

FALL'S FINEST

North Andover fall hoop league opens at Herman Youth Center this week

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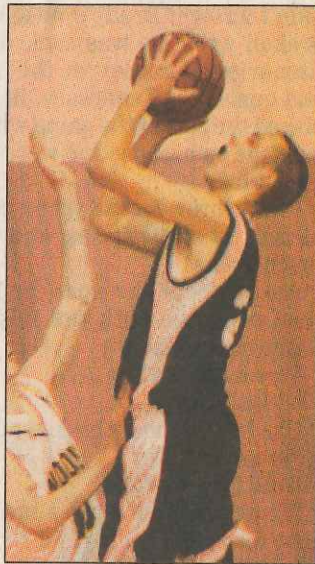
NORTH ANDOVER — September and October have never meant so much to North Andover's Derek Collins.

The first three-quarters ravaged by bad breaks and injuries, Collins needs every on-court opportunity he can get to prove that the Knight senior has returned to lethal weapon status.

He needs a vehicle to showcase his skills. Fortunately, he's got the J.J. Donovan & Sons league at the Herman Youth Center — the Cadillac of all fall hoop leagues.

"That league has always been great, I mean I've been in it for four years now," said

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Courtesy photo

Derek Collins looks to return to his former glory during this year's J.J. Donovan & Sons league.

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HOOPS: Knights' Collins looks to show off skills

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Collins. "(Director) Rick Gorman gets a lot of D2 and D3 coaches there on a nightly basis. The exposure is exceptional.

"I'm looking forward to it. I think it can be good for me. Hopefully, I can turn some heads."

The brainchild of Youth Center director Rick Gorman, a self-admitted hoop junkie, the league has become a recruiting staple for small colleges all over New England.

A dozen top boys teams, including Central Catholic, Lawrence, Methuen, Andover and North Andover, Methuen, Salem, St. John's, Whittier and Pelham, compete in the 12-team boys league.

New this fall is the Sunday night girls league as well.

"It's a move we've always wanted to make," said Gorman. "We're excited to have

them, and we definitely expect this to grow."

Of course, the fall league's first priority has been to help teams prepare for the winter season.

"It's always been a great way of getting the guys together," said Collins.

But for high school seniors looking to extend their careers, this might as well be the Christmas Tournament.

"There's always a bunch of coaches around, and I want to keep playing," said Central Catholic forward Doug Gemmell. "I've gotten a lot of calls already. I have to keep showcasing myself. There are different coaches showing up all the time, so you just don't know who might be watching.

"I try to play as hard as I can all the time. But knowing there might be that one coach I need out there keeps me looking at going as hard as I can."