

BOXSCORE

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THE 1955 INDIANA ALL-STARS

It was decided between the two state athletic associations that the Indiana and Kentucky All-Star teams should begin playing two games per year beginning from June 1955 onward, instead of a single game each year. That single game had routinely been played at the Butler Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. The new

agreement was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that the Indiana teams had won every game but one in the 13 previous years that a lone game per year had been played. And that one game was always on Indiana's court.

unlikely since the Kentucky All-Stars had used the Butler Fieldhouse for pre-game practice sessions just as much as the Indiana All-Stars had, in prior years. There was no real "home court" for either team. OK, then perhaps it was the influence of



HOOSIER SHOOTERS—Members of the 1955 Indiana All-Star team are (front row, left to right) Wilson Eison, Jim Henry, Willie Merriweather, Don Bates, Charles Lyons;

(back row, left to right) Gene Flowers, Jim Butcher, Ron Loneski, Jerry Schofield, Jim Loer. (Star Photo)

Something didn't seem quite right, since the talent from both states appeared always to be fairly equal. Perhaps the imbalance in game results was attributable to a presumed "home court" advantage the Hoosiers had. But that seemed

the 10,000 or more spectators most of whom were cheering for the home team. Maybe. But whatever was causing the imbalance had to be corrected, it was deemed, or the games might eventually be thought of as simply a showcase for the

Indiana boys. If so, Kentucky might someday decide to refuse further participation. The “fairness” factor was raised for bilateral consideration, as well. Then there were the gate receipts. Ah, yes, the extra revenue that an added game would bring in. Now we’re talking money, and money always talks to us as well! Dollar signs quickly end debates. So, “resolved, there shall henceforth be two games played!”

Indiana’s All-Star player selection in that year was comprised of 1. Wilson (Jake) Eison, 6-5, Gary Roosevelt; 2. Willie Merriweather, 6-5, Ind. Crispus Attucks; 3. Gene Flowers, 6-4, Muncie Central; 4. Jerry Schofield, 6-3, Columbus; 5. Ron Loneski, 6-4, Hammond Noll; 6. Jim Henry, 5-11, New Albany; 7. Don Bates, 6-0, Jasper; 8. Jimmy Butcher, 5-9, Kokomo; 9. Jim Loer, 6-2, Indianapolis Shortridge; and 10. Charlie Lyons, 6-3, Fort Wayne South Side.

Kentucky was being led by 5-10 Kenny Kuhn from Louisville Male; 6-3 Johnny Cox from Hazard; 6-4 Joe Viviano from Louisville Xavier; 6-4 John Liveious from Louisville Central; and 6-1 Donnis Butcher from Meade Memorial. Other Kentucky All-Stars were Ed Huffman from Newport; Bob Austin from Paducah Tilghman; Terry Randall from Adair County; and Jim Beck from Louisville Central.

The first match-up was arranged in Indianapolis (as usual) and the Hoosiers were again victorious by a count of 94-86. Indiana’s scoring was balanced, with Eison (14), Flowers (15), Schofield (16), Loneski (12), and Henry (17) each contributing their share. All of Kentucky’s starters ended up with double digits also—Kuhn (25), Cox (22), Viviano (12), Liveious (12), and Butcher (13). The Kentucky team built up a 12 point lead by halftime, but could not hold onto it in

the second half as Indiana roared back, outscoring Kentucky by 20 points.

The second game was played in Louisville. The two-game plan seemed to speak for itself as Kentucky finally won its 2nd game ever in the series, 86-82. However, it took an overtime to turn the trick. With less than a minute remaining in regulation time, Kentucky had a two-point lead and possession of the ball when Indiana’s Jim Henry forced a turnover and drove downcourt to score a layup and send the game into overtime. During the overtime period, points were dropping like leaves on a windy day in fall, as a flurry of 20 hit the scoreboard within a 3-minute timeframe. Unfortunately for Indiana, Kentucky’s total (12) exceeded by four Indiana’s total (8) and there the game ended. John Liveious, the first black player to ever be selected for a Kentucky All-Star team, scored 27 points and was awarded Kentucky’s Star of Stars honor for the two game series. Johnny Cox pitched in 21 and Kenny Kuhn added 12 more in the victory. For Indiana, the scoring was well-distributed among several players with Ron Loneski leading the way with 8 field goals and 3 free throws for 19 points. Loneski also received Indiana’s Star of Stars award for his two game effort.

Each team and its fans must have gone home happy that June with the newly-created All-Star split decision. The series’ sponsors must have been happy too, with a doubling of gate revenue.

THE LIFE & TIMES OF COACH LES RAY

by Roger F. Robison

Leslie Lund Ray is an esteemed and accomplished 90-year old survivor of the golden age of single-class basketball in Indiana. He was born on August 19, 1925 in Sullivan

County, where his father was a farmer and rural mail carrier. Les played varsity ball for the Sullivan Golden Arrows during 1941-43; becoming a starter late in ’41. His coach was Harold (Red) Sering who led the Arrows to sectional championships in the last four of his five years at the helm: 1941-45. The Sullivan sectional had always been a wide-open, competitive event and from 1921-67 the Arrows won only 18 of the 47 sectionals they hosted. Sering led all the Sullivan coaches with four titles. [1,2].



Les and the Arrows won the ’42 and ’43 sectionals, but lost to Washington at the Hatchet House regionals both years. In his senior year, Les averaged 17 points per game and made the All-Regional team as well as first team selection in the historic Southern Indiana Athletic Conference (SIAC) which produced the state champions in ’41-’42 (Washington), ’44-’45 (Bosse), and ’49 (Jasper) [3,4]. Another title was lost in the 1948 final game after Evansville Central top gun Lee Hamilton blew out a knee in the afternoon game. Central had previously defeated state champion Lafayette Jeff at Jeff’s home court, 65-51.

**GOLDEN ARROWS SECTIONAL
CHAMPS OF 1942 & 1943 [5]**

<u>1942 (13-7)</u>	<u>1943 (16-8)</u>
F Truelock-5'11"	Ray-6'2"
F Clarkson-5'11"	B. Hines-5'10"
F Beasley-5'11"	Barrett-5-11"
C Ray-6'2"	Kelley-6'3"
G Faught	Lucas-5'9"
G Hamilton-5'10"	D. Hines-6'
G Sisk-6'1"	

World War II brought *universal military conscription* for all able-bodied males. From 1940-70, men were "drafted" for Army service, usually the infantry, for two years or for the "duration" of the war. Starting September of 1940 all males of ages 21 to 36 had to "register for the draft." After Pearl Harbor, the age span changed to 20-44. By February of 1943 it had dropped to 18-38. To escape the infantry, many enlisted in other military branches. Many coaches signed up in 1942 to become Navy physical education officers. Exemptions and deferments were granted for defense plant work, farming, having lots of kids, or being unfit for service and classified as 4F. The "draft" and the War greatly altered the careers of many 1942-45 graduates and their coaches [6A]. Being "drafted" did not have the same connotation it does today.

The All-Star game with Kentucky, which was sponsored by the Indianapolis Star, was suspended during 1943 and '44 due to World War II travel restrictions and the "draft." Fifty years later, the Star made its selections for those two years. The Indianapolis News, however, did select a five-man All-state team in 1943. Paul Hoffman was the outstanding graduate of '43. He was somehow ineligible for military service and started for all four years at Purdue during '44-'47 where he earned All-America honors. He then played ('48-'54) and managed professional ball in

Baltimore [7-9].

**The 1943 Sweet 16 Was As Follows
[4,6b,10]**

Final 16	Final 8	Final 4	Final 2
Jasper	Jasper		
Martinsville			
Bedford	Bedford	Bedford	
Evans. Cent.			
Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Leb. 40
Rochester			
Gary Wal.	Gary Wal.		
Peru			
Batesville	Batesv.	Batesv.	
Madison			
Greenfield	Greenf.		
Clinton			
F.W.Cent.	F.W.C.	F.W.C.	F.W.C.45
Monroe			
Marion	Marion		
Richmond			

**1993 Indpls. Star All-Star Selections
For '43: [6b,8]**

****John Brennan-Bedford: Notre Dame**
Jim Fritsch-Batesville: Notre Dame
****Paul Hoffman-Jasper: Purdue '44-'47**
Ralph Holmes-Richmond
Ralph Houser-Lebanon: DePauw & Michigan
Dick King-Rochester: Purdue, Western New Mexico
****Dave Laflin-Lebanon-Gimbel**
Bob Mehl-Ind. Tech: Indiana 1956
Joe Pfeiffer-Marion
Jim Powers-SB Central: Indiana State, S.B. Central H.S.
****Ch. Stanski-F.W. Central**
Bill Stearman-Columbus: Columbus H.S.
****Robt. Van Ryan-F.W. Central**
(** indicates 1943 Indianapolis News All State team.)

In 1962, the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame (HOF) began selecting All-state Silver Anniversary teams from senior students of twenty five years ago who were still alive. The HOF selections omitted Fritsch, Holmes, Laflin, Mehl, and Van Ryan and added Albert Kralovansky, East Chicago Roosevelt (Indiana '45-'47); Robert Negley, Lawrence

Central (North Carolina State); and *Les Ray* (Indiana-'44, Nevada-'48-'50) [11,12]. If some of our readers have further information on the 1943 players, please contact the author at hotdog@compuserve.com.

Les Ray had earned a scholarship from I.U. coach Branch McCracken, who was to be 35 years old on June 9, 1943. In March, however, McCracken joined the Navy for three years. Les would have one year of eligibility as he did not turn 18 until August 19. Taking over at I.U. was Indiana Central College (ICC) coach Harry Good, whose record there ultimately stood at 192-50 [13]. He won 30 in a row during 1941 and ICC was ranked #9 nationally in '42. At I.U. in '43-'44, Good went 7-15, having one senior, ten freshman, and lots of 4-Fs (unfit for service). Not recruited by Good, Les sat on the bench [Fig. 1, Les at I.U.]. To his credit, Good finished 10-11 in '44-'45 and in '45-'46 finished 18-3 (9-3), second only to Ohio State 16-5 (10-2) in the Big Ten. Because of a better overall record, I.U. was considered for the conference's NCAA bid, but gave it up when long Tom Schwartz (HOF) was drafted [13]. Schwartz had been a junior on the 1944 Kokomo runner-ups known as the "LSMFT" team [4] and had played end for the '45 Hoosier football Big Ten champions. Good went on to coach at Nebraska in '46 and Schwartz returned in '47 to graduate from I.U. in '50.

Les Ray, meanwhile, was serving in the Army Air Corps loading cargo planes in the Pacific during '44-'45 and '45-'46. Upon discharge, he returned to I.U. to work on a degree in education during '46-'47. To get back into form he played intramural basketball. Meanwhile Scott Beasley, Sullivan class of '42, was already playing at the University of Nevada-Reno, where he would graduate in '47. Les and Joe Libke,

Sullivan class of '46, were recruited to Reno to play for coach Glen (Jake) Lawlor [Fig. 2 Les at Reno].

Sullivan's "Dynamic Duo" At Nevada Reno: 1947-50 [courtesy of editor C. Johnson]

	Libke 6'3" F	Ray 6'2" G	Record
47-48	16g, 65pts	sub	09-19
48-49	27g, 261pts	27g, 219pts	11-16
49-50	24g, 267pts	24g, 230pts	14-10

Leaving Reno with a degree in education, Les returned to Indiana in 1950 and had another encounter of historical significance. He was briefly connected with the **Anderson Duffy Packers**, a member of the Midwestern, small-market cities of the National Basketball League (NBL) from 1946-'47-'49 and then a charter member of the 1949-50 National Basketball Association (NBA). The NBL was famous in Indiana, which supported multiple franchises during 1937-49 and had HOF coach **Ward Lambert** as commissioner during 1946-48.

Anderson prevailed in the remaining ten-team league in '48-'49, winning both the regular season (49-15) and sweeping the playoffs over Dayton, Syracuse and Oshkosh [14,15].

The NBL In Indiana [14]

City	Franchise	Years
Indianapolis	Kautsky grocery	1937-40
Richmond	King's clothiers	1937-38
Whiting	Ciesars (autos)	1937-38
Hammond	Ciesars	1938-41
Ft. Wayne	Gen. Electrics	1937-38
Ft. Wayne	Zollner Pistons	1941-48
Indianapolis	Kautsky grocery	1941/42
Indianapolis	Kautsky grocery	1945-48
Anderson	Duffy Packers	1946-49
Hammond	Calumet Buc'rs	1948-49

Anderson was the smallest city to join the merger of the NBL and the BAA in 1949 that formed the seventeen-member NBA. The Packers dropped out after that first year. The small market franchises were quickly eliminated from the NBA as the number of teams fell to eight only by 1955-56. It would be

faltering Louisville Alumnites franchise, Les decided to stick with his day job which was teaching and coaching freshman basketball at North Vernon High.

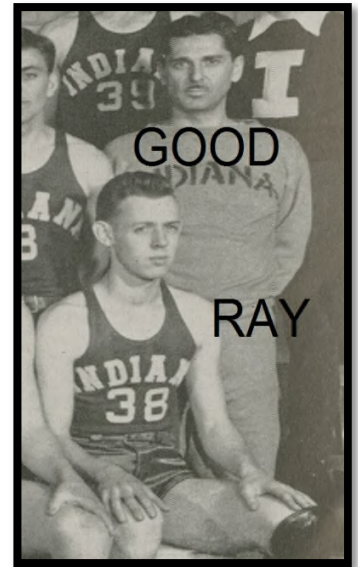


Figure 1

After five years of college, plus summer school at I.U. during 1951, Les finished his M.A. degree for teaching. He then began his exemplary career during what was considered the golden age for Indiana high school basketball: 1952-68. He obtained his first head coaching assignment at Jackson Township in Randolph County, on the Ohio line, during 1951-52. In four grades the school had 22 boys, but 18 were seniors. There were no home games because the gym was condemned and they had to practice in Jackson, Ohio. But it won 22 games before falling in the Winchester sectional. Even after consolidation into Union City, the school is still 1A [16]. Les moved on with the 18 graduating seniors.

With the recommendation of coach Red Sering, Les got the head coaching job at Flora in Carroll County, succeeding Phil Buck (HOF). Flora, had a legendary basketball tradition. From 1925-30, its teams averaged over 20 wins per season--and that, in spite of Frankfort and Kokomo poaching the



Figure 2
VARSIITY - ROW 1 - Lehman, Peed, Rowland, Young, Tipton, Shields, Ray. ROW 2 - Sidwell, Doyle, Truax, Etherford, Mercer, Stozek, Leary, Coach Good. ROW 3 - Williams, Brandenburg, Latham, Thompson, Ravensberg, Toon, Taylor, Jensen, Marshall, Student Manager Kaminsky.

During its last year of operation, the NBL lost four of its best teams (Minneapolis, Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, and Rochester) to its east coast rival--the Basketball Association of America (BAA).

1970-71 before it was back up to 17 teams. Meanwhile the Packers and seven others tried a new National Professional basketball League (NPBL) for 1950-51. When Anderson wanted to trade Les to the

better players. In the years 1941-47 they won 18,17,16, 4,18, 24, and 20 games; as well as four sectionals ('42, '45-'47); and went to the Final 4 in '46. With only 137 students, coach Ray had only one losing season and then during '54 and '55 won 46 more games. Two boys went on to play college ball: Dean Day at Western Kentucky and Jerry Garrison at I.U. [3]

The Carroll County sectional had rotated between Delphi and Flora until 1952 when they were both shifted to Kokomo, where even the Harlem Globetrotters would have had difficulty. At the end of single class basketball in 1997, Kokomo had won its own Sectional 66 times, second only to Vincennes with 67 [1]. Coach Ray lost to Kokomo in the sectional all three years: In '53 he lost 73-69. In '54 he outlasted Western 53-50 in double overtime but then dropped the final to Kokomo 69-64 in another O.T. In 1955, Flora lost 65-45 but Kokomo lost its Sectional in '55,'56, and '57--rare events in Howard County [1,2].

The next step up on the coaching ladder for Les was at Rushville, where he had triple the enrollment--from 137 students in Flora to 475 at Rushville. Les was so heartened by this move that he figured the time was right to marry his Sullivan sweetheart Sandy Snider. Rushville had hosted sectionals since 1919 and regionals since 1926 [2]. It had lost its sectional only seven times and had won eleven regionals [1]. Jim Gridley (HOF) had coached the Lions from 1945 to 1953--winning five sectionals and two regionals before becoming athletic director there for an additional 25 years. Earlier, Gridley had played for the 1940 NCAA champion Hoosiers [12].

Les took over for the Lions from 1956-60 and won four sectionals and three regionals in five years. In

1958, he won the regional over Brookville and Vevay, but fell at Indy to Muncie Central 55-53 in an O.T. Muncie Central was again the spoiler in the 1959 Indy semi-state, besting the Lions 77-72. In 1960, Rushville beat Aurora and Versailles in the regional but then lost to Madison at Indy. During 1959, Les decided to pass on the head coach position being offered at Nevada-Reno. During the period of 1958-60, his Rushville squads were all ranked in the top 20 and as high as 4th in 1960 [3]. This led to an opportunity up the road (State Highway 3) to New Castle, where Les encountered two more major historical milestones in Indiana basketball history: the largest high school gymnasium in the U.S., and Marion Pierce.

The New Castle Trojans were sick of having to play in the Muncie Central regional. The Muncie gym had been dedicated in 1928 with 7,800 seats and was the largest in the state for 30 years while hosting many regionals and 16 semi-states. The New Castle Church Street gym seated 2000 and was literally a cracker-box, similar to the 1939 WPA gym at Richmond. When the Henry County school board refused to fund a new gym, the community started its own fund-raising in 1956. Aided by the local Chrysler plant, a new 9,300 seat gym with six acres of parking was dedicated in November of the '59-'60 season [17].

Les was one of 150 coaches who had applied for the open New Castle position. He took over for the next four years '60-'61 to '63-'64 while going 55-38 in the rugged North Central Conference. In his first year, the team lost its sectional to Lewisville (81 students) and scoring phenomenon Marion Pierce (HOF). Pierce averaged 32.4 points per game en route to a total of 3019 during four years as a starter [12]. At the New Castle regional, Muncie Central

edged Lewisville 50-41 for the title [2]. The '62 Trojans had junior Butch Joyner but lots of injuries when they dropped the sectional to Spiceland 48-46. Muncie Central again won the regional. In '63 with Joyner healthy, the team finally advanced to its own regional. After beating Parker, the Trojans lost to eventual state champion Muncie 69-58. In the '64 regional, another Muncie, "South" this time, nosed them out 62-59. Like the whole New Castle community, Coach Ray was getting sick of losing games to Muncie.

He then became the successful applicant of the 70 coaches who applied at Kokomo, which at that time was the second largest high school in the state with 3000 students in grades 10-12. And it had its own regional sans Muncie. Les joined a cadre of famous former coaches at Kokomo who took teams to the final 4 in 1925, 1941, 1944, 1959, 1961 1989, and 1997. The Kats took the state title in '61. Its coaches read like a who's who in Indiana basketball history: Chet Hill (HOF), Abe Masters (HOF), Walter Cross (HOF), James "Pedad" Campbell, (HOF) Ralph King, Joe Platt (HOF), Les Ray (HOF), Carl McNulty (HOF) and Basil Mawbey.

Winning the sectional is almost a birthright at Kokomo, but Les was the only Wildkat coach to never lose a regional (4 for 4) and he tied with Joe Platt in winning four in a row. At the Fort Wayne semi-state in '65 he lost to North Side, the state's runner-up, 58-54. The next year Kokomo lost at Fort Wayne to state champ Michigan City 74-66. Ray's least successful team, in 1966-67, finished the regular season 8-12 but then ended up 13-13 after a semi-state loss to Marion. That same year, New Castle, under coach Cecil Tague (HOF), went 25-3 and finally got out of its own regional en route

to the final 4.

In Les's last year as a head coach, the Wildkats (18-8) blew thru the sectional games 81-48, 85-52, 72-57 and then the regionals 71-64 and 70-55. At Fort Wayne, Michigan City Elston delivered the coup de grace, 90-79. In February of that year Les was named to the Silver Anniversary HOF all state team. After 17 years and with a young family of two daughters ages 4 and 9, Les decided to retire from coaching and concentrate on his career in education.

As eventually occurred in Muncie, Anderson, and Lafayette, the Kokomo school board decided that the benefits to basketball of a huge enrollment were outweighed by the necessity for more than one high school per city. Kokomo Haworth opened its doors in 1968. With the reduced enrollment, Kokomo High actually lost seven sectionals between 1969-1997 and did not win another regional until 1985. Les worked as an assistant principal at Haworth for the next three years before going back on campus at I.U. to finish his doctorate in education (Ed. D) during the 1971-'72 year. From '72-'73 to '77 he was associate superintendent at Lebanon and then superintendent at Avon from 1977-'81. Les and Sandy wanted to return to southern Indiana, so Les transferred to Bloomington South where he taught Social Studies and was a guidance counselor and personnel director. He retired at age 65 in 1991. In 1994 he was inducted into the Indiana Basketball HOF [Fig. 3, Les at HOF].

His one last hurrah in sports came when he managed the Bloomington South tennis team in 1988 and won the South Central Conference en route to the final 4. His teams won both sectional and regional titles in '89 and '90. For all those who know him, coach Ray has always

been described as a class act--a true gentlemen, as well as an exceptional coach, teacher and administrator. He is now widowed and lives with his daughter Cathy in Bloomington. He goes to the local YMCA in the A.M., watches a lot of basketball in the P.M., and frequently gets back to Sullivan for visits. His address and phone number are listed in the IHSBHS membership directory.

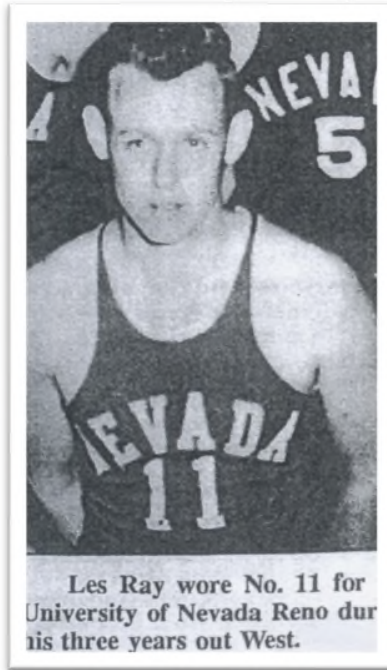


Figure 3

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LES RAY COACHING RECORD			TOTALS
1951/52:	Jackson Twp.	22-4	22-4
1952/53	FLORA	08-14	
1954	54-21	23-04	
1955		23-03	76-25
1956	RUSHVILLE	13-11	SECT
1957	86-37	13-08	
1958		20-06	SECT.-REG.
1959		19-07	SECT.-REG.
1960		21-05	SECT.-REG. 162-62
1961	N. CASTLE	12-11	
1962	55-38	10-11	
1963		17-08	SECT.
1964		16-08	SECT. 217-100
1965	KOKOMO	18-08	SECT.-REG.
1966	69-35	20-06	SECT.-REG.
1967		13-13	SECT.-REG.
1968		18-08	SECT.-REG. 286-135
CAREER		286/421=68%	Ten Sectionals-7 Regionals

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THE MACKEY ACES, 1945-46 SECTIONAL CHAMPS

by

Mark Buxton, PhD

Despite having produced two eventual Evansville College Hall-of-Famers in Gus Doerner and Harold Brown, the Mackey Aces had never won a sectional title. Located seven miles south of Oakland City in Gibson County, Mackey always had to contend with the big boys of Princeton and Owensville in the quest for that sectional championship. Hopes were bright though going into the 1945-46 season as the previous year had seen the Aces reach the semi-finals in the Princeton sectional and were returning several letterman. The end of World War II had everyone all over the country thinking about the future. The survivors who left the cities, small towns, and farms as boys were coming home as men. One man in particular, coming home to Mackey, would play an important role later on in the season.

When the season began, Principal James Null served also as the coach. The starting five for most of the season was comprised of Archie Wildt, Erwin "Dee" Whitehead, Louis Buck, Clifford "Casey" Bennett and sophomore Alton "Smokey" Ambrose. Other players contributing were part-time starter Charles Schmett, Marvin "Shank" McConnell, Don Lutz, Wayne Benton, Winfrid "Wimp" Obert and

Bob Block. Four of these players are still living today – Louis Buck, Wayne Benton, Marvin McConnell and Winfrid Obert, along with one of the cheerleaders, Ruth Bedwell (nee Skelton).

Mackey, Buckskin and Somerville were coal-mining communities whose grade schools fed into the high school. Several of the players' fathers worked in the surrounding coal fields which was difficult and often dangerous work. Charles Dickens' characters in his novel *Hard Times* had nothing on some of Mackey's players, especially Alton Ambrose and Marvin McConnell.

Alton was born with rickets, causing one leg to be shorter than the other and also to have some of his teeth fall out, thus requiring dentures. Then when he was seven years old in 1937 his family suffered a tragedy when two of his sisters and a brother died from malaria contracted by mosquito bites. Alton also was bitten. His son, Tom, recounted what his father had described to him: "My dad's family lived out in Buckskin and he and my two sisters and a brother slept upstairs in the loft while Grandma and Grandpa slept downstairs. The oldest siblings were already grown and out of the house. After the mosquito bites, my grandparents couldn't figure out exactly what was wrong. By the time they did, my dad's siblings had passed away. He himself had a 105 degree temperature but was saved by a shot of quinine. My grandmother had three funerals in two days." Despite the maladies, Alton developed a muscular and stout body. All four surviving players from the Mackey team mentioned his jumping ability and respect for his basketball skills, McConnell calling him a "dead-eye shot."

When Marvin McConnell was nine, his father was killed in a coal

mining accident and his mother died a few weeks later from complications after giving birth to her eighth child. Marvin described his and his siblings' youth: "It made it rough to get by. The four youngest of us got kicked pillar to post. A lot of times we didn't know where we would be tomorrow. Other people have been in a lot worse shape than we were, so I don't, well, just think of it as one of those (terrible) things, but praise the Lord, all of them (us) came out, we did real well with what we had." In his senior year Marvin was living on his own in a boarding room and had to work for a railroad to make ends meet. He worked out an agreement with Principal Null and his boss on the railroad to go to school only three days a week and work three days a week. "See, that was the way it was while going to school. Working, having a boarding room, and acquiring a little spending money. That's how I got my education, through that (process). I had to do not only that, but milking quite a few cows and (many other things). But I still found some time to have a little entertainment. I'd really grown up (fast) and it was something (of a challenge) to me."

During his senior year Wayne Benton said he also worked a full-time, night-shift job on the assembly line at Servel (Company) in Evansville making refrigerators and had to get home to Buckskin to get ready for school. Winfrid Obert worked on his father's dairy farm, rising early to milk the cows. Louis Buck worked as well. So the players had a mental toughness and work ethic already instilled in them.

Due to World War II, many young men were drafted or enlisted at age 18, some even enlisted at age 17 so they could choose the branch of service they desired, then never finished school. So with many of the boys going into the service, several

of the 1946 players moved up to the varsity their sophomore years and gained valuable experience.

Mackey opened its 1945-46 campaign November 2nd on the road against Warrick County school Elberfeld which had graduated its big gun, future Hall of Fame coach Bob Lochmueller. The Aces were never threatened by the rebuilding Elites as Schmett poured in twenty points, tying Elberfeld all by himself, the final tally being 40-20. Another win at Francisco over the Owls followed five days later, 38-25. The Aces led 20-6 at halftime as Whitehead scored 12 and Ambrose had 11 in the easy win.

The home opener on November 9th against Oakland City was up next for Mackey. Winfrid Obert described the crackerbox Mackey Gymnasium: "I think the gym held 300 people, and supposed to hold just 300, but they just kept selling tickets and it got so full around the corners of the gym that we used a balcony up above. I think down below there were five rows of seats, and the balcony had two rows. They would fill all the seats up and then people would be standing around the corners of the gym. Up in the balcony, you'd see them standing back there looking over everybody trying to see the game. Whenever we were (playing) on the south end, the fans on the north end were almost out at the foul line watching the game. As soon as we got the ball and came down to the north end of the floor, well, they all backed up and the ones on the south side would be at the free throw line watching the game too. That was really funny. I'll bet they sold 500 tickets. It was really something." Louis Buck added that the opponents could get fouled by the (spectators). That never really happened, did it?" "I wouldn't bet against it." In front of the home crowd the Aces blasted the Oaks, 49-

20. Wildt led the way with 13 and Ambrose added 11 to up the Aces' mark to 3-0. The box score doesn't list any fouls called on the Mackey crowd.

On November 14th the host Spurgeon Cardinals brought Mackey down to the earth with a 36-24 spanking but on the 20th the Aces bounced back with an easy win at home over Griffin, 29-8, Schmett leading the way with 13. In those days many smaller schools played the junior varsity squads of big-city schools. Next up, Mackey had such a game scheduled against Evansville Central in the big gymnasium in Evansville. The Aces fell to the Bear Cubs 30-22 with sophomore Gene Southwood scoring 12 for Central. Shortly afterwards, Southwood would be promoted to the varsity. Two years later as a senior, Southwood and a fellow senior, future United States Congressman Lee Hamilton, would lead the Bears to the state finals. Mackey went into the Christmas break with a game at Owensville. Mackey pummeled the Kickapoos in the first half, 22-6 and coasted in the second half to win 41-24. Whitehead poured in 16, McConnell tallied a season-high 10 coming off the bench and Schmett added seven. So at the break, the Aces' mark stood at 5-2.

Mackey opened the second half of the season on January 4th at home against Patoka which came in with its own strong mark of 6-2. The Aces struggled mightily against the Wrens' zone defense, shooting poorly and were embarrassed, 35-22. Ambrose scored 10 in the disappointing contest. A week later Mackey had another match against Francisco, this time in Mackey. Most thought it would be another easy conquest, but again Mackey struggled. The Owls led most of the first half though the Aces managed to capture the lead by the end of the

third frame, 28-26. Free throws were the difference in the outcome as Mackey outscored Francisco by six at the charity stripe to win the game 35-31. Ambrose scored 14 and Whitehead added nine.

The squad turned in its best effort of 1946 on January 18th with a 59-20 pounding of the Hazelton Lions at Hazelton. All ten players got into the game with nine scoring, Ambrose fired in 17 to the lead the barrage. Four days later the Aces turned in another strong effort on its home floor beating Haubstadt 53-38. Balanced scoring was the key as Whitehead had 13, Schmett and Wildt added 10 each and Ambrose and Bennett chipped with eight apiece. The Haubstadt coach stated afterwards Mackey was the best team he had seen in the county.

Principal Null had led the squad to an 8-3 record including three straight wins when a surprise was announced. Former Mackey student manager Denver McCullough, who graduated in the late 1930s and had been discharged from the Army, would be taking over the coaching reins. The players did not have an inkling the change was to happen, it just did. In talking to the surviving players, they felt that while Null was a good man and a decent coach, practices became much better organized and they may not have won the sectional without McCullough. Marvin McConnell talked about the difference in styles: "Coach Null was too strict, he wouldn't let anyone chew gum, he wouldn't let the cheerleaders ride the bus, they had to find their own way to the game. When Denver got here out of the army, he started the second semester and in two months he whipped that team up." Louis Buck agreed: "He (McCullough) was a good guy, he wasn't too tough. We started running plays, but prior to that we just played. He taught us the

fast-break and the zone defense.”

Principal Null deserved a lot of credit as he had coached the teams throughout the war and had kept the program going. The 1946 players weren't sure who would have coached if Principal Null hadn't. Null apparently was very happy for McCullough to take over in January 1946 and reduce some of his workload. Another difference was that McCullough seemed to shorten the bench. Wayne Benton agreed with that observation, saying “Principal Null wanted everyone to have a chance.”

Friday January 25th had Mackey hosting Fort Branch in McCullough's debut as coach. With Whitehead “throwing them in from all over the floor”, the Aces pulled away in the fourth quarter to win 42-31. Wildt backed Whitehead's twenty points with nine of his own. In the Wednesday, January 30th edition of the *Princeton Clarion*, columnist Jim Leister wrote in his *Slant of Sports*, “Mackey is the most talked about team in the county at the present time. Those Aces are one of the “fightingest” ball clubs in the state. They use a fast-break and pick up their men on defense from the moment their opponents take the ball out of bounds”.

Next up for 9-3 Mackey was a road game against Stendal on February 1st. “The fast-breaking Aces had some trouble at the first of the contest but as the game progressed, so did Stendal.” Whitehead fired in eight buckets to lead the charge with 16, Wildt chipped in with 12, and Ambrose added nine as Mackey triumphed 47-36 to add to its county-best record. The Aces faced Elberfeld a second time on Wednesday the 5th and this game turned out to be a red-letter day for the squad. It broke the school record for most points in crushing the Elites 77-22. Somewhat

surprising was that McCullough used only seven players in the blowout. Whitehead scored 22, Schmett added 21 and Ambrose chipped in with 13, as the Aces' mark now stood at 11-3.

What is the opposite of a red-letter day? The answer apparently for Mackey was the game at Lynnville on Friday the 8th. Coach McCullough suffered his first loss and the team's six-game winning streak was snapped by the Lindies, 31-21. *The Clarion* reported, “Mackey did not play their usual brand of ball last night and several of their shots that are usually made went for nil”. Schmett scored nine and Ambrose added seven, but Whitehead was held to a single point while his man for Lynnville, Bailey, scored 12. The Aces had a week to regroup before closing out its regular season against county foe Mount Olympus at home. The Aces held the Olympians (who were formally called the Mountaineers back in 1929 when the school won its only sectional) scoreless in the third quarter to blast open the game. It cruised in the fourth quarter, 32-17 being the final score. Whitehead got back into the scoring lead with 10 while Wildt and Schmett added six apiece as the Aces finished the regular season with a 12-4 mark.

When the sectional pairings were announced, the Aces were thrown into the long end of the 11-team Princeton bracket. Working overtime that week was Coach Denver McCullough who “has taken over the duties of Mrs. Mildred Hennigar as seventh grade history in the “blackery” school (Princeton Lincoln). Mrs. Hennigar has gone to Philadelphia for a two week's visit with her husband, Paul Hennigar, who is in the U.S. Navy.” Mackey was assigned a 1 p.m. practice time on Tuesday the 19th at the Princeton gym. The *Princeton Clarion* also reported “When Mackey practiced

Tuesday afternoon in Princeton's gym, they shot a lot of free throws and those boys hit them. Almost all of the team's members would hit at least four out of five. Mackey used a zone defense in practice yesterday too. Could they be trying to come up with something new for the tourney? They have been using a man-to-man most of this season.”

The next day *The Clarion* reported “Their team has been paced by a high-scoring center, Whitehead, whose pivot shots and tip-ins are murder. Bennett, who plays guard for Mackey, is a cool, deliberate player who has a very dead-eye long shot and doesn't hesitate to use it when the opportunity presents itself. Ambrose is another versatile player at the forward position for the Aces. His ball-handling and smooth playing is one of the biggest reasons for Mackey's success this year”.

First up in the sectional on Thursday February 22nd were again the Olympians from Mt Olympus as the two squads opened the sectional at 7pm. Mackey prevailed again, 37-30, as Whitehead scored 10 and Wildt had nine. In the Friday night quarterfinal, the Aces bested Oakland City 39-29 as Louis Buck and Ambrose each scored 10. The Aces steadily increased their advantage throughout the game leading 9-7, 21-16 and 32-24 at the quarter stops.

As basketball fans awoke Saturday morning anticipating the day's semi-finals and finals action, they were reminded of the war that had ended seven months earlier - newspapers reported that Admiral Charles McVay, captain of the ill-fated *USS Indianapolis*, had been found guilty in his court-martial though his sentence was remitted “in view of his previous outstanding record” and “restored to active duty”. The first semi-final at 1:30 pm had Mackey against the Twigs from Fort Branch

who had beaten Princeton earlier in the tournament. Mackey had beaten Fort Branch in the regular season 42-31 and this time was no different with Mackey prevailing in a thriller, 32-31 in overtime. The *Evansville Sunday Courier and Press* reported "Mackey entered the final quarter with a 24-23 margin and still led 31-29 with 37 seconds to go. The Aces were stalling when suddenly one of their players took a shot from the corner, missed, and Jackson, sub Twig pivotman, swept down the floor and under to tie the score. He was fouled by Wildt but missed the free throw that would have won the game for the Twigs" so the game went to overtime. No one seems to remember who took the ill-advised shot for Mackey, but Buck who was in the game at that point said, "I don't remember; (but) I probably (wanted to) kill him." Louis, were YOU the one who took the shot? Laughing, he said "I knew better."

In the overtime period Bennett missed a free throw that would have put Mackey on top but later Ambrose was fouled "who didn't miss with a minute left. The Aces then completed a stall without one of their players 'blowing his top' and taking a poke at the bucket." Principal Null rented a house in Princeton so the team could rest between games because the cutting down of the sectional nets would require one more win against Patoka who had stomped Mackey 35-22 back on January 4th.

Fans of both teams were ready as neither school had won a sectional championship. The doors opened at 7pm and the stands were full by 7:15. Fans were standing under the baskets and in the corner, and sitting in the aisles. This time Mackey was in control most of the way, leading 22-14 at the half. The starters played the entire game and had balanced scoring on their way to a 37-31

victory as Whitehead and Ambrose had ten points, Wildt nine, Buck six, and Bennett two. Obert talked about Patoka and the aftermath of the championship game. "I know we met the Patoka guys outside after the game and they were crying around and we kind of razzed them a little bit. The Princeton team really got behind us because Fort Branch beat Princeton, so Princeton was on Mackey's side then. As we went out the door, all the Princeton boys followed us down the street."

Back in Mackey the celebration was on. Obert recollected that "We just went to a little tavern, Ahlman's Café in downtown Mackey, where some of us got something to eat and something to drink. Back in those days you could sit up at the bar right next to a guy drinking a beer. It was no problem."

Jim Leister wrote in his *Princeton Clarion Slant on Sports* column for Monday the 25th, "Orchids of the year go to coaches James Null and Denver McCullough. McCullough took over those Mackey Aces at the turn of the year after receiving his discharge from the Navy. Null was coaching the team before McCullough came back. Immediately after the championship game Saturday night the Mackey team cut down the nets. After the net ceremony, several Mackey fans carried the Mackey team on their shoulders into the dressing room."

While all of Mackey celebrated, some folks in one losing town were not in a similar mood. Leister wrote in his Tuesday *Princeton Clarion* column "A Mackey fan told me that some of the Mackey team members were driving around Sunday and drove to Fort Branch. They entered a restaurant there and could not get waited on. He stated the team went to Haubstadt where the whole town was almost given to the Mackey champs". Of course there are always

two sides to a story. A couple of days later an employee of the Ft. Branch café wrote to the newspaper claiming the reason the Mackey players weren't seated was because they were just standing around playing the slot machines. The café's owner thought they were loafing.

Bill Robertson of *The Evansville Press* wrote in his column, *The Firing Line*, "Basketball enthusiasm at Mackey, the little Gibson County town with a population of 164, is running high this week and most of the town will probably be on hand at the Central Gym Saturday afternoon when the Aces tangle with Boonville in the second game of the local regional. Coach Denver McCullough, tutor of the Mackey quintet, is a soft-spoken hometown boy who had made it good in a big way. He is a graduate of the school he now coaches. He was discharged from the service in January, took over the coaching reins immediately and here he is with a sectional champion. That's using the fast-break to success. The Mackey boys are going through their practice sessions this week happily, but without aimless talk of what they're going to do this Saturday. Coach McCullough expects their actions to speak much louder in the Central gym." On Wednesday the 27th Coach McCullough and the players were guests at the weekly meeting of the Princeton Kiwanis where McCullough told the crowd, "The boys are going to Evansville to defeat Boonville."

The regionals were played at the old Central High School gymnasium which sat on the corner of Sixth Street and Vine and still stands today as a YMCA. Seating capacity for that regional was estimated to be 4,586 and the tickets were allotted, based mostly on enrollment but partly upon a fixed amount.

Evansville Central had an enrollment of 1705, Boonville 393, Cannelton 175 and Mackey 106. The tickets allotted to the schools were Central 1730, Boonville 794, Cannelton 576 and Mackey 522, so the race was on for tickets by all fans. Every school that fed into any regional also would receive twelve tickets so as to take along their players and coaches, if they so desired. *The Evansville Press* reported that only 30 of the 38 schools sent in a check. Among the missing were Cannelton and Mackey, so twelve potential Mackey fans missed out.

The surviving members of the team say that Principal Null was given options on where in the gymnasium the Mackey contingent would be seated. Null thought that it would be best up high and out of the way, so all of the Mackey crowd sat in the upper reaches of the gym, far away from the Aces' two cheerleaders (only two!). They were down at floor level couldn't lead any cheers since their crowd couldn't hear them. The cheerleaders were not happy about this. Ruth Skelton (Bedwell) pondered "When we got to the gym in Evansville, where were our people? In the very back! All the other schools were seated down close." Obert opined "I don't know what was wrong with the principal. He put all of our seats way up in the corner. My sister was one of the cheerleaders, just her and one other. We just had two cheerleaders, and they couldn't lead any of the cheers with all of our fans way up in the corner of Central Gym. She was really mad. All of the fans were kind of mad about that. I don't know why he did that."

While their fans were up in the far reaches of the Central Gym, the first game at 1:30 would pit #1 ranked Evansville Central against Cannelton while the Aces were matched up against 21-3 Boonville, winners of

19 in a row, in the 2:45 game. Mackey had only three boys who

much for Mackey, winning 49-39 despite 17 points from Erwin



Queen's Court: Cheerleaders, L-R- Carolyn Obert, sister of Winfred Obert-#12 and Ruth Skelton Bedwell.

Mascot with Ball- James "Jimmy" Skelton, nephew of Ruth Skelton

Queen and attendants, L-R - Unknown, Eualee Wilson, Mary Montgomery, Queen Iola Tyring, Alma Jean Annis, Bernice Lee Richey, Unknown

Ball Team, L-R - Jack Burch, Team Manager, Alton "Smokey" Ambrose #9, Charles "Chris" Schmett #6, Louis Buck #3, Arthur "Archie" Wildt #5, Winfrid "Wimp" Obert #12, Erwin "Dee" Whitehead #4, Wayne Benton #11, Robert "Bob" Block #7, Marvin "Shank" McConnell #5, Donald "Don" Lutz #10, Clifford "Casey" Bennett #8

were six feet tall or over. Whitehead and Benton were listed at 6'1" and Buck at an even six feet, while Boonville had four starters between 6'1" and 6'4". Boonville had knocked off Lynnville for their sectional title, a bruising game in which 48 fouls were called and all of Lynnville's starters had fouled out. Mackey led 9-7 at the first quarter break but Boonville led 26-16 at halftime. The Aces hung tough in the second half, *The Evansville Press* reporting that "with Whitehead, Wildt and Ambrose scoring six baskets, the determined Aces narrowed the gap to four points at the end of the quarter and then sent their backers into rapture in the last period when they pulled within one point of Boonville, 37-36." In the end though, Boonville proved too

Whitehead. Buck said, "We did get within one point and then the wheels fell off."

Evansville sportswriter Dick Anderson commented on the resiliency of Mackey in that "A hard scrapping outfit, the Aces finally bowed to the Pioneers but only after (Boonville) Coach Ricketts had torn up two notebooks and pulled a few more hairs off his balding dome." *The Princeton Clarion* reported, "Coach Denver McCullough's boys had to fight height and weight in battling the Boonville Pioneers but they did put up a whale of a battle and their refusal to never say die was typical of southern Indiana basketball. Coach Denver McCullough and Gibson County can well be proud of the county's representative in the regional

tournament.”

Though there would be 21 more versions of a Mackey High School basketball team, none would reach the heights of a sectional championship the way the 1945-46 Aces did. In 1967, Mackey consolidated with Francisco and Oakland City to form Wood Memorial High School.

Today Marvin McConnell is retired from Whirlpool Corporation and lives in Evansville with his high school sweetheart, Ima June. They've been married for 66 years. Wayne Benton is a retired teacher and lives in Naples, Florida with Edna, his wife of 68 years. Louis Buck worked at Chrysler and Ralston Purina in Evansville, is retired and lives in Buckskin with his wife of 62 years, Imolee. Winfrid Obert is a retired dairy farmer and lives on the same farm outside of Buckskin on which he grew up. He and his wife Marian have been married for 59 years. Ruth Bedwell and her husband of 68 years, Bill, until recently lived in Mackey about 100 yards from the house in which Ruth grew up. They now are in a nursing home together. Perhaps Winfrid Obert put it best about his life and the farm where he grew up and lives today when he happily said, "I'm still here."

Now, nearly 70 years later, the memories of the only sectional title in Mackey school history are still alive for members of the 1946 Aces. They include Louis Buck, Winfrid Obert, Marvin McConnell, Wayne Benton, cheerleader Ruth Skelton Bedwell--and the Mackey alumni who gather each year for the school reunion.



Mackey class of 1945 includes the players and Principal Null, middle row, far right



Sectional
Party Favor



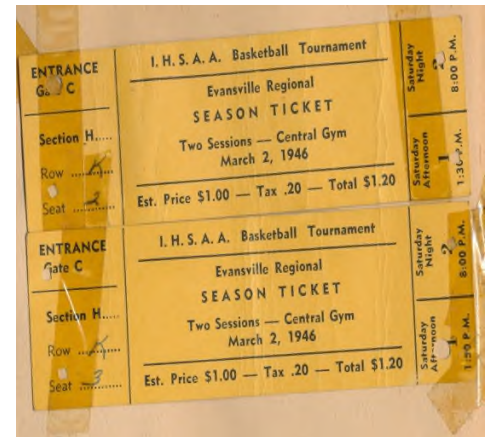
Mackey Class of 1949, Coach
McCullough is far right



Cheerleader Ruth Skelton Bedwell,
Marvin McConnell, Louis Buck and
Winfrid Obert



The seven seniors – L-R Clifford
Bennett, Charles Schmett, Louis Buck,
Archie Wildt, Marvin McConnell,
Winfrid Obert and Erwin Whitehead



Tickets to Regionals

Regular Season scores:

Mackey 40, Elberfeld 20, 1-0
Mackey 38, Francisco 25, 2-0
Mackey 49, Oakland City 20, 3-0
Spurgeon 36, Mackey 24, 3-1
Mackey 29, Griffin 8, 4-1
Evansv. Cent. JV 30, Mackey 22, 4-2
Mackey 41, Owensville 24, 5-2
Patoka 35, Mackey 22, 5-3
Mackey 35, Francisco 31, 6-3
Mackey 59, Hazelton 20, 7-3
Mackey 53, Haubstadt 38, 8-3
Mackey 42, Fort Branch 31, 9-3
(McCullough's first game)
Mackey 47, Stendal 36, 10-3
Mackey 77, Elberfeld 22, 11-3
Lynnville 31, Mackey 21, 11-4
Mackey 32, Mt. Olympus 17, 12-4

Sectional at Princeton:

Mackey 37, Mt. Olympus 30, 13-4
Mackey 39, Oakland City 29, 14-4
Mackey 32, Ft. Branch 31 (ot), 15-4
Mackey 37, Patoka 31, 16-4

Regional at Evansville Central:

Boonville 49, Mackey 39, 16-5

Sources for the story:

Evansville Courier
Evansville Press
Evansville Sunday Courier and Press
Princeton Clarion
Personal interview with Marvin
McConnell
Phone interview with Tom Ambrose
Phone interview with Wayne Benton
Phone interview with Louis and
Imolee Buck

Phone interview with Marvin McConnell

Phone interview with Winfred Obert
Roundtable interview with Buck, McConnell, Obert and Ruth Skelton Bedwell

1940s era photos courtesy of Marvin McConnell

Photos of regional tickets and "Peppy Ace" party favor courtesy of Tom Ambrose

Present-day photo with Ruth Bedwell, Louis Buck, Marvin McConnell, and Winfred Obert (furnished by Mark Buxton).

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THE 1988-89 MARION GIANTS: ALMOST PERFECT

by

Editor Cliff Johnson

You aren't much of a follower of Hoosier basketball history if you've never heard of the three straight state championships captured by the Marion Giants during the 1985-87 seasons. That feat hadn't been accomplished in 65 years, ever since the Franklin Wonder Five had turned the trick during the seasons 1920-22. Not that winning state titles was a rare accomplishment for the Marion fans; the Giants had also won two straight titles in 1975 and 1976, and had annexed an earlier title as well, in 1926. What you might not be familiar with, however, is the sequel to that triple championship story, i.e., the team of two years later, 1988-89. That team closed out an undefeated regular season schedule and then NEARLY won the state title, as well. That earlier triple championship run has simply overshadowed most of the short-lived impression left by the 1988-89 team.

Over the decades Marion had brought

many fine teams to the hardwood and had come away with several 20-plus winning seasons. However, beginning with 1975, its reputation as a perennial state powerhouse advanced with "Giant" steps. For the following 13 years its total wins per season never dipped below 20, even during so-called "re-building" years. Playing in the highly competitive North Central Conference, these teams were either champions or title contenders every season.

Right after the trifecta titles of 1985-87, the 1987-88 team finished with a 14-

Giants and was an important contributor to the success of all those teams. (P)

With that as a backdrop, the story of the 1988-89 season can begin. Practice sessions were initiated in mid-October, but several of the potential squad members were on the football team and still wearing rubber cleats instead of gym shoes toward the end of November. The football team finished its season late, owing to participation in the Class 5A state championship playoffs. Because of this, Marion was forced to cancel and re-schedule its first three

1988-89 Marion Giants Basketball Team



1ST ROW L-R: Jerry Freshwater, Willie Jackson, Head Coach Dan Gunn, Curtis McClung, Jeff McPherson
2ND ROW L-R: Asst. Coach Jeff Plummer, David Anderson, Mark Edwards, Travis Kirby, Trico Grant, Asst. Coach Jack Colescott
3RD ROW L-R: Johnny Williams, Jason McCain, Paul McGriff (Mgr.), Todd Fleece, Dedrick Jackson

8 record. Most of its starters were seniors. But fresh talent had just come up from the ranks of the junior varsity and freshman squads to complement the team and to play ball for a new head coach, Dan Gunn. Bill Green had just relinquished the reins to Dan, after six extraordinarily successful seasons at the helm that followed on the heels of seven other tremendous seasons under coaches Larry Liddle and Green (who had also coached in a previous stretch). Jack Colescott had four 20-plus winning seasons just prior to that, in the late 1960s. Jack continued on as an assistant coach during subsequent years with the

basketball contests. Meanwhile, two of Marion's key players had been dismissed early because of school & team rule violations. That would have constituted a jolt to most teams. But the Giants appeared to be deep in talent this season. By the time basketball practice had concluded on December 1, it became reasonably apparent to all who knew of the pre-season scrimmages that this gifted assemblage of boys was ready to re-establish itself as king of the courts, at least in Indiana. Anticipation for the new season was high.

A writers' poll taken just prior to the opening of the season showed Marion

ranked No.12 in the state, a lofty perch for any squad having just one player returning from the previous year's starting five. That lone guy, however, was 6-1 guard David Anderson, Gunn's leading scorer from the 1987-88 squad. He had averaged 18.3 ppg. Anderson's presence at guard was being augmented by a quick 5-9 sophomore named Jerry Freshwater, one of only three varsity letter-winners on the team. The frontline starters were all big and strong, although largely untested in varsity play. Forward assignments were given to 6-5 John Williams and 6-3 Travis Kirby. The center spot was being handled by 6-5 Jason McCain who weighed in at 265 pounds, certainly enough poundage to avoid being pushed around much in the keyhole.

The Giant's opponent for the season opener on Saturday, Dec. 3 was formidable Lawrence North of Indianapolis which was hosting the Giants on its own home court. The Wildcats, having already clobbered Indianapolis Washington 96-56 in its Nov. 23 opener and being ranked No. 11 in an early AP poll, were blessed with the return of 7-0, 250-pound Eric Montross and two other starters, 6-6 David Ryser, and 5-11 long-range sharpshooter Todd Leary. Coach Gunn decided to employ a partial zone defense to hold Montross in check, while assigning a single player to hound shooter Leary. It worked, and Marion was off to a solid start for the 1988-89 season, taking out the favored Wildcats by a score of 69-65. Anderson scored 24 points (mostly early in the game) for the Giants, while Montross and Leary combined for 36 to lead the Wildcats.

The team's schedule, as usual, had few soft spots in it. Nearly every game presented a challenge. The following week, David Anderson's 32 points helped push down the Anderson Highland Scots team to a lower altitude. The score was 79-58. After that, the Kokomo Wildkats were declawed in a 55-49 overtime tilt. The Giants kept winning, and kept climbing in the polls. By the 21st of February, they had attained the No. 1 ranking in the state, were undefeated at 20-0, and became the favorites to win the state championship.

Terre Haute South (19-1) and South Bend St. Joseph's (21-1) were generally considered in the polls as No. 2 and No. 3, respectively.

The complete regular season results for the Marion Giants in 1988-89 are as follows:

Marion 69, Lawrence North 65
 Marion 79, Anderson Highland 58
 Marion 55, Kokomo 49 (OT)
 Marion 72, Huntington North 52
 Marion 77, Blackford 55
 Marion 66, F.W. South Side 58
 Marion 78, Lafayette Harrison 71
 Marion 61, Richmond 48
 Marion 68, Ben Davis 56
 Marion 68, New Castle 66
 Marion 76, Anderson 56
 Marion 65, Lafayette Jeff 64 (OT)
 Marion 74, Madison Heights 57
 Marion 66, F.W. Northrop 63
 Marion 68, North Central 52
 Marion 75, Norwell 51
 Marion 53, Logansport 46
 Marion 72, Muncie Central 51
 Marion 55, Indianapolis Chatard 50
 Marion 95, F.W. Snider 51

Individual scoring was led by David Anderson, with 451 points and a 22.6 ppg average. Second was Jason McCain with 331 points, and a 16.6 ppg average. McCain led also in rebound recoveries with 162. Jerry Freshwater topped the assists column with 148. Contributing greatly to this team's overall success as well were starters Johnnie Williams and Travis Kirby. The bench strength was deep and included Dedrick Jackson, Trico Grant, Todd Fleece, Willie Jackson, Mark Edwards, Jeff McPherson, and Curtis McClung.

Sectional action got underway the evening of Wednesday, March 1. The Grant County area could boast of two other high-quality teams that spring. The 1988 sectional champ Madison-Grant Argylls ended its regular season at 16-4, and Mississinewa's Indians went 15-5. However, neither of those teams made it to the final game. The Indians were taken to task by the Argylls in the first round 72-57, then the Giants pulled out a closely contested 67-62 win over

the Argylls in the second round. In the final, the Giants had little trouble disposing of the Oak Hill Golden Eagles, 70-53.

Marion's regional tournament pitted three teams having very good season records against one another. Logansport, the dark horse of the foursome, had recorded a mark of 8-15 to date, but was always dangerous because of the strong NCC competition it had to face every year. You could never count the Berries out, and 23-0 Marion had to face them in the second afternoon game. The Giants had managed to win their regular season match-up 53-46, but it was a tense struggle though that was not indicated by the final score.

The Northfield Norsemen, starring the bruising 6-9 and 6-8 brothers Jon and Joe Ross, came into the regional with a record of 22-1 and a No. 16 ranking in the final state poll. They were pitted against South Adams (17-6) to open afternoon play. Northfield won its game handily against South Adams 69-57, with inspired Brad Hampton, a 6-3 forward, leading the way with 20 points. The Giants defeated the Berries in the other contest 64-58, but again it wasn't easy. Toward the end of the game, the score was only 56-53 Marion, with less than three minutes to play. But the Berries began to commit fouls, and free throws widened the score for the Giants. That night it was much easier for them, as they conquered the Norsemen 77-65. Travis Kirby had his best game of the season by grabbing 14 rebounds and scoring 20 points.

On to the semi-state, with a 25-0 record! The competition at South Bend was probably going to be as tough as it could get. The host team St. Joseph's Indians (27-1) had earlier been ranked No. 1 in the state. They were still No. 3 by the end of the season after suffering a tight 55-54 loss in mid-year to a respectable (15-3) Concord contingent. Since Terre Haute South had been eliminated earlier in the tournament, the Giants and Indians may well have constituted the best pair of teams in the state at this juncture, and here they were playing each other in the first afternoon game of the semis. The other two

contestants this year for the South Bend semi-final trophy were Elkhart Memorial (16-9) and Fort Wayne Concordia (21-5). Those teams were to play in the second afternoon game.

In the first game, the Giants lost to the Indians by two points, 76-74 in overtime. Obviously, it could have gone either way. The game certainly had the appearance of a battle of wills. It was nip-and-tuck throughout the entire first half, which ended with St. Joseph's ahead, 38-37. Outstanding play by guards Darren Teamor and Rodney Holmes led the way for the Indians, while David Anderson was consistently rattling the nets for the Giants. Anderson would wind up with 38 points in this game, his high for the season. The Giants came out fighting in the second half and eventually built up a 65-56 lead with only 1:25 left in the game. But then the roof caved in. Both teams began to commit multiple fouls. The Giants couldn't capitalize on their free throws (1 of 8) while the Indians shot all bull's-eyes. In fact, the Indians made all 18 of their free throws throughout the game, while the Giants managed to sink fewer than half of theirs (9 for 20). In spite of all that, the Giants nearly won. Trailing by 3 points with just 4 seconds remaining on the game clock, a 3-point goal by 6-5 Indians forward Kevin Lorton sent the game into overtime. The overtime likewise became a cliff-hanger. Lorton put the Indians ahead 68-66 with two free throws, but Anderson tied the score with a field goal. The Giants sank three more field goals, but kept fouling the Indians who made all six of their final free throws. The score settled at 74-74. Then Teamor hit a short range jumper to put the Indians ahead by two with just five seconds left. The Giants' Anderson put up a hurried shot that missed, but was fouled in the act of shooting and was awarded two free throws. He had already scored 38 points, but wouldn't finish with 39 or 40 this time because his first shot at the line rimmed out. He was forced to deliberately miss the second in order to try for a rebound. He almost got it too, but was charged with stepping over the line too soon. The game was over, and the Giants were out.

In the second game, Elkhart managed to end the Cinderella aspirations of F.W. Concordia 84-75 in yet another overtime thriller. The night game went to St. Joseph's by a score of 78-62 with fairly balanced scoring among all the starters, 6-7 center Jamie Jamison, 6-5 Kevin Lorton, 6-3 Tom Corcoran, 5-11 Rodney Holmes, and 6-1 Darren Teamor.

So the St. Joseph's Indians made it to the final four, but were downed by Lawrence North 81-62 before reaching the championship tilt. Kokomo bested Floyd Central in the other afternoon contest 73-70. Lawrence North then took out Kokomo in the night game 74-57 to become the state champion. Eric Montross and Todd Leary were both on fire during each of Lawrence North wins in the finals. Remember them, from the team's regular season loss to the Giants? Not only that, but the Giants had also edged out Kokomo during the regular season. So of the four finalists, two had lost to Marion, and a third had been played to a virtual stalemate. This is about as close as a team could come to achieving a perfect season without actually getting one. The Marion Giants of 1988-89. FINIS



Dan Gunn, Giants' Coach, 1988-89

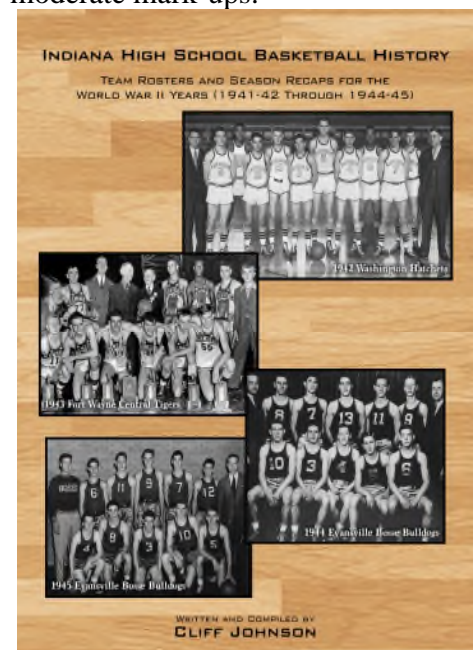
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