

# BOXSCORE

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## THE 1954 INDIANA ALL-STARS

by

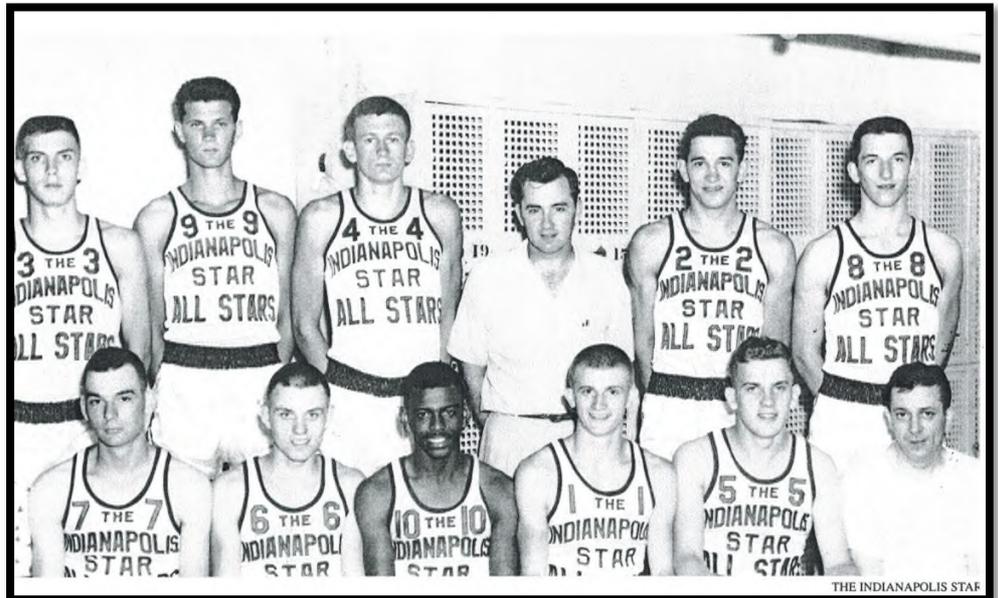
Cliff Johnson, Editor

Indiana's 1953-54 basketball season was an unforgettable one, to those of us old enough to remember it. But even for others, 1954 is marked in basketball history as "the miracle year." The final game of that season is recorded in dozens of

published books, a popular film, video presentations, and countless printed articles, as one of the greatest basketball events of all time. It was the game, of course, in which the little town of Milan captured the imagination of millions of fans by fielding a team that won the state high school basketball crown. Its

lasting legacy was a 32-30 cliff-hanger against a team considered by most authorities, at the end of that season, to be virtually unstoppable, the Muncie Central Bearcats.

Many of us associated with IHSBHS watched that game, either in person or on TV. Harley Sheets, Roger Robison, and I, for example,



Front row, left to right: Joe Hobbs, Sheridan; Ray Craft, Milan; Bill Mason, Ind. Crispus Attucks; Bob Plump, Milan; Arley Andrews, T.H. Gerstmeyer; Jim Morris, Trainer. Back row, left to right: Pete Obremsky, Jeffersonville; Jerry Clayton, Evansv. Bosse; Larry Hedden, Mississinewa; Angus Nicoson, Coach; Ray Ball, Elkhart; Jack Quiggle, S.B. Central. Milton Baltimore, Jr., student manager from Indianapolis Tech, does not appear in this photo.

all witnessed the game and then were handed high school diplomas two months later. The same can be said of members Norm Jones, Jim Mallers, Kent Milburn, Gene Racht, Elmer Reynolds, Roger Schroeder (of that same Milan team), Walter Smith, and possibly a few others.

Two of the stalwarts on that Milan team, 5-10 Bobby Plump and 5-8 Ray Craft, were selected to represent the Indiana All-Star team that summer for its annual engagement against the Kentucky All-Stars. Plump had been the player who sank the final field goal that won the game against Muncie that Saturday in March. Added to Milan's small school talent were some the best players the state had ever produced. They included 6-3 Pete Obremsky of Jeffersonville, 6-3 Arley Andrews of Terre Haute Gerstmeyer, 6-4 Ray Ball of Elkhart, 6-6 Jerry Clayton of Evansville Central, and 6-3 Jack Quiggle--who had been a member of the South Bend Central squad that conquered Milan in the afternoon finals just the year before. Quiggle and his teammates had then gone on to win the state championship that evening.

The All-Star game on Saturday, June 19, at Butler Fieldhouse, was another cliff-hanger, but won as per usual by Indiana, 75-74. The luckless bluegrass teams had prevailed in only a single contest against Indiana since 1939, but were usually within striking distance by the end of every encounter. The conclusion of this game was marked once again by a last minute goal by Plump, his only one of the game, but the one that decided the game's outcome. He seemed to thrive on last minute heroics. That pattern apparently endured throughout his college career at Butler, where he set new scoring records.

Jack Quiggle led Indiana in scoring with 17 points. Kentucky

was led by 5-11 John Butcher from Pikeville with 19 points and 6-3 Billy Cassady from Inez with 17. Butcher received the game's "Star of Stars" award. The Kentucky contingent had seemed poised to celebrate a victory with about one minute remaining in the game, and with a 74-71 lead. Obremsky, however, was fouled while shooting and sank both charity tosses. He then stole an errant Kentucky pass but missed his shot. The ball bounced off the rim to the left side where Plump grabbed it up and then calmly pitched it in. Play continued, and with less than half a minute to go, Kentucky's 6-3 forward Lincoln Collinsworth was fouled. He missed both shots from the line, possibly disturbed by noises from the crowd of 12,205 screaming spectators. Indiana then took the last rebound and Craft's deft dribbling ran out the clock.

### **RECORD BOOK ON WW II HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL NOW AVAILABLE**

*"Indiana High School Basketball History; Team Rosters and Season Recaps for the World War II years 1941-42 through 1944-45"* has been developed and organized to offer readers an inside look at historical Indiana basketball records related to a specific era, the WW II years. This period was the precursor to what is now popularly referred to as Indiana's golden age of basketball. The author is Cliff Johnson, Boxscore Editor. A photo and further description of the book appear on this issue's last two pages.

The content of this 852-page book consists of (1) an alphabetized listing of all schools entering the state tournament during WW II; (2) an alphabetically organized data block and team roster (the main work) for each of those schools; (3) a running account of all AP poll rankings

during each season; and (4) an independent tabulation of all state tournament results for each WW II season, from the sectionals through the finals.

The book price is \$48 plus shipping and handling, and can be ordered from Rowland Press at 199 N. 9<sup>th</sup> St., Noblesville, IN 46060, phone (317) 773-1829, or the Indiana Basketball Hall Of Fame, One HOF Court, New Castle, IN 47362, phone (765) 529-1891. It may also be available at various bookstores, at moderate mark-ups.

The ISBN identification, if needed, is 978-0-692-57602-5.

### **LOGOOTE, THE 1962-63 SEASON, AN UNDEFEATED TEAM by Jack Butcher**

*Editor's note: By the beginning of Jack Butcher's sixth season as Loogootee's coach, the Lions had begun to gain statewide acclaim as a consistent winner, having registered 88 wins out of 118 games played, a 75% W-L margin. The previous two years they had also captured sectional championships. Coach Butcher eventually went on to set an all-time record number of wins for an Indiana high school coach, finishing with 806 of them (all at Loogootee) by the time he retired after the 2001-02 season. His overall winning percent was 76% during that 45-year career, with four undefeated seasons supplementing that achievement. Most fans have heard or read about the undefeated 1975 season when the Lions made it all the way to the final game of the State Tournament before succumbing to an opponent. But Butcher's undefeated 1962-63 squad might be less familiar. Here it is, as recounted (in a markedly abridged form) from Jack's own book entitled "The Coach Remembers" (pub. 2010).*

Some might recall a period in October 1962 when world events became so tense that it was enough to take many minds off of high school basketball, at least for a time. In a bold move that threatened the United States, USSR Premier Krushchev deployed nuclear missiles off the coast of Cuba and ordered his vessels to continue delivering even more added armament. This was much too close to home for our comfort and, when diplomacy failed to deter these activities, our young President Kennedy established a naval blockade off the island and ordered the U.S. Navy to prevent the delivery of more missiles. The world held its collective breath until the Soviet Union backed down; the ships turned around and the missiles were dismantled. While many were aware and at least concerned with the situation, I am not sure that most of us really appreciated how close the world had come to nuclear war.

On a beautiful fall day that October, we were still free to hit the hardwood for the first day of basketball practice in the old gym. In the barber shops and watering holes of Loogootee where local basketball gurus gathered, there was still talk about the sectional basketball championships the Lions had captured two years in a row. Their hopes were high for the new season too, given that we had a solid nucleus of players returning with which to build another great team. The team's mainstays were Junior Gee (5-10), Bob Haines (6-2), Mike Bohlinger (5-7), Dave Strickland (6-1), Darrell Smith (6-4), Roger Taylor (5-7), Terry Hall (6-0), Bill Drake (6-5), Charles Siebe (5-9), and Steve Page (5-8).

We opened the season on Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>, as usual against the Shawswick Farmers. It was our home game, but we moved it to the Hatchet House in Washington to accommodate the



**DEFENDING CHAMPS**—Members of the team are (Front row) Charles Siebe, Mike Bohlinger, Junior Gee, Steve Page, Roger Taylor. (Back row) Tom Medina and Ralph Haines (student managers), Terry Hall, Darrell Smith, Bill Drake, Dave Strickland, Bob Haines, and Coach Jack Butcher.

expected crowd. By the end of the game, Loogootee had overwhelmed the Farmers 86 to 43; a great start to the new season that left our fans wanting more. While the scoring was well-balanced this game, Junior Gee, Bob Haines, and Mike Bohlinger collectively racked up 56 of the points.

Six days later, on Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>, Loogootee took on the Oolitic Bearcats in their home cage. The hometown Bearcats saved their most productive quarter for the last and scored 15 points, but the boys from Loogootee rattled in 26 to win the game 85-49. Gee, Bohlinger, and Smith led the scoring.

The Shoals Jug Rox were the next team on the Lions' dance card. We built a 25-11 lead at halftime and never looked back. Unable to find a defensive solution to the Lions' powerful offense, Shoals grudgingly gave up 22 points in the final quarter, and lost the game 66-38. Gee, Haines, and Smith topped the Lions' offensive barrage with 48 of the points.

Gym bags in tow, the Washington Catholic Cardinals flew into town Nov. 21<sup>st</sup>. A standing-room-only

crowd saw the Lions quickly let them know who was king as they plucked out a 24-15 lead in the first quarter. Things got even more depressing for the Cardinals after the half. Loogootee had a good night! Every player got in the game as we hit for an impressive 91 points to Washington's 52.

The Lions continued to pound their opponents all season long. Subsequent game scores for the remainder of the regular season's schedule were as follows:

Lions 62, Montgomery 38; Lions 65, Springs Valley 49; Lions 90, Worthington 46; Lions 65, Petersburg 46; Lions 62, Odon 46; Lions 76, Elnora 37; Lions 72, Dubois 38; Lions 104, Montgomery 31; Lions 74, Bloomfield 43; Lions 55, Washington Catholic 46; Lions 82, Shoals 61; Lions 78, Switz City 31; Lions 60, Orleans, 23; Lions 89, Plainville 49.

Our regular season was over; the Loogootee Lions could boast an undefeated season—18 straight victories. We had annihilated the opposition on offense, averaging 75.50 points per game in the process, a Loogootee record that still stands.

The defense was also formidable, holding opponents to only 45.05 ppg. The average win margin had been 30.45 ppg, also a standing Lion record.

The week before the final game, the IHSAA had conducted the annual sectional draw. Listening to the radio, Loogootee fans drew sighs of relief when it was announced that we would play the Petersburg Indians. We had received a favorable draw that put the strong Washington Hatchets in the opposite bracket. We had won the two previous sectionals and had just completed Loogootee's first undefeated season too, so our fans were all psyched up.

We had defeated Petersburg during the regular season (by 19 points), but this was tourney time and anything could happen. The Indians and Lions met head on and no one blinked in the first quarter. They held us to a near-tie with 15 points to our 16. The momentum began to change in the second quarter when Loogootee's offense, headed by Bill Drake, was virtually unstoppable. We dazzled the crowd by sinking 23 points while our stingy defense allowed the Indians only 8, to take a 39-23 lead into the next half. The margin widened during the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, with Junior Gee and Darrell Smith alternating blows to help us record 22 more points to Petersburg's 12. Petersburg had a great final quarter, pumping in 21 points, but couldn't make a dent in its deficit as Loogootee scored an additional 23. The 84-56 victory by the Lions was impressive—but one game does not a tournament make.

In the second round, the Lions and Cardinals squared away to see which team would advance in the tournament. We had defeated the Cardinals twice during the regular season and there was that old disquieting bugaboo that it is difficult to beat a team three times in

one season. The dynamic duo of Lions vs. Birds raced up and down the 84-foot floor, ending the first period with the Lions ahead 22-15. Our lead expanded during the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, and the first half shootout ended at 48-33. The Lions began to pour it on once the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter began, and when it ended, we had a nearly insurmountable lead of 77-42. Our starters then rested for the remainder of the game while the reserves finished the job. We had a 92-61 win.

For the March 2 afternoon semi-final round we were matched against Alfordsville, which for a tiny school, had enjoyed a measure of success during its season. However, the Yellow Jackets were no match for the Lions. In the opening eight minutes, they put a little sting in the Lions' bonnet, scoring 12 points to 16 for our boys. They seemed to lose steam in the 2<sup>nd</sup> period, however, as they posted only 7 points to 22 for the Lions, led by Bob Haines' rebounding and scoring. Alfordsville had a complete meltdown on offense in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, scoring only 2 points while the Lions were racking up 22. The final score was 72-41, with Loogootee being advanced into the night's championship game.

The challenge, as expected, would come from Washington's Hatchets, a team that had experienced another successful season that year at 13-7, prior to the sectional. The Hatchets always played their regular seasons against high level completion within the southwest quadrant of the state and beyond.

Not many fans, players, or coaches can enter a gymnasium at sectional time in Indiana and not experience a little spine-tingling emotion. A competitive team is often greeted with both shouts of approval and boos of derision. If it's the night of the championship game,

the excitement is heightened. When the announcer introduced the starting lineups and shouted "For the Loogootee Lions!" our fans leapt to their feet, applauding each player as he dashed out to center court. The gymnasium grew quiet and both teams stood at attention as the national anthem was played, which was another magical moment for many.

With all the preliminaries out of the way, the game was on. Loogootee fans were shocked as they watched the Lions fall behind 15 to 8 during the first quarter. We were an entirely different team in the second period, however. With ferocity, the Lions surprised the Hatchets as they raced to a 23 point quarter while holding Washington to a lowly 7. Our fans were relieved to have Loogootee in the lead 31-22 at the half.

I remember that just before the start of the second half, senior guard Junior Gee questioned whether we should slow the game down and with all the confidence of a Mississippi Gambler I replied, "No, we're alright." However, when the Lions tried to rekindle their former fierceness, it simply did not happen and we struggled to score 10 points while the Hatchets came out hot to rip the nets for 20. We now found ourselves down 42-41 at the close of the third quarter. Our team was unaccustomed to trailing this late in a contest and did not respond well to the challenge in the final quarter. It is not an excuse, but perhaps an explanation that two of our key starters were underclassmen. Although senior Junior Gee played a good game, posting 23 points and teammate Darrell Smith added 10, we simply did not have the balanced scoring which had made us successful throughout the year. Not having seen us lose a game all year, it was a horrible feeling for

Loogootee fans to see their team go down in defeat 58-51. The party was over for the 1963 Lions.

It hurt—but eventually the pain would be eased by reflecting on what we had accomplished. The kids had enjoyed a great year, winning 18 straight regular season games, a school record, and they had advanced to the championship game of the sectional, losing by only a few points. The seniors had been members of two sectional championship teams and could be proud of great high school basketball careers. Most important of all, they were great young men and it was my privilege to be their coach.

To some people in Loogootee it was not just another loss, they were devastated. Some swore they would never attend another basketball game. But as the years passed and other great teams emerged, most were back shouting as loudly as ever with the cheer block, “Way to Go, Lions! Way to Go!”

### **The 1932-33 Michigantown Ganders** by

**Cliff Johnson, Editor**

This article recounts a memorable season for the Michigantown Ganders, when their 1932-33 team ran through a regular-season schedule undefeated (22-0), then reached the final 16 of the Indiana state tournament. It was a singularly successful achievement for a school that was based within a small community of no more than 500 residents (now about the same number). It also was the only time in the 40-year history of its basketball program that the school produced an undefeated season.

According to former IHSAA Commissioner Ward E. Brown’s reference book “IHSAA Membership History, 1903-1983,” Michigantown first registered with

the IHSAA during the 1912-13 season, but engaged that year in no publicly reported inter-scholastic contests. It allowed its membership to lapse over the next two seasons, but re-joined in 1915-16. Its few games appear to have been played against non-scholastic competition until after World War I ended. The *Frankfort Crescent News* reported what appears to have been the school’s first interscholastic contests in February, 1919, which were all losses. Its first entry into state tournament play followed in 1920, when it lost to Jamestown 33-9 in the first round of the Lebanon sectional. In 1923, the school’s post-season play was moved to nearby Frankfort, but its teams had yet to score their first tournament victory. That drought ended in 1925, when it bested Forest 17-9 and Scircleville 33-31, prior to being upended in the sectional final 58-10 by eventual state champion Frankfort.

The history of the school itself, situated in the Clinton County township of Michigan, just northeast of Frankfort, goes back to the year 1878, when a four-room schoolhouse was first constructed. It was replaced shortly after the turn of the century by a “more modernized” facility. Its basketball team enjoyed several winning seasons between 1920 and 1933, most significantly those of 1927-28 and 1928-29. After 1933, the school continued to operate for 26 more years before becoming a part of the Clinton Central school corporation in 1959. The other schools involved in forming the new consolidation at that time were Forest, Scircleville, Kirclin, and Sugar Creek Twp.

Coaching the superlative 1932-33 squad was Larry Farrell, an experienced mentor who had handled the Ganders ever since his coaching career took him there, in 1924. Coach Farrell was a colorful

character of Irish heritage. He had a fiery temper that could be displayed both on and off the basketball court. Born in 1894 at the nearby town of Fayette in Boone County, his efforts initially were directed toward seminary studies and a career as a Catholic priest. At age 22 though, after 10 years of study for the priesthood, Farrell’s interest changed and he developed an affinity for teaching and coaching, instead. It was an easy transition to make since those functions had been a part of his early training regimen. During that early work, his command of Latin became extensive, if not exhaustive. He used Latin words often in his subsequent coaching career to avoid being thrown out of games. He would fume at game officials in Roman expletives with which they were unfamiliar. Students in his classrooms, as well, rarely understood the meaning behind some of his selected terms of non-endeartment. After Farrell parted with the seminary in 1916, he enrolled at Indiana University to acquire a teaching credential—only to find that he had become subject to the draft by the U.S. Army. After serving two years under General Pershing’s command in Mexico, he finished his studies at I.U., complete with a degree, a handshake, and a teaching credential in tow. Within a few years, he was teaching and coaching at Michigantown.

Farrell’s available talent for the 1932-33 season included several veteran players, most of whom had helped lead the Ganders to a 17-3 record the previous year. The one significant addition was a transfer from the 1931-32 Scircleville team, 6-2 Wayne Gregg. Gregg, along with 6-0 Forest Stoops, and 6-1 Glynn Downey, led the team. They were all on the front line and each was capable of putting points on the board and pulling down rebounds.

The guard positions were more than adequately manned by 5-10 Merle Cole and 5-9 Hoyt Cox. Two capable subs were 5-9 Lemoine Ostler and 5-6 Robert Baker.

the Clinton County championship, opponents began falling like lead balloons for the rest of the regular season, usually by hefty margins. By season's end, after 22 straight wins

Frankfort Coach W.E. Bausman regularly employed it to the team's advantage for home games, as did Everett Case during his successful years there. This time though, the Fighting Five's zone was met by an equally effective one from the Ganders. The result was essentially a slow defensive game by both teams. The final score was 16-10, with Michigantown prevailing.

The Ganders were not out of the woods yet, though. The championship game was to be played that night between the Ganders and the Warriors of Washington Twp (Little Jeff). Little Jeff had a respectable record of 15-7, coming into the game. It was nip-and-tuck all the way, the most difficult four quarters the Ganders had experienced all season. The testy Warriors seemed determined to win and pulled out all the stops before bowing, 27-26. The result might have gone the other way too, when a Warrior field goal at the end of the game was disallowed because of a whistled foul that had been called just a few seconds before the "winning" shot was launched. The sound of the whistle had been muffled by the excitement of the spectators. In the end, the Ganders had survived the sectional, and it was on to the regional in Lebanon.

Regaining their briefly compromised composure during the championship game of the sectional, the Ganders breezed through the regional in great style, first disposing of Earl Park, winner of the Fowler sectional, by a score of 35-17, then eliminating the host Lebanon Tigers in the final, 42-30. Lebanon had earlier annihilated a respectable Lafayette Jeff team in the afternoon by the whopping margin of 20 points, 44-24, so the result against the Tigers was a defining moment for the Ganders. Their record now stood at 27-0 and they were headed

### *The Undefeated Michigantown Ganders*



**Front Row: Principal Reed, Merle Cole, Wayne Gregg, Glynn Downey, Forest Stoops, Lemoine Ostler, Coach Larry Farrell. Back Row: Leo Bond, Robert Baker, Murl Caldwell, Elmer Sheets (student manager), Herbert Sheets, Kenneth Burns, Hoyt Cox.**

The season got underway with a flourish, as the Ganders thrashed Mooresville 45-17 and then Colfax 29-15. Four more wide-margin victories quickly followed over Washington Twp. 38-16, Scircleville 42-13, Cicero 37-7, and Sharpsville 64-16. By this time, the game results and rumors of the quality of play by the small-town Ganders were starting to catch the attention of big-city sportswriters. By mid-season it became apparent that it was going to take a pretty strong team to hush the Ganders' honking. This team might even become viable contenders for the Frankfort sectional crown. The only game that had been even fairly close was a 24-20 victory over Zionsville. However, host Frankfort had monopolized the sectional for years and would probably still be the favorite.

Coach Farrell's preferred style of play was firebrand. The fast break was often used and was complemented by a stifling 1-2-2 zone defense. After easily capturing

and finishing as the only undefeated team in the state, it was surmised that it might even take a state title contender to put down the Ganders. And that turned out to be a pretty accurate prognostication.

In the fourth game of the sectional, they bounced onto the floor at Frankfort's Howard Hall, wearing their customary red & white uniforms with striped knee socks, ready to compete against Kirklin. The center jump tipped off at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 3, and the Ganders were off and running. The Kirklin five posed absolutely no threat and was crushed by a final count of 53-9. Meanwhile, Frankfort's Fighting Five (aka the Hot Dawgs or Hot Dogs) was polishing off Jackson Twp. 35-11 in the same tourney bracket. So the Frankfort-Michigantown second round match on the afternoon of March 4 was to be the crown-jewel event of the tournament. Long and narrow Howard Hall was practically made for a tight zone defense and

to the 16-team finals scheduled for the following week at Butler Fieldhouse.

The Logansport Berries were the next hurdle. They had been a favorite to capture the state tournament nearly all season long and came into the finals with a 24-4 record against big-time competition. The Berries had won the tough North Central Conference title that year with a record of 11-1, the single loss having been inflicted by the Kokomo Wildkats (third in the NCC) who could always leave claw marks on opponents in their own home court. The Berries had tamed the Kats earlier, however, in Berry Bowl.

Cliff Wells was Logan's coach. He was a highly effective game strategist and had the height and heft on the team that year to augment his coaching skills. So the Ganders and their coach knew in advance that the odds would not favor them in this game. And as expected, they fell by a score of 22-12. The string of Gander victories had ended at 27. But what a season it had been!

Subsequently in the tournament, the Berries too were felled in their next game by an upstart Greencastle team, led by Jess McAnally, its towering (for those days) 6-6 center. The Martinsville Artesians, in spite of nine season losses, became the state champions that year, under the direction of coach Glenn Curtis. That loss total for a state champion was a record that stood for 16 years until the Jasper Wildcats, under coach Cabby O'Neill, tied it in 1949. It goes to show that in Indiana's annual state basketball tournament, anything can happen.

*Many thanks to IHSBHS President Dr. Roger Robison, for permitting certain excerpts to be used from his 1998 publication "Everett Case and the Frankfort Hot Dogs."*

## **BOB COLLINS, THE STAR, THE 1950S, AND ATTUCKS**

by  
**Zak Kiefer, Sports Columnist,**  
**w/research by Cathy Knapp**  
**and with permission from**  
**The Indiana Star newspaper,**  
**March 8, 2014**  
**(photo selections by IHSBHS**  
**appear throughout the story)**



**Bob Collins, 1929 – 2013**

"You know right where to find me," he barked at every last one of the critics, his Irish audacity leaking through while the letters poured in and the phones kept ringing and one after another they demanded Bob Collins be fired. He wasn't writing what they wanted him to write, wasn't seeing it the way they saw it. No matter how many victories this team piled up, no matter how many opponents it overwhelmed with size and speed and skill, the players still weren't doing it the right way. They weren't doing it the way it had always been done.

This was Indianapolis, and these were the 1950s; the city's racial frictions were playing out through the prism of a high school basketball team that was challenging the very manner in which Hoosiers believed

their beloved game ought to be played. Collins, a young sportswriter at The Indianapolis Star, found himself central to the conflict: He was a white reporter defending a black team in a city barely a generation removed from the height of the Ku Klux Klan.

"A communist," some called him in letters to The Star. Others shouted racial slurs while they drove past his house at night, honking their horns. Some called him at home and told him over the phone exactly what they hoped one of those black basketball players would do to one of his young daughters.

But Collins kept writing what he kept seeing — a team without peer, one led by the best coach in the state and the best basketball player he'd ever seen. The team was Crispus Attucks. The coach was Ray Crowe. The player was Oscar Robertson. Yet a faction of the city's deeply conservative population wasn't ready for an all-black team to reign over its pastime. In Attucks they saw a threat to tradition, to basketball purity. They saw their horizontal game shifting vertical, a group of bigger, faster, stronger athletes uprooting convention and burying their white teams along the way.

Bobby Plump, star of Milan's 1954 state championship team, remembers walking around downtown with teammates before they faced Attucks in the semi-state title game that year. Drivers would roll down their windows and yell racial slurs. "(They'd) shout at us, 'Go beat those (expletive)!' " says Plump. "I'd never even heard (that language) before."

Collins became an institution at The Star during the 1950s writing his beloved "Shootin' The Stars" column on high school basketball. Even Collins' boss at The Star, sports editor Jep Cadou Jr., took issue with the Attucks phenomenon early on,



1955 Crispus Attucks state champs. Front: Oscar Robertson, Sheddric Mitchell, Bill Hampton, William Scott, William Brown, Back: Coach Ray Crowe, John Gipson, Stanford Patton, John Brown, William Burnley, Sam Milton, John Clemons, Asst. Coach Al Spurlock.

once citing the sport's inventor, James Naismith, in a column. "Naismith never intended players with 'jumping jack legs' would be able to rewrite basketball's traditional patterns," Cadou wrote. He later decried that Attucks had six players who could — gasp — dunk the ball.

Collins never blinked. The letters poured in, the phones kept ringing. No sweat. Collins wasn't apologizing. If anyone took issue with it, that was their problem. The conflict climaxed 60 years ago in March 1955, when the Attucks players persevered over death threats, racial bigotry and partisan referees on their way to a historic state title. "People really resented him for writing about us" Robertson says today. "A lot of white sportswriters wouldn't do it. But Bob Collins did. I can't even tell you in a few words how much he meant to our team at that time."

Even in the end he had his stories, and they always made him laugh. He'd beg a friend to pick up a six-

pack and swing by the house, he'd top off his beer with tomato juice — it masked the smell of alcohol — and together, they'd relive the ride. Bob Collins was dying. All he wanted to talk about was how much fun he'd had living.

There was the time he'd burned through his travel money midway

through a trip to Los Angeles to cover the Super Bowl. "Old money gone. Send new money," was the message he wired The Star's offices. When he returned and the bosses pressed him for an explanation, Collins came clean. He'd had a rough night at the gambling tables on a one-night jaunt to Las Vegas. Somehow the expense was approved. "Research for a future story," Collins called it.

And the time they couldn't find him after the 1975 Indianapolis 500. An hour to deadline, a copy boy opened his office door and found Collins face down on the floor, passed out drunk. So they sat him up in his chair, poured coffee down his throat and marveled while he dictated his column to his secretary. It still made the city edition.

And, of course, there was the time he grew so incensed at Indiana's bully of a basketball coach, Bob Knight, that he decided to publish Knight's phone number — office and home — in The Star. No, really. The newspaper had run a photo of Knight grabbing a player that irked the combustible coach. A day later, on



The 1956 Crispus Attucks Tigers won the state championship. Front, left to right: Ed Searcy, John Gipson, Odell Donel, Bill Brown, Stanford Patton, Oscar Robertson. Back, left to right: James Enoch, Sam Milton, LaVern Benson, coach Ray Crowe, Herbert Swanigan, Henry Robertson, Al Maxey.

his weekly television show, Knight urged viewers not to read the paper. This was Collins' retort, in the Feb. 10, 1976, edition of *The Star*: "In his usual straightforward manner, the coach took his case to the public and chided *The Star* on his weekly television program," Collins wrote through a thick vein of sarcasm. "I think coach would appreciate how many Hoosiers out there are behind him. All it will take is a phone call. His office number is: 812-337-2238. His home: 812-336-0508."



**O. Robertson & R. Crowe**

One can only imagine Knight's reaction when he picked up the paper – or answered the phone. Who else but Collins? Who else can say they held on for dear life in the passenger seat of an Italian sports car while Bobby Unser zipped through the French countryside? Toured the Vatican with Mario Andretti? Took time off from the newspaper to run a mayoral campaign for his friend Bob Welch? Dictated a column from a phone booth in Chicago while tear gas soaked the air and policemen billy-clubbed rioters mere feet from him during the 1968 Democratic National Convention?

Who else found time to gather six investors at a country club in Lafayette in 1967 and persuade them to pony up nine grand each to start up a pro basketball team? You might've heard of that team – the Indiana Pacers.

He was the writer Indianapolis woke up with for four decades. "No one at *The Star* has ever had a bigger

following, I can guarantee you that," Plump says. Collins became an institution in the 1950s when he darted to every corner of the state to chronicle the golden age of Hoosier high school hoops for his beloved "Shootin' the Stars" column. He sat courtside for Plump's shot and Oscar's mastery and wrote about it better than anyone else. "If you'd have missed that jumper, you'd have pumped gas in Pierceville the rest of your life," Collins would say to Plump, whom he affectionately called "One Shot." They became good friends over the years, same with Robertson and even the surly Knight.



**Bob Jewell, 1951 Trester Award**

Collins' prose – short, snappy, sublime – was delicious. Of Oscar: "He beats you to death with a pillow, finesses you off the floor." Of Knight: "Controversy trails him like a trained puppy." Of A.J. Foyt's Indy 500 dominance: "Tony Hulman doesn't need to establish a purse for the race anymore – he just asks Foyt how much he needs."

Collins turned down gigs in bigger cities and kept Indianapolis home, raising two sons and six daughters in three marriages. He reluctantly became sports editor in 1964 but continued with his columns – on sports, family, whatever tickled his curiosity. By the time he retired in

1991, he'd chased deadlines from the greens of Augusta to the Olympic torch in Rome to arenas, racetracks and stadiums across the globe. He'd also drunk himself to death.

Collins' greatest vice was the Manhattan – a shot of Early Times whiskey and a dash of vermouth. He'd pour them in the office. Knock a few back at lunch. Or at a game. After a deadline and sometimes before. Drinking was commonplace in *The Star*'s offices back then. Rules were loosely enforced. Collins' habit spiraled out of control as the years wore on and his paycheck grew. "Before long a half-dozen were my standard fare," Collins admitted in a 1995 article published in *Indianapolis Monthly* some time before he died of cirrhosis of the liver. He was 68 (at the time). Of his drives home after several cocktails: "I bounced off enough steel and concrete to build the Empire State Building."

"I think a lot of us are surprised he made it to the '90s," said the great Los Angeles Times columnist Jim Murray, a close Collins friend for decades. But as he lay on his deathbed during those final months, sipping those beers topped with tomato juice, laughing, reminiscing, one topic would cause his words to slow and his voice to crack. That was Attucks. "The day he died, there was nothing he was more proud of than what he wrote about Attucks," says Dale Ogden, a curator of history at the Indiana State Museum and a Collins friend. "It made him feel like he did at least one thing right. In his eyes, Attucks made his life important."

Crispus Attucks High School was formed in 1927 to rid Indianapolis public schools of black students. The day Attucks opened its doors, the Ku Klux Klan led a parade past the school. The procession lasted an hour. It took two decades for the

Indiana High School Athletic Association to allow the Tigers entrance into the state basketball tournament, and six more years for a group of white referees to rob them of a semistate title. Late in a closely contested 1953 semi-state championship game, Attucks star Hallie Bryant – that year's Mr. Basketball – drove to the basket, lofted a shot and was knocked to the floor by two Shelbyville players. The whistle blew. Bryant was called for charging. The basket was wiped out, Shelbyville was awarded free throws and Attucks' season was over.

Ray Crowe later called it "the worst call he'd seen in a lifetime of watching sports." Collins, by then a staunch supporter of Attucks, openly questioned the officiating in the following day's *Star*. "He called it like he saw it," Bryant, another close friend, says today. "He was a man who was simply doing the right thing at a time when it wasn't easy to do the right thing. He was fair and he was courageous." Following that '53 loss, the only hitch to Attucks' continued ascension over the next three years came in the form of Plump's Milan team. The Milan Indians downed the Tigers in the '54 semi-state title game. After that, Crowe's boys wouldn't lose in the state tournament for two years.

Collins wasn't the only journalist to champion Attucks (Jimmie Angelopoulos of *The Indianapolis Times* did so, as did the city's black publication, *The Indianapolis Recorder*), but he was certainly the loudest. The close relationships he formed with the players he defended during that time — legends like Crowe and Bryant and Robertson — held firm until the day he died. "What he did for us was tremendous," Robertson says. "I was told he got a lot of hate mail for the things he wrote, and I believe it."

It was the Tigers' style and success that rankled so many traditionalists. With each win, Crowe's team debunked the myth that Milan had furthered with their title in '54. That was: Teams built on a foundation of fundamentals and a patient, deliberate offense would triumph. Attucks never bought in. Attucks ran the floor. Its players dunked. They scored in bunches. They shattered previous perceptions.

Consider: Plump's Milan team scored 32 points in its state title game victory over Muncie Central. A year later, in the same game, Attucks scored 97. If Milan employed a square dance of an offense — a methodical, plodding version of cat-and-mouse — Attucks did just the opposite. The Tigers played a smooth jazz. "What Milan proved was that you win a state championship by being more disciplined than everyone else, more team-oriented, better coached," Ogden says. "Attucks comes along and does all those things, and the white fans say, 'This can't possibly be. The only way they're winning is because they have freak athletes. They're bigger. They're faster. It's not fair. It's not cheating, but it's not fair.' "Bob essentially said, 'The hell with all that.' He believed he was writing the truth and he told them, 'I won't back off, I won't issue a retraction. If you can't handle it, if you don't like it, then that's your problem.'"

A new age of racial integration in Indianapolis was dawning, and thanks in part to Collins, the Attucks team became the most popular symbol of black culture in the city. "He was in our corner every time," Ray Crowe's widow, Betty, says today. "He took a lot of heat for what he wrote, but nobody was in Ray's corner like Bob was." Collins was chronicling history. He called Attucks the greatest team in the

annals of Indiana high school basketball. He called Crowe the finest coach in the state. He called Robertson a legend in the making. Turns out he was right about it all. The '55 and '56 Attucks teams went 60-1 and won back-to-back state titles. Crowe coached just seven seasons, but went 193-20 over that span. Hoops in the Hoosier state would never be the same.



**Scribes' Row, Butler Fieldhouse, in the early 1950s**

"They swept through state like a chemical fire," Collins wrote, "building and exploding and growing into an awesome, almost uncontrollable force. The success of Attucks basketball integrated the high schools of Indianapolis. They became so dominant that the other schools had to get black basketball players, or forget about it." No milestone meant more than what they achieved March 19, 1955, the night the long climb for Crowe's boys culminated in their first state championship. They were the first team from Indianapolis to hoist the crown and the first all-black team in the country to win a state tournament. "Pull out your adjectives, garble the syntax, throw it in one big stream and you'll have a word defining the show Attucks gave 15,000 high school addicts last night," Collins wrote in *The Star* the next day. What he wrote next was as true then as it is today: "Their names will be remembered as long as there is high school basketball played in Indiana."

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Check or money order to IHSBHS for \$10 enclosed? \_\_\_\_\_

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**(Tell us about yourself)**

**Complete this form and mail to: Rocky Kenworthy, IHSBHS, 710 E, 800 S, Clayton, IN 46118. Profiles may appear in Boxscore from time to time.**

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**High School** \_\_\_\_\_ **H.S. graduation year** \_\_\_\_\_

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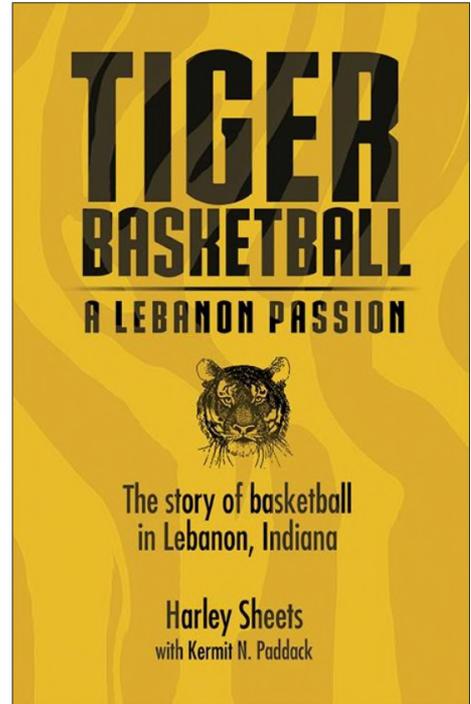
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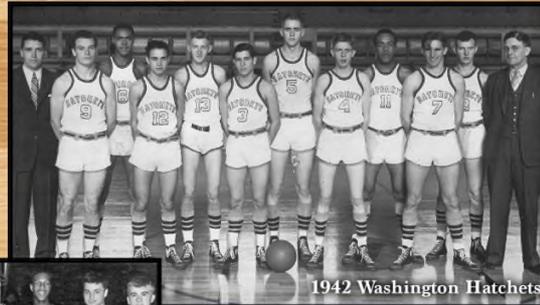
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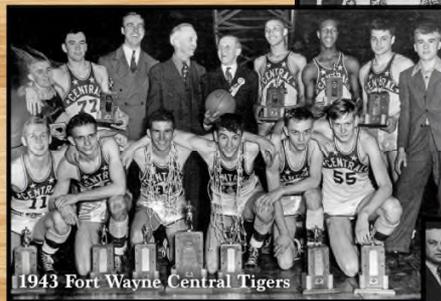
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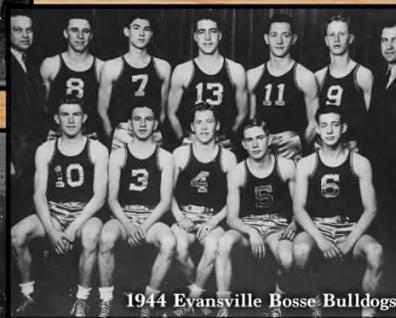
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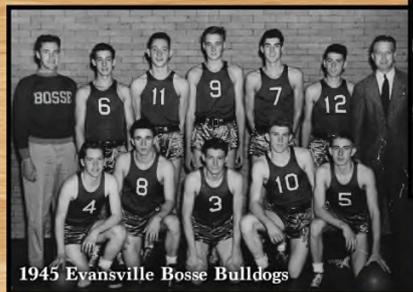
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