



**MICK
McCABE**

Flint Powers gave us something to believe in

Flint Powers was leading Detroit Renaissance by two points in the Class B girls state championship.

With less than 30 seconds left Saturday night, Renaissance star Shamira Thedford took a short jump shot.

"It was a shot I hit all night," said Thedford, who made 12 of 17 shots for 24 points. "It was dropping all night."

The ball hit the rim, bounced up, hit the rim again and bounced out.

Powers' Brandy Pickens leaped in the air and swatted the ball to Wendy Middleditch, who was fouled. She missed the free throw, but Pickens grabbed the rebound, scored and was fouled for a three-point play and a five-point lead.

"When I saw the ball come off I said: 'Liz, just let me get this one,'" Pickens said. "I was asking Liz for that one last shot, that one last rebound."

Liz is Liz Hallman, the former teammate and Flint Powers senior who died last July in her sleep because of a defective heart valve.

Keeping the faith

You either believe in certain things or you don't.

In the midst of my 27th year in the business, I am disappointed to find myself becoming more and more cynical.

And I don't even have to deal with greedy owners and selfish millionaire athletes.

You have coaches and schools that simply do not follow the rules.

You have parents and athletes who have lost all touch with reality. Some athletes believe their ability allows them to blow off all academic responsibilities.

Parents think a coach's role is to make sure their child plays every minute of every game, is the leading scorer, makes all-state and receives an athletic scholarship.

That is what high school athletics has become.

But then comes along this Flint Powers girls basketball team.

You see young girls who are supposed to enjoy the best year of their life — their senior year in high school — and it begins to crumble even before it begins when their friend dies unexpectedly.

The day Liz Hallman was buried was one of the saddest days of my life and I barely knew her. I was overwhelmed by the incredible grief these girls felt.

After the funeral I drove to Michigan State's girls basketball camp and I wondered how these girls could ever play basketball again, as if it really mattered.

Not only was Hallman the team's best player, but she was the soul of the team. She was the one girl who inspired her teammates, making them better than they thought possible.

Every championship team has a girl like Hallman. Without her, Powers was not great. I questioned if it could even be good this season. Early in the season the Chargers were not very good, splitting their first six games.

An incredible turnaround

But Powers coach Kathy McGee did one of the best coaching jobs in the history of Michigan high school basketball. She allowed her players to grieve the loss of their friend, but she also made it possible for them to recover and direct their hurt into something positive.

More important, she allowed the players to make the decision to come out of their sorrow and turn their season around. She told them everyone in the state would understand if they had a poor season and that would be fine with her, too. Actually, there were many days she hurt so bad she no longer wanted to coach.

So these girls took it upon themselves to turn their season around and try to win the state championship that Hallman had told them they would win a few months before her death.

And Saturday night in Kellogg Arena the ball bounced off the rim a couple of times. It could just as easily have bounced in.

Who knows, maybe Liz was up there somewhere tipping it away. You either believe in such things or you don't.

A few moments later these Powers girls were state champs. The most unlikely state champs ever. They did it by capturing the passion that made Hallman so special.

Sometimes we question the value of high school athletics. When we do we should remember Liz Hallman, Kathy McGee and these wonderful Powers girls.

And we should believe.