

HERB GARBUTT / CANADIAN CHAMPION

Holy Rosary holds off Bears for eighth straight north title

By Herb Garbutt
METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

The finalists and the outcome may have been predictable. How it unfolded certainly wasn't.

The Holy Rosary Hawks won their eighth consecutive North Halton girls basketball title Tuesday by beating the St. Brigid Bears, their longtime rivals who have contested the last six of those championships. But the Hawks, who ran their two-year unbeaten streak to 42 games, had to hang on for dear life for a 33-32 victory as the Bears rallied from a five-point deficit in the last 40 seconds, missing a shot at the buzzer that could have ended Holy Rosary's reign.

"My heart is still pounding," said Holy Rosary coach Cin Johnston, a day after the victory.

What made the nail-biting finish all the more incredible was how Holy Rosary dominated the opening half. Despite a major disadvantage in the height department, the Hawks completely shut down the Bears, holding them to just four points in the first half — shutting them out in the opening quarter.

"We pretty much just got our rebounds and had good position," said Shannon Ruthven, who shared the rebounding duties with Marina Furik.

"What we were lacking in height we were able to get back in our shooting," said Johnston, who coaches the Hawks with Jackie Da Ros. "We were faster on our feet and we were able to get steals and intercept a lot of their passes."

Those turnovers led to points at the other end. Led by Hayley Schroder, who scored 10 points in the half and finished with team-high 14, the Hawks built a 17-4 lead by halftime.

With a couple of baskets by Ruthven, Holy Rosary extended its lead to 25-10 in the third quarter and seemed to be on its way to an easy victory.

St. Brigid fought its way back into the game thanks to a nine-point run, all scored by the Bears' Rachel Hollywood, to close the gap to six heading into the final quarter.

"It was really quick and we didn't know how it happened," said the Hawks' Danielle Vis. "It was pretty intense after that."

Improving St. Brigid's fortunes even more was the fact that Schroder fouled out in the final minute of the quarter.

"The difference was we started taking advantage of our height and outrebounding them," said Bears coach Richard Brown. "Then when they lost (Schroder), it was a different game."

St. Brigid cut the lead to four early in the final quarter but good work by Vis and Furik to create turnovers helped Holy Rosary to rebuild the lead to 33-26 with four minutes to play. Holy Rosary then began to work the clock. St. Brigid was forced to foul the Hawks to send them to the line and the strategy worked as Holy Rosary's shooting suddenly went cold.

Though instructed by Johnston to pass the ball and kill time off the clock, the Hawks looked for the basket to put away their rivals and when it rattled off the rim, St. Brigid took the ball down the court and cut the lead to 33-30 with 35 seconds remaining.

St. Brigid would capitalize once more after a couple of missed foul shots by the Hawks, pulling within one with nine seconds to play. The Bears then tracked down a stray inbound pass and got one last shot off.

"I was just hoping it was going to

miss," Schroder said.

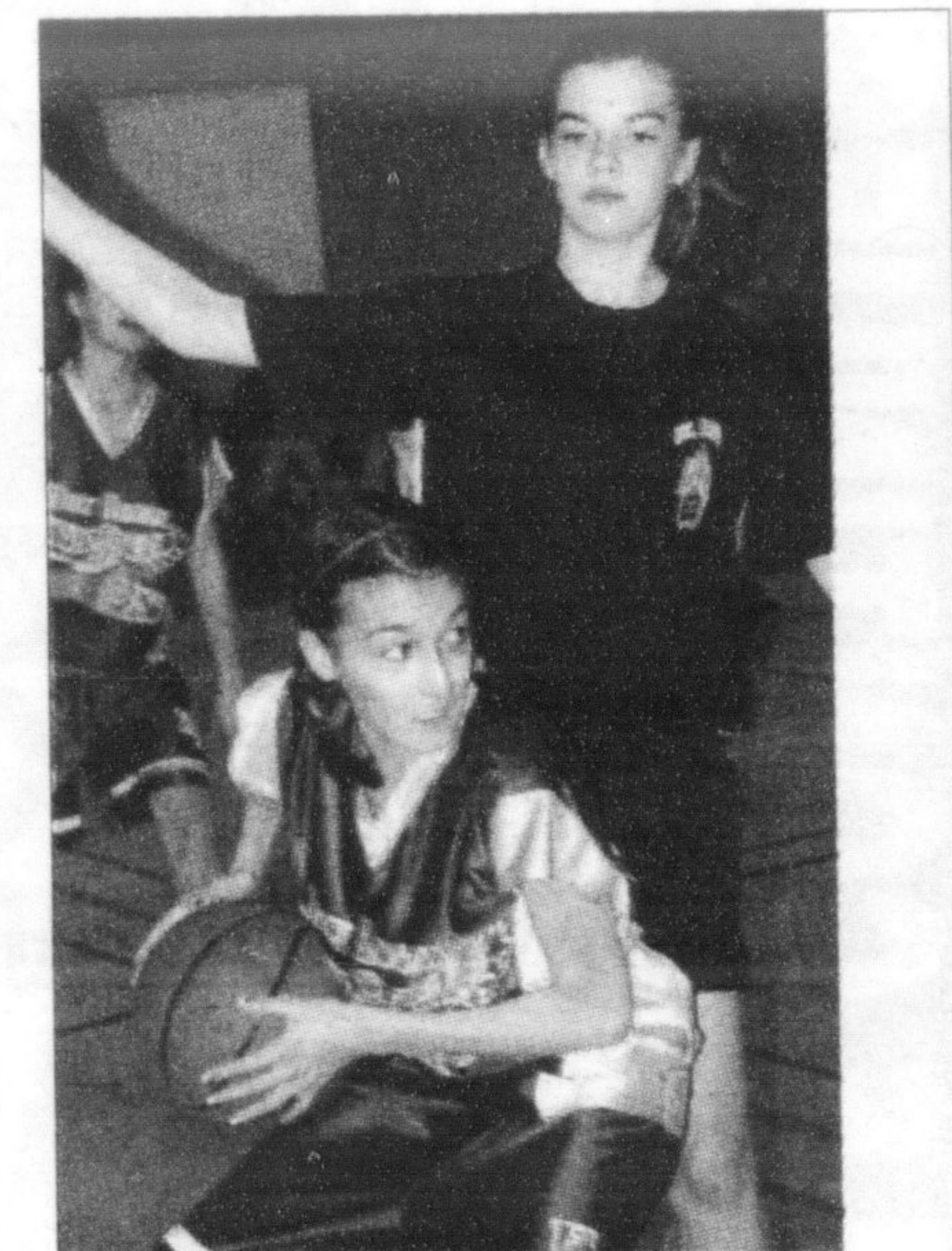
It did, sailing over the rim as the Hawks held on for the victory.

"Last year we won Haltons in volleyball and basketball," Schroder said. "To win two gold plaques is pretty amazing."

"Now we're trying for our third," added Ruthven.

The Hawks will try to defend the Halton title they won last year in two weeks time.

In an all-Milton bronze medal game, it was Guardian Angels topping St. Anthony's 34-11.

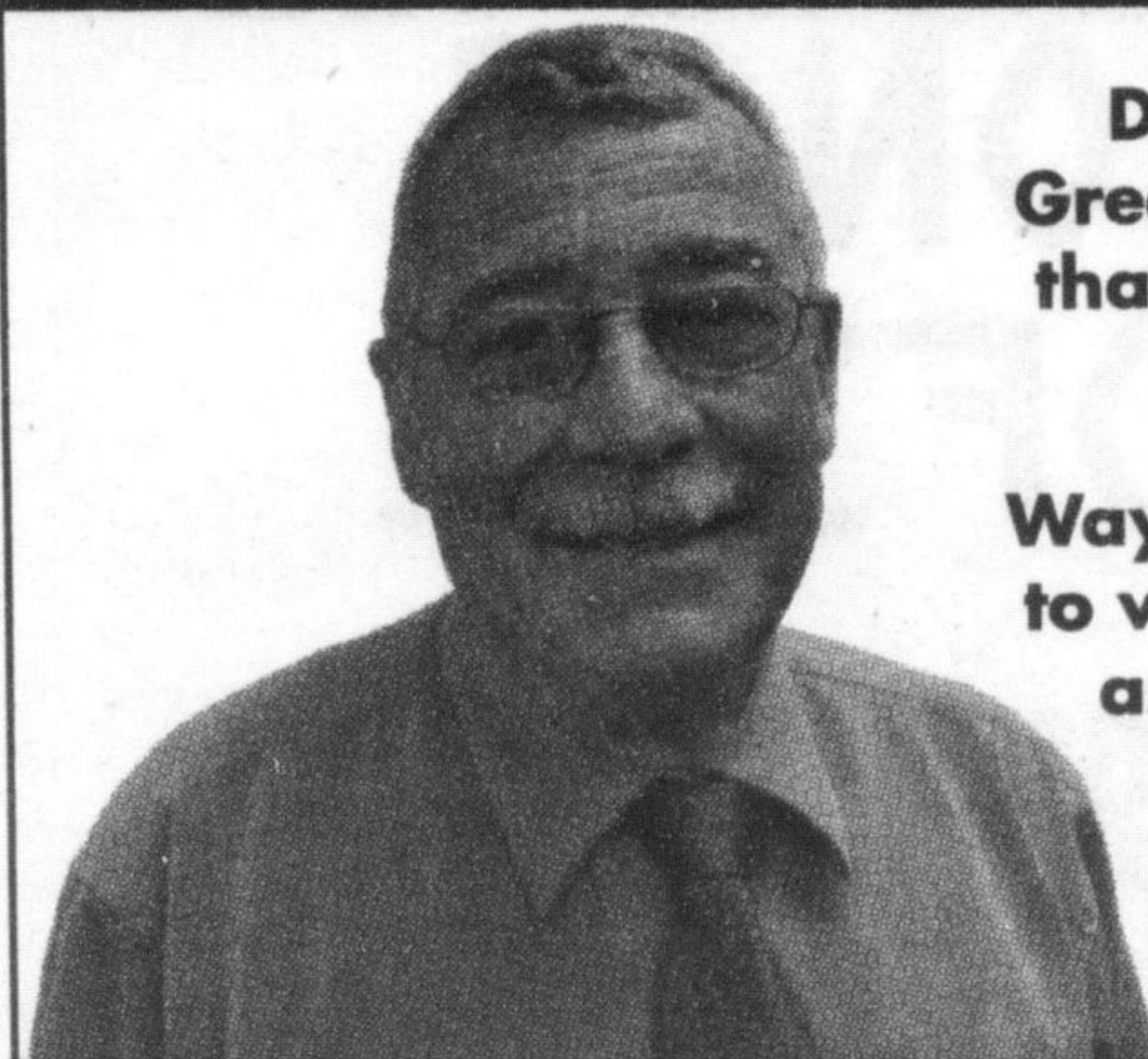


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ME AND MY SHADOW: Holy Rosary's Hayley Schroder looks to get a shot away against a much larger St. Brigid opponent in Tuesday's North Halton final.

SOARING THROUGH THE LANE: Danielle Vis of the Holy Rosary Hawks drives toward the basket past Jessica Gormley of the St. Brigid Bears while Hawks teammate Shannon Ruthven, left, provides support. Hayley Schroder had 14 points and Marina Furik added nine as the Hawks held off a late charge by St. Brigid to win the North Halton girls' basketball title 33-32. It was the eighth consecutive title for Holy Rosary.

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