

## LEO MARCH NEWS



Leo's Mykel Hampton, Darius Branch, Coach Shawn Frison, Darius Oliver and Jamil Green meet the press after the Lions' victory over Woodlawn in the state tournament semifinals.

### UPCOMING IMPORTANT DATES

#### ACT TEST

April 9 at 8 am

#### HALES VS. LIONS BASEBALL

April 11 at 4:30 pm

#### WINDY CITY TRACK RELAYS

April 16 at 10 am

### Dear Leo Family,

When **Darius Branch's** potential game-tying three-pointer came up short in the final seconds of the Class 1-A state championship game in Peoria on March 12, groans were audible all over the South Side. I felt heartsick myself ... and no, not because Branch was fouled on the shot and it wasn't called.

I wanted that championship for this Leo team as badly as I've ever wanted anything in my life. Because I know the players as people, most of them seniors who have been with us for four years. I know what great kids they are, how hard they have worked, how well they do in school. How well they have represented us, and the pride they have taken in upholding the Leo spirit and tradition. A state title, I thought, was their just reward. What a way to kick off our 90-year anniversary celebration.

It wasn't meant to be—LeRoy High School took us 38-35 in that championship game at the Peoria Civic Center, after we'd survived our semifinal on a buzzer-beater to augment victories in the Melrose Park Regional, the Elgin Sectional and the DeKalb Supersectional. After winning 29 games total in the previous three seasons, we finished 24-9 in **Coach Shawn Frison's** first year. We placed second in the state in Class 1-A, and Branch and **Darius Oliver** made the 10-man All-State team.

Heartsick? As we assembled for the awards presentation I no longer was. I was proud, very proud, for reasons that go beyond the fancy runner-up trophy we have been parading around the South Side as though it were the Stanley Cup. **These Lions were a team we will remember, for all the right reasons. They're symbolic of what's going on at Leo High School, starting with the fact that 10 of the 14 players who dressed for the tournament are honor-roll students.** The IHSA held a banquet for the eight participating 1-A and 2-A teams the night before the tournament began. Our kids were not only the sharpest dressed among the 120 or so young men in the room, they were the most engaging to their fellow guests, a fact that wasn't lost on tournament sponsors and officials.

As I was checking us out of our hotel after the championship game, the manager came out to offer congratulations "on our fine showing." More important, he made it a point to tell me that the Leo party was as courteous and well-behaved a group as he has encountered in the 20-plus years his hotel has been hosting tournament teams.



**Willie Shelton, ESPN's Michael Wilbon, Christian Armstrong, Dan McGrath and Marcus Pass at a News Literacy Project Conference at the Chicago Sun-Times.**

It was gratifying to hear, but not surprising. I knew we had good basketball players at Leo. And I know they are even better people, symbolic, again, of what's going on at our school. Judging by the size and diversity of the crowds that followed us, many of you share that assessment. Our kids were thrilled to look into the stands and see so many supportive faces. For the 90 years of its existence, one thing about Leo has never changed: It is a special place in the service of special people. Be it ever thus.

The news isn't all basketball. As we move toward our eighth straight year of 100 percent graduation, college acceptance letters are rolling in for the seniors, most accompanied by generous offers of financial assistance. We held an Honors Assembly for the first semester in early February, and 35 percent of the student body was recognized for making the honor roll. Juniors **Christian Armstrong** and **Willie Shelton**, standouts in our Journalism/News Literacy class, were invited to speak at a National News Literacy Project conference at the Chicago Sun-Times on Feb. 12. Their poise and smarts made a real impression on a panel that included some of Chicago's most distinguished journalists, as well as ESPN's Michael Wilbon, the featured speaker—we heard from all of them.

On March 19, a delegation from our world-renowned Gospel Choir helped the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph celebrate St. Joseph's Day by providing the music for a prayer service at the CSJ Motherhouse in La Grange. As God is my judge the nuns treated our singers like rock stars, requesting two encores after their uplifting four-song set was completed.

**I could go on, but I don't like to brag. Fact is, there are so many great kids doing so many great things at Leo that they are a source of pride for all off us, a force for good in an increasingly violent city. Thank you for your support of the Leo Mission. There is no better investment in our city's future.**

***Wishing you health, happiness and abundant blessings this Easter season.***

Sincerely,

Dan McGrath '68  
President Leo High School