they led 44-14, and already there was little doubt as to who would be the next champions.

They also played nearly errorless defense, spearheaded by Leslie Diehl who held Baldwin's dazzling dribbler and playmaker, Denise DelGreco, to just two points. Patti Bucklew, their tall 6-foot, 1 inch center, who had scored 24 points the night before, was stopped cold and held to just six points by Helen Balasavage. High-scoring Pam Miller was able to connect for nine points.

Late in the first quarter Lynne Parks, who did not start because of her knee problem, replaced Paula Kambic who was in foul trouble. She promptly proceeded to pick off 16 defensive rebounds, started a few fast breaks and converted four offensive rebounds into field goals for her team.

Lancaster Catholic confused Baldwin during most of the game with a 3-2 full-court zone press. It caused them to commit 32 turnovers, but the Crusaderettes were just as effective defensively when they went "man to man" after Baldwin began to beat the press. No Highlander could get off a shot without a defensive hand in front of her eyes.



Left Photo: Forward Lynne Parks comes down with one of her 16 rebounds against Baldwin. **Photo by Robert H. Hertzler.** **Right Photo:** Right-handed Helen Balasavage displays her ambidexterity by scoring left-handed. **Photo by Charles A. Blahusch.**

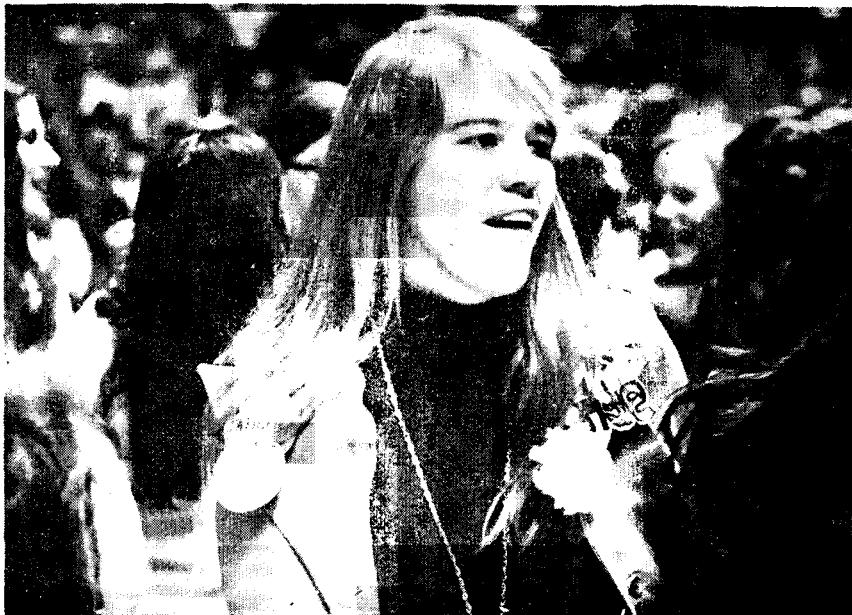
Mimi Senkowski, the little guard who played such a superb floor game, was also the leading scorer for Lancaster Catholic with 28 points, followed by Leslie Diehl with 15. Paula Kambic, the Crusaderette center, did not see much action as a result of early foul trouble. Monica Curtin, who started in place of Lynne Parks, played a steady aggressive game and dropped in several field goals. As was the case the day before against Central Columbia, Coach Wallace played all her reserves, including Pam Lautsch, Linda Butz, Sue Bitts, Mary Glah, Sue Kirchner, Kathy Pillion, Becky Riley and Ellen Senkowski. The final score of the game was 75-32.

As the Crusaderettes left the court they received a tremendous standing ovation from the nearly 5,000 persons in the arena. They had given them a spectacular performance; and now they were the new state champions. One of the girls, tired but happy, probably expressed the jubilant emotion of all the players very well, when, with tears streaming down her face, she said: "This is the greatest day of my life!"

The coaches of the two teams seemed lost for words. All Pat Wallace could say was: Great! Just great! Baldwin coach, Pam Cras-sen, when asked what she thought of the Lancaster girls, replied simply: "They're a fantastic basketball team." But with little Mimi

Senkowski it was different. Not at all a loss for words when a reporter asked her about the game, she said: "I knew that if we played like we can we'd blow them off the court, because no team can beat our basketball team when we're at our best."

The *Intelligencer-Journal* in an editorial noted that: "Sportsmanship seems to be at its highest level at the girls' games." Before the game some of the Plymouth-Whitemarsh girls, who had been eliminated by the Crusaderettes, came over to them to wish them luck. As the teams were introduced at the start of the championship game, the Baldwin players raced the length of the court



Coach Pat Wallace at the moment her girls became State Champions.
Photo by Robert H. Hertzler.

to shake hands with Coach Wallace before returning to the middle to stand. Since Lancaster Catholic had been introduced first, they could not return the gesture. Good sportsmanship prevailed throughout the game. When two Baldwin girls fouled out, several Crusaderettes went to them and shook hands with them before they left the court, and when the game ended, the Baldwin girls first went to the Lancaster bench to congratulate the Crusaderettes before going to their own bench. A little later, the two teams after lining up in single file at opposite ends of the court, walked past each other, with handshakes and embraces taking place all along the line.

A Harrisburg sports writer who covered the game wrote: "Speed, grace and endurance were the keys to the fast break and full-court press that the girls from Lancaster used against Baldwin . . . The Crusaderettes shoot and run like any other team, and have even adopted the personal tap of encouragement seen in other sports. The players weren't noticeably different from any top-notch boys, except that they were girls." Another out-of-county sports writer called them "the only super team in the playoffs, boys or girls."

As the spectators were leaving the arena little bits of comment could be heard being passed back and forth: "They are really good!" "They have class; they're clever!" or "They're fantastic!" All these, and other little tokens of praise, were earned and deserved by the players who had just left the court. Individually they were the material; collectively the structure built by an architect—their coach. Here and there among the many there must have been a few, who, in tribute also remembered the architect, she who was responsible for the team's obvious class, who formulated their techniques, inspired their drive, firmed their discipline and effectively communicated to them her extensive knowledge of the game — Pat Wallace. True, many of the girls came to her with inherent athletic ability, but that alone never produced a championship team.

Mary Patricia Wallace, a native of Wildwood, New Jersey, and a 1959 graduate of Chestnut Hill College for Women, in Philadelphia, came to Lancaster Catholic High School in September of that year.

During the ensuing years she coached girls' basketball and softball; also directed the cheerleaders. She was director of physical education; took turns at teaching English, health and biology, and directed the school's annual musical productions and dramatic plays. She has a master's degree in education, and in recent years has served as full-time guidance counselor.

She began her own basketball career as a member of the Wildwood Catholic High School girls' team. When she came to Lancaster she took over a very weak girls' basketball program, and had her only losing season in her first year as coach. Her overall varsity basketball record is 199 victories and 29 defeats, and all of the Lancaster girls' teams of recent years have reflected, above all else, the character of Pat Wallace.

Hours before the final game of the tournament was played, it was decided that the Crusaderettes would receive a "Welcome Home" reception worthy of their accomplishments, even if they failed to win the championship. It was scheduled to take place at 12:30 o'clock Sunday afternoon in the campus parking area.

Sunday came, and the crowd started gathering an hour and a half before the girls were scheduled to arrive from Harrisburg. Signpainters must have worked all night to make the large signs and



Cheerleaders and students give the victorious Crusaderettes a rousing welcome home after the final game. Father Francis J. Taylor, principal, can be seen walking under basket at left. New Era Photo by Henry Hertzler.

banners that decorated the southeast portals of the high school building. In large bold letters they declared: **Crusaderettes are No. 1! — WELCOME HOME CHAMPS! — It Took Our Girls To Do It! — We're Proud of Our Crusaderettes! and We Are No. 1,** among others.

A platform had been erected during the morning, and as the crowd continued to assemble, the cheerleaders, dressed in their uniforms and swinging their purple and gold pompoms, mounted the platform and began leading the cheering: **We Are Number One!** and **We are the best, the very best!** The Crusader Band was on hand and began playing the liveliest compositions in their repertoire. Gold balloons with "STATE CHAMPS" printed on them were in evidence, and even little children were waving purple and gold pompoms. A carnival air prevailed as city and county officials began to arrive. Representatives of the press were on hand early, as were radio and television personnel, busy readying their equipment.

Before long Mayor and Mrs. Richard M. Scott were escorted to the platform, followed by Mr. E. Jerry Brooks, president of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association, the man who headed the arranging and conducting of the State Tournament. He brought word that the girls had arrived from Harrisburg in their chartered bus, and were at the Lancaster Shopping Center. From there they would be brought to the high school by a police escort.

Newspapermen estimated that by this time 2,000 jubilant, cheering fans had gathered to welcome home their heroines.

At 12:40, ten minutes after the appointed hour, the police escort could be seen approaching the north gate of the campus, followed by the bus carrying the Crusaderettes. As they came nearer they could see the large gathering of people who had come to honor them, and the sound of music and cheering probably reached their ears. As they emerged from their bus a loud and prolonged ovation greeted them, while the band appropriately played "Superstar," the musical theme from a popular motion picture.

Led by their coach, they walked from the bus along an aisle through a veritable sea of people to the platform, where they were officially greeted by the Mayor in behalf of all of the citizens of the community. Student Council President Charles Frey approached the microphone and asked the crowd to "Show these girls how much we appreciate what they've done for the name of our school," and **THAT THEY DID.**

Mayor Scott said that the girls "brought pride and honor to the city, their school and themselves," and that he wanted "to get individual rewards or certificates for each member of the team, and also have a city plaque prepared honoring them."

Father Francis J. Taylor, principal of Lancaster Catholic, said the team "deserved credit for the quality of kids they are . . . there are no prima donnas on this team; they played together, worked together and even sang together . . . their prime interest was the team, not themselves." Speaking of the good will and sportsmanship that exists among our young people, he told of how girls from Garden Spot High School, "our girls' number one competitor in the county," came to Lancaster and called on members of the Catholic High team in their homes the night before their departure for Harrisburg, to wish them success in the tournament. Best wishes came from others in varied forms — even with flowers.

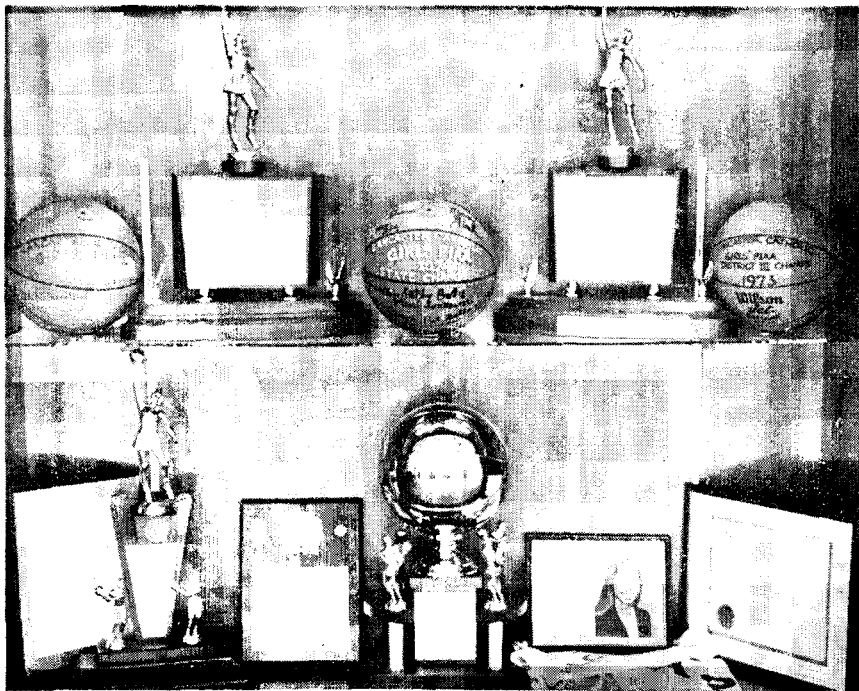
When Coach Wallace stepped to the microphone the members of the team rose to applaud her along with everyone else. She extended "our thanks for the tremendous support both from the students and all of Lancaster County. We're very proud to be the first state champs from Lancaster County."

Mr. Brooks told the people, "I've shared some happy moments with these girls the last two days. In addition to playing together they cried together, and Mimi led them; but it was from happiness."

After the formalities of the celebration had ended, the people lingered for a long time, many hoping for the opportunity to offer personal congratulations. It seemed nobody was ready to go home.

In the weeks that followed the girls were guests at several private receptions held in celebration of their triumph. On Friday, May 3, a day proclaimed by Mayor Richard M. Scott to be **Lancaster**

Catholic High School Girls' Basketball Team Day, they were the luncheon guests of the Mayor and Mrs. Scott at the Hamilton Club. That evening they were honored at a testimonial dinner in the spacious school cafeteria. In attendance were Mayor and Mrs. Scott; the Lancaster County Commissioners, Raymond Herr, Paul Paes and Jean Mowery; Representative in the Pennsylvania State Legislature from Lancaster City, Marvin Miller, Jr.; PIAA District Three Basketball Chairman, Ed. Brunner; representatives of the press, radio and television; parents of the girls, and other relatives and friends



Championship trophies, game balls and the various awards presented to the Lancaster Catholic High School Girls' team. Also Uniform No. 12, worn by Marianne "Mimi" Senkowski, which was permanently retired. Photo by Frank A. Weatherly.

Mayor Scott presented the team, and each of the girls individually, with a formal copy of a congratulatory resolution adopted by the City Council of Lancaster. Representative Miller presented them with a similar resolution adopted by the Pennsylvania State House of Representatives, and Mr. Brunner read a message of commendation from the officials of the PIAA. There were addresses along with other presentations and awards, including the rarely given Lancaster Red Rose Award, presented to the team by the Mayor in

behalf of City Council for bringing unusual honor and recognition to the City of Lancaster. In the final award of the evening the team members, managers and coaches were presented with individually engraved Hamilton wrist watches.

On Wednesday May 8, at the Dutch Town and Country Inn, the Red Rose Chapter of the **Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame** paid tribute to the State Champions by awarding plaques to the school, the coaches and members of the team. Cocalico High School, whose boys' team finished fourth in their state tournament, presented an "Award for Outstanding Achievement" to the girls of Lancaster Catholic, signed by all the members of the Cocalico team. Charles "Chuck" Daly, head basketball coach at the University of Pennsylvania, and Marge Trout, girls' basketball coach at Millersville State College, were the principal speakers.

With this final gathering the formalities of celebration came to an end, and the girls were about to resume the routines of normal day to day living. It probably seemed as though much time had passed since the night they reached the pinnacle of success in their chosen sport of basketball, but the footprints they left along the road to final victory will remain there a long time.