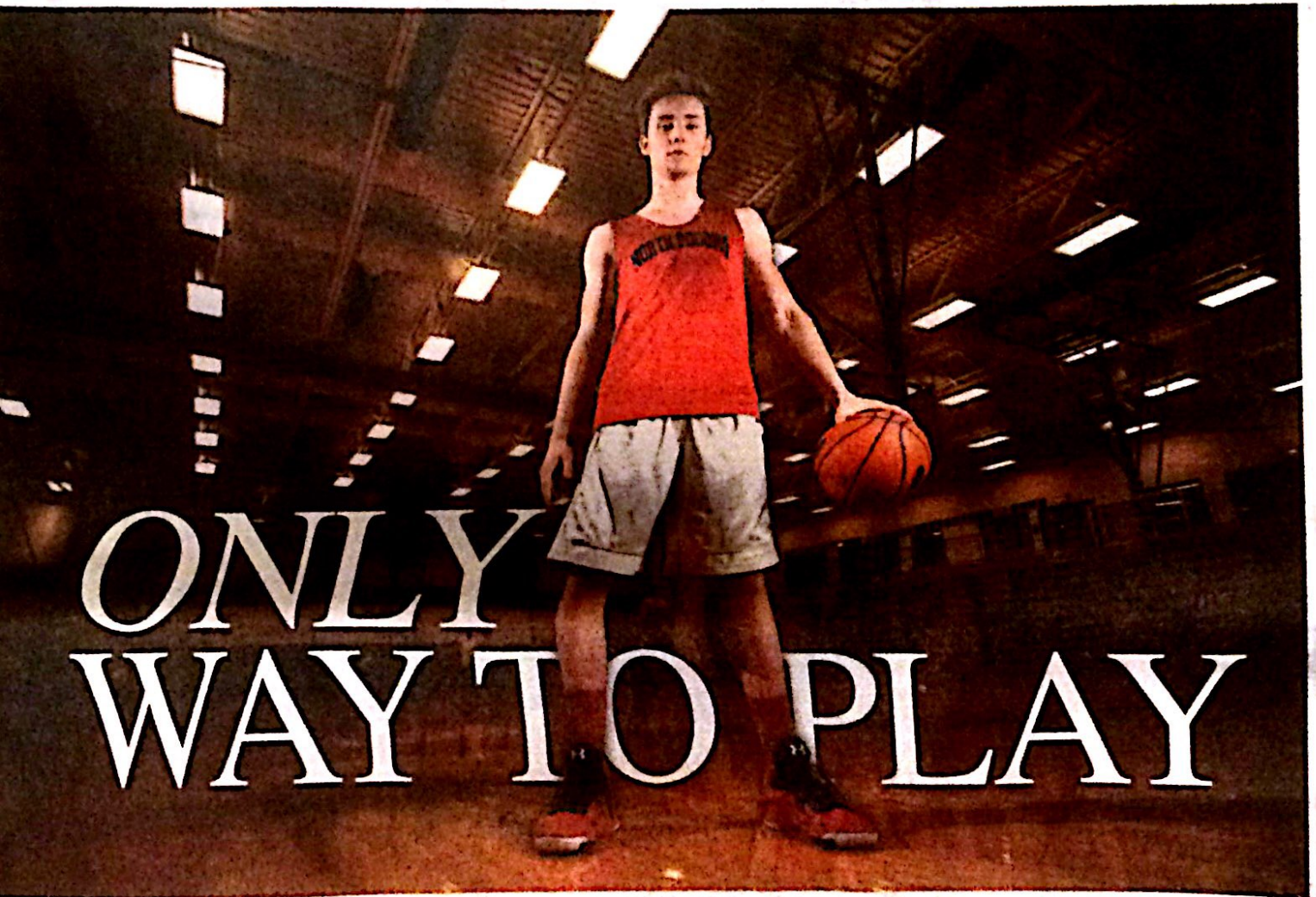


HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL



JASON FARMER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

McGee brings hard-nosed game, work ethic to Trojans

Forward has North Pocono in hunt for division title.

BY JOBY FAWCETT
STAFF WRITER

It's practice.

North Pocono players are racing up and down the floor, executing plays, breaking open and taking shots.

As the ball goes up, Michael McGee, sweat pouring from his brow, crashes to the post and on a miss attacks for a rebound and putback.

Later, he dives on the floor for a loose ball, sacrificing his body, so that his group maintains possession.

When walking along the baseline as others take their turns in the half-court drill, he shouts instructions, guiding his teammates.

It may be practice, but McGee only knows one way to play. He is a nose-to-the-grindstone player, one who relies heavily on a combination of ability and commitment.

McGee's work ethic has made him a model student and a standout basketball player. His contributions and dedication have led to success.

Inside

Injury bug bites Wallenpaupack's Scartelli. Page **C3**

This season, his last, the 6-foot-2 forward has the Trojans in contention for a Lackawanna Division II title.

"We have been having a really good year," McGee said. "It really started last spring. We have been working hard. Our motto is 'Work hard every day, every play,' and we have been doing that lately.

"We are all doing our parts."

Like many in the sport, McGee got started at an early age.

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JASON FARMER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

North Pocono's Michael McGee is averaging 10 points per game in league play this season.

McGEE: Work ethic sparks teammates

FROM PAGE C1

As an eager 6-year-old, he would run up and down the floor at a sprinter's pace, displaying an aggressiveness to get to the basketball.

He struck up a friendship with Tim Blaine and the two grew up with the game.

"I always knew he would be a good player," Blaine said. "He is a great worker."

While basketball had captured his attention, McGee balanced time for all of his interests.

He began playing the piano and performed in school concerts all the way until junior high.

Occasionally now, when McGee needs to relax or unwind, he will sit and just bang out a song or two on the ebony and ivory keys.

"Playing the piano at a young age really has helped me," McGee said. "I was a shy kid and not outgoing, but with the piano, it helped me build confidence that I use in sports and every day life."

"It's relaxing to just sit down and play. It's really fun for me."

A keen interest in science helped him keep schoolwork and sports in perspective. McGee incorporated his competitive spirit as a member of the Science Olympiad team that boasts three regional championships and trips to the state competition.

"He is just a great kid," Blaine said. "In the classroom, which is first obviously, he works really

hard and that translates into how hard he works on the court."

Regardless of the challenge, McGee puts his mind to conquering it. His coaches even praised his culinary skills after a team sponsored chili cook off. He's even dedicated to having an outstanding hat collection, one he is extremely proud of.

"I have more than 30," McGee said. "My favorite is probably one I had when I was really young. It's a SpongeBob Squarepants hat with him holding a Krabby Patty with Plankton on the back trying to steal it."

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North Pocono is guided by Joe Ferguson, who is in his first year with the program.

His no-nonsense approach to coaching is well known. Ferguson's teams in both girls and boys basketball have won championships with a relentless, often suffocating, defensive style and a deliberate offensive philosophy that relies on sharp execution.

His teams have been on the winning side of the ledger more often than not, because of athletes willing to buy-in and give an exhaustive effort every day.

Having a player like McGee helps fuel the philosophy.

"He has been the leader right from the start," Ferguson said. "His example of how he works, it's not often you find someone who works like him. He plays hard every day

and that carries over into the classroom and in the community.

"That's a credit to his family and how well he was raised."

In league play, McGee is averaging 10.0 points per game. He has more than 10 rebounds almost every night and probably as many bruises from his physical play.

"I've always kind of done the dirty work," McGee said. "This year, it has been more noticeable for me. I want to crash the boards and get down on the floor for loose balls. I always want to give everything I have."

McGee, 17, spends nearly all of his energy, knowing his playing days are inevitably winding down. It doesn't go unnoticed.

"He hustles for every rebound," Blaine said. "That is just what we need out there every night."

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It's been a long road for McGee.

One made smoother by getting as much — if not more — out of basketball and school, than he has put in.

As the season marches on, he will continue to pour his heart into every opportunity, whether it be in a game or at practice.

He and his teammates will continue to reap the rewards of hard work.

"We are always there for each other and we have a team that is truly a family," McGee said.

"That's the most important thing."