

A History of Spencer High School Basketball

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Nowhere was Indiana's passion for basketball more evident than at Spencer High School between the years 1915 and 1970. Located approximately 60 miles southwest of Indianapolis along state Route 67, Spencer sits between Terre Haute to its west and Bloomington to its east. It is the county seat of Owen County, which the local Chamber of Commerce has designated "Sweet Owen County." Both the county and the town were named after men who fought in the Battle of Tippecanoe near Battle Ground, Indiana, during the War of 1812.

Spencer High School graduated its first senior class of six members in 1876 and its last class of 114 in 1970 before consolidating into Owen Valley Community Schools that fall.

Nickname

The basketball team did not have a nickname until 1927, when a contest was held to provide the team with a mascot. In 1920 a federal demography agency had designated an area eight miles southeast of Spencer, near Whitehall, as the "Center of Populations" of the United States at that time. Isidore Cohen, a 1928 graduate, used the first letter of each word in that designation to arrive at the name COPS.

School Colors and Fight Song

The school colors have been blue and white from the late 1920s. Poems found in yearbooks written by students Mary Grace Heavenridge (1927) and Isabel Crane (1933) refer to those colors.

Ida Wood, class of 1933, penned the words to the fight song, which was then set to the music of the U.S. Navy's, "Anchors Aweigh."

Many a varsity basketball player got the thrill of running onto the court to the music of "Anchors Aweigh" as the cheerleaders lead the home crowd in the singing of "Here's to Old SHS."

Coaches

The school had 19 varsity basketball coaches during those years. Wilford G. Hendershot, the coach from 1920 to 1926, also served as principal and taught physics. He left Spencer to take a position in the Chicago public school system, and relatives say he then took a position at the University of Chicago, where he did work for the "Manhattan Project" during World War II. His record at Spencer was 67-56 with a best in 1925 at 19-4.

Elton Harrison coached only one year at Spencer. His 1927 squad won Spencer's first sectional championship but were then defeated in the regional played at Martinsville. Led by John Wooden, who would later star at Purdue and then become a hall of fame basketball coach, Martinsville was the state tournament champion that year.

Relle Aldridge had a best record of 17-5 in 1928. Clarence Tolbert took over from 1932-36. His 1936 team won Spencer's second sectional championship and their first Wabash Valley Prelim Championship. This team beat Bloomfield for the prelim championship before eventually losing to Ashboro, which was led by Angus Nicoson, a legendary player and coach at Indiana Central, now the University of Indianapolis. They were able to avenge the Ashboro loss later by beating them for the sectional title.

Searle (Cy) Proffitt was the coach from 1937 through 1939. His best record was in 1937 at 15-8, but his teams won two consecutive sectionals in 1938 and 1939 while posting losing season records each of these years.

Glen Ricketts won two Wabash Valley Prelim titles in 1940 and 1941, with his best season record being 14-5 in 1941. Herb Edwards took over in the 1941-42 season. He was a Spencer graduate and had played on the 1926 and 1927 teams. His best record was 15-5 in 1943. He was called to military duty prior to the end of the 1944 season.

John Moore's season records were only 7-8 in 1944-45 and 9-7 in 1945-46, but his teams were successful in winning the Wabash Valley Prelim Championship and the sectional championships in both of those years.

Edwards returned from military service and coached from 1947-51. His best season record was 15-1 in 1948, and he won Wabash Valley Prelims in 1947 and 1948. His 1947 squad was the runner-up to Wabash Valley Champion Terre Haute Garfield. His team again won the prelim championship in 1948. This was the fourth straight prelim championship the Cops won.

George Bradfield took over the coaching duties for the next two seasons, compiling an overall record of 15-29. John Bennett had a one-year stint with a record of 12-12. Robert Royer coached the 1954-55 team to a 12-9 record.

Jack Brown was hired to lead Spencer starting with the 1955-56 season. He rebuilt the program and won the Wabash Valley Prelims in 1958, 1959 and 1960. His best record was 18-5 in 1960. His 1958 team posted a 17-5 record.

Tom Smith coached from 1960-64. His 1962 team won the sectional title for the first time in 16 years. He won Wabash Valley Prelim Championships in 1962 and 1963 and then added a second sectional championship to his record in 1964. His 1964 team posted a record of 19-5.

Del Harris, who was to later coach in the NBA and is the recipient of the 2019 John W. Bunn Lifetime Achievement, inherited a talented veteran team for the 1964-65 season that again won the sectional title. Their record was 19-6.

Bob Williams was 6-15 in the 1965-66 season, and Paul Patterson was 19-25 in two seasons, 1966-67 and 1967-68. John Heckman took over in 1968 and won the last sectional championship under the Spencer High School name in the 1969-70 season. His team, playing in an era when consolidations had reduced the number of teams in the state tournament, played just two games to win the sectional title. Heckman also took the 1968 Spencer baseball team to the IHSAA Baseball Final Four before losing.

Indiana High School Basketball Tournament

Indiana High School Athletic Association records indicate that Spencer High School first participated in the state tournament in 1915 and continued in consecutive tournaments until its consolidation into Owen County Community Schools. The

exception was 1934. During the 1934 season Coach Clarence Tolbert pulled his team off the floor due to “rough play” in a game against Cloverdale that was played at Cloverdale. The IHSAA did not agree with that action and suspended Spencer for the remainder of the season. The suspension was lifted prior to the 1934-35 season.

Spencer High School hosted the sectional round of the tournament 13 times during this time. The first sectional was held at Spencer in 1926 just after the school had completed a new gymnasium that would seat 1,000 people. Spencer was to host the sectional for the next three years and then again in 1931, 1939, 1940, 1944 and 1946. The majority of sectionals for the Owen and Clay county schools, when not played at Spencer, were played at Brazil High School. Spencer was again awarded a sectional round in 1958 after their existing facility was renovated to a seating capacity of 3,000. Additional sectionals were awarded to Spencer in 1959, 1961 and 1963. As many as 14 teams played in this sectional from 1930 to the early '60s. At the last sectional played at Spencer, consisting of 10 teams, Freedom beat the host school 56 to 55 to win. Due to consolidations, the last sectional Spencer won was made up of only six teams and they only played two games to win. The sectional site that year was Clay City High School.

S.H.S. won 10 sectionals during this time. The first was in 1927, and then 1936, 1938, 1939, 1945, 1946, 1962, 1964, 1965 and 1970.

Ralph “Unc” McGuire led the 1927 squad in scoring with support from Denny Parrish and Howard “Beast” Wolgamott. The leading scorer on the 1936 team was Kenneth “Bill” Johnson with 227 points. He was supported by Clarence Ooley, who then played at Indiana University 1937-40.

Wayne Payton, a junior, led the 1938 sectional champions with 198 points, and seniors Mahlon “Gibbie” Gibson and Fred “Fritz” Winders scored 164 and 101 points respectively. Payton again led the 1939 team in scoring with 218 points. Juniors Jim “Red” Winders poured in 64 points and Oliver Troth hit for 77. The 1938 and 1939 teams had losing season records prior to winning the sectional championships.

Bill Bayh captained the 1945 sectional winners. He scored 204 points and was second in scoring to Bill Wallace, who hit for 245 points his senior year. Bill Moss, Rudy Tabereaux, Dick Dyar and Bobby "Chigger" Babbs were the leaders and scorers on the 1946 squad. These teams were similar to earlier sectional winners as they did not dominate during the regular season but were stellar at tournament time.

The 1962 Spencer team that won the first sectional in 16 years was led by group of seniors that included Terrie MacMorran, Glen Taylor and Don Townsend plus underclass members Bob Winders and Denny Dreher.

The 1964 and 1965 teams were perhaps the best to ever play at Spencer High School. They were led by Keith Livingston, Bob Hawkins and Keith Griffith. All were three-year starters. Griffith led the team in scoring his sophomore year with 314 points. Hawkins had 266 and Livingston 244. The 1963-64 season produced a record of 19-5, with Livingston the leading scorer with 426 points, supported by Hawkins with 410 points and Griffith with 278 points. The 1964-65 season record was 19-6, and again Livingston was the leading scorer with 478 points, followed by Hawkins with 457 points and Griffith with 396 points. Griffith was the leader in assists with 120. Livingston was the leading rebounder with 248 followed closely by Hawkins with 239. Valuable reserves were Steve Cradick, Ron Medaris, Mike Klaiber, Mike Boyd and Bob Livingston. This team produced many season and individual records in rebounding, points scored and assists. Their combined three-year record was 55-19.

The 1969-70 team was 13-9 for the season. This was a high-scoring group that started slow but caught fire after the Christmas break and won the sectional title in the final year as Spencer High School. They were led by Barry Keith, Denny Taylor, Brad Farmer, Dave Rubeck and Kevin McKay.

The 1927, 1936 and 1938 teams all played in the Martinsville Regional and lost to the host school each of those years. The 1962 team played in the Martinsville Regional and lost to Bloomfield, 55-47. The 1964 team played at Terre Haute in the regional and again lost to Martinsville, 69-60. The 1965 team played in the Terre Haute Regional, defeating Terre Haute Laboratory, 88-75 before losing to

Bloomington, 60-54. The 1970 team played at the Washington Regional and lost to Bloomfield, 64-63.

Wabash Valley Basketball Tournament

The Wabash Valley Basketball Tournament was centered in the Terre Haute area and named after the river valley that flows through that part of the state. More than 175 Indiana high schools from that area plus 31 from Illinois participated in this tourney during its heyday, 1929 to 1963.

The Terre Haute schools -- Gerstmeyer, Wiley and Garfield — won several Wabash Valley titles, but many championships went to other area schools. Clinton; Linton; Lawrenceville, Illinois; Decker; Paletine, Illinois; Monroe City; Switz City; Greencastle; Bloomfield; Brazil; and Ellettsville were some of the other Wabash Valley Champions.

Spencer first participated in this tournament in the late '20s. The school hosted the first round, or prelims, several times from that period until withdrawing from the event at the end of the 1963 season. The Cops won 15 prelims during that span of time, including four consecutives in 1945, 1946, 1947 and 1948. The 1947 team that was led by Glenn "Big Red" Woolard, Wilbur Franklin and Bob McKay finished second to Terre Haute Garfield, 51 to 38. Garfield was undefeated at the time and would remain so until the final game of the state tournament, when they lost to Shelbyville. The star of the Garfield team, Clyde Lovellette, was 6 feet 10 inches tall. Bill Garrett led the Shelbyville team.

Spencer won three consecutive prelims in 1958, 1959 and 1960. The 1958 team was led by Steve Parrish, Jerry Dreher, Al Lucas, Al Meguschar and Gary Fulk. The leaders and scorers on the 1959 team were Gary Fulk, Bob Emerson, Jerry Rumble, Denny White and Doug Kinney. The 1960 team was composed of Denny White, Doug Kinney Jim Conrad, Jerry Nicholson and John Dyar.

Two of the more exciting prelim championships won by Spencer came at the expense of the Greencastle Tiger Cubs, coached by Tom Goldsberry, a member of the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame. The game in 1959 went to a second overtime. (The rule at the time was that the first team to score two points in the

second overtime won the game.) The score was tied at 53 after the first overtime. The tip to start the second overtime was won by Spencer with the ball going to John Dyar, an inexperienced sophomore, who was fouled as he brought the ball up-court. He was awarded two free throws, and with words of encouragement whispered to him by senior Gary Fulk, Dyar made both. Bedlam ensued, and five minutes of fame is still celebrated by this author. Three years later Rick Rodenbeck, a valuable reserve, came off the bench with the score tied at 60. Spencer missed a shot near the end, but Rodenbeck was there to tip it in as time expired to secure the win and the championship for the Cops, 62-60.

Brothers, Fathers and Sons, Cousin, Nephew

Some 25 sets of brothers played for Spencer High School from 1915-70. Brothers have been the McGuires, Wogamotts, Johnsons, Winderses, Lucases, Galloways, Fulks (two sets), Weidners, Tabereauxs, Thompsons, Wilsons, Taylors, Dreheres, McKays, Summerses. The families with three or more brothers each were the McGuires, Kinneys, Woolards and Wallaces.

Coach Herb "Hoggie" Edwards played in 1926 and 1927 and son Roger in 1954. Forrest "Skinney" Kinney played in 1932 and sons Doug in 1960, Alan in 1964 and son Jeff was team manager in 1957. Bob "Huggins" Lucas played in 1930 and sons Jim in 1954 and Allen in 1958. Arthur "Probe" Parrish played in 1935 and son Steve in 1958. Walter "Runt" Meguschar played in 1927 and son Allan in 1958. Bill Stanger (1953) and son Steve (1970).

Father-son sectional winners were John Griffith in 1936 and son Keith in 1964 and 1965. Bob Klaiber was listed a team member in 1945 but left the team to enlist in the U.S. Navy prior to the team's winning the sectional. Son Mike played on sectional winners in 1964 and 1965.

Brothers playing together on sectional-winning teams were Keith and Bob Livingston in 1965 as well as Brad and Bob Farmer in 1970.

Brothers playing on sectional winning teams were Glen Taylor-1962 and Denny Taylor-1970.

Brother-manager combinations were Dick Dyar (1946) and manager Bob Dyar (1949), nephew John Dyar (1961), manager Dick Emerson (1946) and brother Bob Emerson (1959), and manager Freal Galloway (1946) and brothers John Galloway (1944) and Bob Galloway (1948). Cousin Ernie Galloway played in 1939.

Father-Son (Player-Manager)-John Galloway (1944)-John (Mike) Galloway(1970)

Fathers and cheerleaders: Charles (Si) Shields (1937) and daughters Connie (1959), Charlene (1963) and Judy (1964); Charlie Winders (1937) and daughter Bonnie (1967); Renos "Ping" Weidner (1943) and daughter Cindy Weidner (1967); William Wallace (1945) and daughter Connie Wallace (1970).

Who Were the Opponents?

During the early '20s and into the '30s the opponents were mainly teams within Owen County or from adjacent counties. The Cops usually played these teams twice each season on a home and away basis. The teams were Freedom, Gosport, Paragon, Bloomington, Bowling Green, Ellettsville, Martinsville, Scotland, Smithville, Stinesville and Linton. The improvement in roads and means of transportation in the '30s expanded the list of teams to include Bloomfield, Worthington, Switz City, Mooresville, Monrovia, Eminence, Oolitic, Odon, Jasonville, Van Buren, Cloverdale, Patricksburg, Brazil, Greencastle and Crispus Attucks plus the Terre Haute schools Honey Creek, Garfield, Gerstmeyer and Wiley. The '30s and '40s saw schedules arranged so fewer teams were played twice during a season. Schools added during the '50s and '60s were Plainfield, Shawswick, Plainfield Charlton, Clay City, Clayton, Sullivan, Shakamak, Eastern Green and North Davies. The sectional round of the state tournament added schools such as Coalmont, Staunton, Cory and Ashboro into play.

Odds and Ends

Nicknames for players were quit popular from the '20s into the '50s and beyond. Jack "Del" Money, Paul "Polly" Fulk, Wayne "Payt" Payton, Richard "Amos" Dyar, William "Beetle" Moss, Robert "Chigger" Babbs, Robert "Bones" Bourne, John "Reach" Barrowcliff and Gerald "Suds" McClure, Dave "Porky" Rubeck, Brad

“Bruiser” Farmer, Steve “Spanky” Stanger, Keith “Moose” Class, Rich “Digger” Kay, Don “Crackers” Townsend, were just a few of these names.

Spencer High School has had two players voted to the Indiana All Star Basketball Team: Wayne Payton (1939) and Oliver Troth (1940).

Payton was killed in action in Sicily during WW II. He was awarded the Silver Star plus the Purple Heart and the Combat Infantryman Badge.

Keith Griffith (1965) was voted to the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame Silver Anniversary team in 1990. He played for the University of New Mexico from 1965-69. Keith coached in the Albuquerque school system upon graduation. He retired from coaching and has spent a career in the insurance industry. Keith served many years as the basketball analyst for the University of New Mexico radio network.

A basketball memory for Griffith was hitting the winning shot against rival Ellettsville during his junior year. Through the years these teams generally had close, hard fought games. Large, vocal crowds were the norm as the schools are only 10 miles apart. The second game of the 1963-63 season was no exception. The Eagles held a late 58-52 lead but a Spencer rally resulted in a tie at 58. A defensive play resulted in a turnover by Ellettsville and Spencer got the ball with 12 seconds remaining. Coach Smith told his team “Get the ball to Griffith”. Griffith received the inbound pass, got himself open and hit a 20-foot jumper as the horn sounded.

Bob Hawkins (1965) holds the record for the most points scored in a game, 40, against Plainfield in 1964. This broke Pete Rumble’s (1954) record of 36. Hawkins also had 25 rebounds in the Plainfield game. He played two years at Vincennes University and then transferred to Troy University, Troy, Alabama. Bob was a starter both years at Vincennes on teams that compiled a record of 52-14. He then was a two year starter on the Troy University teams that were 51-18 for those years. He received a degree in education and had a 36 year career in coaching and teaching at the high school level in the Montgomery, Al school system.

The Plainfield game in which Bob Hawkins scored 40 points had Spencer in a 40-27 halftime deficit. Players say that Coach Smith got in their “faces” during halftime and Spencer outscored the Quakers 60 to 27 during the last two quarters of the game. Keith “Brute” Livingston scored 25 points during these two quarters and finished with 28. He and Hawkins combined total of 68 outscored the Plainfield team, 68-67.

The most points scored by a Spencer team were 107 in a win over Ellettsville in 1970, 107-72. The 1965 team scored 104 points in a win over Bowling Green, 104-34 and the 1964 team scored 103 points against Clay City, 103-42.

The widest margin of victory was in 1965: 70 points in a win over Bowling Green, 104-34; 1925: 64 points against Needmore 83-19. 1922: 63 points over Switz City, 69-6. Also in 1922: 62 points over Gosport, 72-10.

Lop-sided losses were to Ellettsville in 1936, 69-26, Edgewood in 1968, 96-55 and Terre Haute Garfield in 1967, 96-58.

The highest-scoring game in which a Spencer team participated was during 1968-69 season, when North Davies defeated Spencer 119-94. Coach John Heckman said neither team could miss that night!

Prior to the 1925 Martinsville sectional the Spencer principal, L. E. Hubbard, took the team on nightly hikes the week of the games to get them in shape. The same year the team stayed at the Whitings Sanitarium in Martinsville. They won their first game against Quincy, 58-14 and then did a tour of goldfish ponds that were nearby. The tour didn't hamper their play as they defeated Eminence in their next game, 37-19.

Spencer families housed members of teams coming to play in the Spencer sectional during the late '20s.

During World War II basketball schedules were reduced due to gas rationing. School was dismissed some days during the week for the same reason.

The late Senator Birch Bayh, as an Indiana legislator, introduced legislation that helped to reorganized and consolidate many small schools in Indiana in the late

'1950s. This had the impact of reducing the number of schools that participated in the IHSAA State Tournament. His cousin, Bill Bayh, played on the 1945 Spencer team that won a sectional title.

John "Reach" Barrowcliff (1941) was a leading scorer when playing for Spencer. He served in the military during World War II and when he returned attended Butler University. He played on the 1948-49 Butler team that featured Ralph "Buckshot" O'Brien, Jimmy Doyle, Bill Shepard and Marvin Wood, who coached Milan to the 1954 state championship. Butler had a dynamic team that season, and Barrowcliff was a valuable rebounder and scorer on that group.

Charles "Squarehead" McClarren (1948) attended Purdue University on an academic scholarship until 1950 when he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and began a distinguished military career. He was selected for Aviation Cadets and graduated as a commissioned 2nd Lieutenant and pilot. He was assigned to duty as a fighter pilot and had assignments in many areas of the world. His duties included the Air Force "Top Gun" school where he achieved "Top Gun" status and was then asked to serve as an instructor pilot. He commanded the 80th Tactical Fighter Squadron in Japan and had two tours during the Vietnam conflict. He was cited for heroism in the rescue of a fellow pilot in North Vietnam. He assisted in facilitating the qualification of the Navy's A-7 aircraft for carrier landings. He then served, as an Air Force pilot, aboard the USS Ranger in the Gulf of Tonkin where he completed over 120 carrier landings. His commendations included three Legions of Merit, 9 Air Medals, the Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation, 3 Navy Commendation medals, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal and the Vietnam Service Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster. He retired in 1983 as a Colonel.

Robert (Bob) Long was named the Spencer Lions Club Outstanding Player for the 1939-40 Season. He briefly played semi-professionally for Delco Brakes Company in Dayton, Ohio. He and his best friend, Wayne Payton, enlisted together in the U.S. Army at Fort Benjamin Harrison on January 28, 1942. He went through Basic training at Camp Wheeler, GA., qualifying as a radio operator. He was assigned to the First Infantry Division and participated in Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa. He was twice wounded in action and spent eight months in a

military hospital recovering from his wounds. He was awarded two Purple Hearts and the Bronze Star for bravery in the North African campaign. He rejoined the First Infantry Division (The Big Red One) in December 1943. The division was sent to England in preparation for the invasion of France, D-Day June 6, 1944. Corporal Long went ashore in the first wave on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. His unit, 3th Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, then fought across France, into Belgium, participated in the Battle of the Bulge, continued into Germany and was in the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia on V-E Day. During their march across Europe he earned a second Bronze Star, the Combat Infantryman Badge, Presidential Unit Citation, and 7 battle stars. He returned to the United States on September 2, 1945, was discharged from military service on September 13 and following in his father's footsteps went to work for the U.S. Postal Service, Spencer Post Office on October 13, 1945. He was to spend 32 years working at the Spencer Post Office, 16 years as Postmaster. He and his wife Barbara, whom he married in December 1945, raised four children in Spencer. Bob Long had a long and distinguished career, serving not only his country but his community as well. He died May 26, 2014. Like many men of "The Greatest Generation" he seldom spoke of the war but confided in his memoirs to his youngest son, "I was trained to do a job and did it the best I could. The real heroes are still over there."

The 1969-70 season was to be a "down" year for the Cops. They fought their way to a successful season and topped it off with a sectional championship. This team also put their name in the final record book by topping five previous marks. The 107 points scored against Edgewood eclipsed 104 mark set by the 1964-65 team. The team scored 35 points in the last quarter of that game to set a record for the most points scored in a quarter. The team set a free throw percentage record of .733 breaking the record from the previous year's team of .694. This percentage record resulted in 446 points from the free throw line, also a record. Denny Taylor set the individual free throw percentage record of .819 followed closely by Barry Keith with a .794 percentage. Taylor and Keith joined an elite group of 400 plus points scored in a single season by a Spencer player, a feat accomplished by only seven other players during this 50 year history.

During the 1945 sectional played at Brazil an interesting situation evolved. The gym floor ran north and south with big windows at the south end in the balcony. Spencer was playing Brazil in the afternoon game, and they were shooting at the south end in the second half of the game. Fans from Spencer, fearing the sunlight pouring through the windows could hamper their team ability to see the basket, went to the windows and pulled down the blinds. These fans then guarded the pulled-down blinds and this proved to be an irritant to some of the Brazil fans. Spencer won the game 43-42. A police escort was needed to get the Spencer team to the Davis Hotel in Brazil and then back again that night for the final game, which Spencer won, beating Bowling Green 56-37 for the championship.

Student managers spend long hours washing uniforms, handing out equipment, filling water bottles and encouraging their teams. Russell Gray, Richard Owens, Herb Nanny, Dave Stannard, Rick Hamilton, Chuck Parker, Darrell White, Stan Ellis, Chuck Macy, John Galloway, Jim Heckman, John Baughn, Eric Childress, Ed Curry, Chris Cantwell and Dick Morley are some of the managers who performed the duties required by all of the basketball teams.

Many energetic gals and guys led the cheers for the players during the games. Cela Huffman, Maureen Strother, Lois Hendricks, Bert Allee, Shirley Hendricks, Penny Wilson, Don Dayhuff, Judy Dyar, Barb Schneider, Bob Winders (cousin of the player with the same name), Judy Burnett, Georganna Hawkins, Janet Wood, Pam Woodcock, Sandy Freeman, Donna Hendricks, Donna Hays, Karen Swinney, Sharon Fryer, Cindy Woodcock, Pat Daniels and Deanna Williams were some who gave of their time and talents to lead the cheers.