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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 12, 2007

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1983 Richmond Class B Champs To Be Honored As Volleyball Legends

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Nov. 12 – *In an effort to promote educational athletics by showcasing some of the great teams of past years, the Michigan High School Athletic Association instituted a program called “Legends Of The Games” in 1997. This year, the 1982-83 Lower Peninsula Class B Girls Volleyball championship team from Richmond High School will be honored Saturday at the MHSAA Finals at Kellogg Arena in Battle Creek. Thirteen members of the team will be in attendance. The ceremony will take place between the Class C and A title matches at approximately 3:30 p.m.*

The text that follows was written by MHSAA historian Ron Pesch of Muskegon for the souvenir program for this year’s Girls Volleyball Finals:

In the midst of celebrating the school’s centennial, officials in the Richmond Community Schools District were suddenly confronted with a unique problem. In March of 1983, 100 years after opening its doors, the school was presented with its first Michigan High School Athletic Association championship from an unlikely source. The Blue Devil volleyball team had just won the Class B tournament and, much to everyone’s surprise, the trophy was simply too large to fit in the school’s trophy case.

The tiny town located just north of Lake St. Clair and about a half hour’s drive from the Blue Water Bridge that connects Port Huron to Sarnia, Canada, reacted as most any small town would. It celebrated its new-found heroes with Main Street celebrations, congratulatory meals and numerous events. Signs decorated the city.

“It’s been 25 years, but the tremendous amount of support we had from families, friends and the community will always touch my heart,” said Teri McNesky, one of the team’s top spikers.

Four years earlier, the team was winless in 19 games. However, under the guidance of Coach Becky Dickieson, Richmond experienced a dramatic turnaround. Between 1980 and 1982, the Blue Devils posted a 97-12 mark. Still, the 1982 season ended with a loss to Fenton in the Regional tournament final, and the 1983 season started with five straight losses, including a pair to the top-ranked team in Class B, Stevensville Lakeshore, to open the season.

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2-2-2 – Richmond Volleyball Legends

Yet, in the eyes of Dickieson, those defeats were key to the squads run to the crown.

“Losing those two matches on our first day of competition probably helped us in the long run because it made the girls work that much harder,” said the coach.

The hard work paid off as Richmond went undefeated in its next 23 regular season contests, ascending to sixth in the statewide rankings.

The team cruised through District and Regional play, knocking off squads from Algonac, Marine City, Yale and Oscoda. All-conference pick Lori Peake led the way in the Marine City match with 10 service points while McNesky had 11 against Yale in the District championship contest. Katy Marshall, one of the team’s defensive specialists, was recognized for her hustle during District action.

In the Semifinals, the team again squared off against Stevensville Lakeshore. McNesky, Mari Foster and Kathy Mallwitz delivered offensively, while Peake, Cheryl Hein, and Donna Brogan excelled on defense, and the team posted a 15-10, 11-15, 15-8 win over the Lancers to advance to the Finals.

“I remember sitting on the bench watching the team as they played in the Semifinals against Lakeshore,” remembered Dickieson. “They had beaten us badly earlier in the season. My wish was that we make the game last as long as possible. As the team played, I was awestruck by how amazing our team really was. The balls that should have hit the floor were dug up by diving defensive players. Setters were scrambling and hitters were driving the balls to the floor. Wow! I remember feeling like I was in another world, watching this amazing feat from a distance, as we defeated the highly-favored team.”

“We’ve never played better than the Lakeshore match” noted Dickieson at the time. “We were able to keep pressure on them because we played aggressively.”

In the Finals, the Blue Devils again faced Fenton. Located only a few miles from Linden High School, the site of the Class B finals, Fenton fans outnumbered Richmond fans, according to one account, by a five-to-one ratio.

“I still remember the crowd and the noise,” recalled Peake. “We had never experienced that before. It was definitely contagious and so encouraging.”

Richmond had defeated Fenton earlier in the year, but again found itself in a real post-season battle. The Blue Devils opened up a 10-4 lead in the first game, and then watched the momentum swing as Tiger MaryAnne Tokarski served seven straight points. Trailing 11-10, Richmond fought back and, following a timeout, Hein reeled off five points in a row for a 15-11 win. Fenton rallied back for a 15-13 victory in game two, setting up the winner-take-all third match.

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3-3-3 – Richmond Volleyball Legends

Foster and McNesky, both All-State selections following the season, turned up the heat and combined for 15 spikes while Mallwitz tallied 10 service points in the team's 15-10 win in game three.

"The girls really wanted that championship and all contributed," said Dickieson.

"I knew we were a good team but it seemed a bit surreal that on that day we were the best Class B team," said Kim Durst. "How exciting it felt to be that team."

"The team was comprised of talented, intelligent, considerate young ladies," said Foster, recalling her high school teammates. "It was an honor and a pleasure to practice, travel, and compete with these outstanding individuals."

"Our team had great chemistry," added Deanna Scaris. "The girls all got along well and there was a lot of camaraderie. Our coach Becky was a guiding light and always kept our team on track with her overall enthusiasm and optimism."

"One of the things I remember most fondly was our warm-up song," added Marshall. "To this day, if I hear Pat Benatar's "Hit Me with Your Best Shot", I am flooded with memories and I get an intense urge to spike a volleyball (which has always been a challenge for me at 5- 2) ."

"The incredible optimistic spirit of our team was a reflection of our coach," said Marshall, summing up the thoughts of her teammates. "She taught us the joy of playing the game and giving our all. Actually winning the state championship was a wonderful byproduct of hard work, determination and pure fun!"

Expected to be in attendance at Saturday's presentation are (last names are from playing days): Donna Brogan, Kim Durst, Mari Foster, Sandy Hamilton, Kathy Mallwitz, Katie Marshall, Teri McNesky, Lori Peake, Deanna Scaris, Janet Schweiger, Assistant Coach Les Francisco, Assistant Coach Dave McCauley, and Head Coach Becky Dickieson.

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 1,600 public and private senior high schools and junior high/middle schools which exists to develop common rules for athletic eligibility and competition. No government funds or tax dollars support the MHSAA, which was the first such association nationally to not accept membership dues or tournament entry fees from schools. Member schools which enforce these rules are permitted to participate in MHSAA tournaments, which attract approximately 1.6 million spectators each year.

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