

THE VALLEY BOYS

The Story of the 1958 Springs Valley Black Hawks

Written by W. Timothy Wright

The following is an excerpt of the recently published 295-page book "The Valley Boys" by W. Timothy Wright

Regional, Here We Come!, "Thelma!" Frankie nearly shouted into the phone. "We're in the top 10 teams in Indiana! We're ranked at #10, Vincennes is ranked #9, and Ft. Wayne South is #1! Can you believe this?"

Thelma didn't respond immediately, but when Frankie took a breath, she just said, "Oh, I bet you're better than number 10."

"Thelma, there are 736 high schools in the state, and our little old Springs Valley is #10! Can you believe it?" Frankie exclaimed.

"I'm so proud of you and our team, Frankie. I love this . . . what is happening with you and me and what is going on in our town . . . I mean towns," she said. "I remember you telling me about your mom and dad, when they were dating in high school, how they would break up after a French Lick/West Baden game. I just feel like I'm walking on air most of the time. I wish this would never end."

Thelma abruptly stopped talking as if she were far away, her daydream carrying her off.

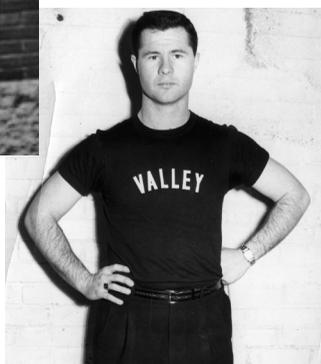
"Maybe it never needs to stop," Frankie replied. He hung up the phone after they had said goodbye and "I love you" to each other. Frankie had alluded to the two of them having a future together, and he meant it. He wanted to marry this girl as soon as he graduated. But this was a bit further down the road.

If the citizens of two neighboring towns could be experiencing a surreal moment simultaneously, French Lick and West Baden surely were. They were all living a dream that would never be repeated in this community's history. Ideally, when a once-in-a-lifetime thing happens, people realize when they are living in that time. Every Springs Valley resident was soaking this up, knowing that this was it, and that the chances of this ever repeating itself were inexpressibly remote.

That is, every resident but the high school sports columnist. The Old Rebounder was already writing articles that included the word "dynasty" and such phrases as "the next few years." Frankie and Marvin were only juniors, and Paul and Jim Conrad only sophomores, so naturally those four would be returning next season. So



Frankie and Thelma



Coach Rex Wells

why not assume another undefeated season was possible?

When Coach Wells was interviewed by the Old Rebounder, he was quoted saying once again, "Never count your chickens before they hatch."

Coach Wells never looked beyond the next game, much less the next season.

Rex's Wisdom—"We're strictly a second half ball club," the 25-year-old Hanover grad told Jeb Cadou Jr., the sports editor for the Indianapolis Star.

Just prior to the sectional games, Cadou wrote, "His Black Hawks had just won their 18th consecutive game to finish the season, beating Salem, to finish the season unbeaten and preserve Springs Valley's record of being the only high school in Indiana that has never lost a basket-

ball game—quite the feat for such a young coach and a newly formed team by two schools consolidating."

The journalist asked how the coach kept his poise and didn't get frantic when his team was down by nine points in the third quarter. Wells said he had the boys call a time out and they quietly talked things over.

"I ask, 'What's wrong?' They immediately tell me, then I ask them, 'How do we correct the problem?' They share their ideas. The kids pool their knowledge and I just try to draw some general conclusion from what they tell me—and then, they go out and do it."

A typically humble response from Rex, giving the boys so much credit, but this was truly a team built on the familiarity of the players with one another and with their coach. After all, they had literally grown up together and Rex had coached them in their seventh and eighth grade years. He was only a few years older than his seniors.

"Some people expected the pressure of being undefeated would get to us," he told another reporter. "I don't believe the pressure has bothered us one iota." Requests for interviews were coming in from all the bigger newspapers across the state. Even telegrams were being delivered from well-wishing fans around the Hoosier state.

"Could this be another Milan?" a few columnists were asking. Could this truly be the making of the next "Da-

vid vs. Goliath” meeting at the famed Butler Fieldhouse at Butler University in Indianapolis? This question was starting to appear in many sports pages, and, as could be expected, was the talk of the two towns being introduced to the rest of Indiana in the columns. The sports-writers had more to write about, pointing out the positive aspects of what a consolidation of two schools can do for a team.

Rex Wells, however, wasn't taking the bait. He would always answer the writer's question about getting to the State Finals and repeating the "Milan Miracle" the same way.

"We take our games one at a time, and our next game is against Dugger, then Vincennes if we're fortunate enough to win in Huntingburg. If we win the afternoon game, we'll go on to the next one . . . and think no further ahead."

The Gift that Keeps on Giving—The afternoon game of the regional at Huntingburg was rather anticlimactic. It was like one of their earlier regular season games or the Huntingburg "upset," where Valley led by 10 to 12 points all the way. The final score was Black Hawks 63, Dugger 54. But the night game was another story altogether.

That evening, back at the 6,200-seat hoops hall, Rex made his pre-game talk.

"Guys, we all know that Vincennes is ranked 9th in the top 10 in the state, just next to you guys at #10. I don't want you to dwell on their ranking or yours. You're a ranked team too, but forget about all the stuff that these sports writers decide. The number you are ranked doesn't make you shoot better, pass better, or rebound any better.

"The only thing that matters is how you go out and play each game. The only thing you need to think about is playing this game the way you have always played: with a great desire to win, by just doing what you've been taught—the fundamentals of this game. Hustle, but always be thinking ahead.

"I have great confidence in you boys because I know what kind of fellas you are," he went on, "and that has as much to do with winning as anything. Sure, it takes talent, and you boys have plenty of that, but there's a couple of other ingredients that only champions possess. Passion and heart.

"You always run back to the bench when I call a time-

out. Don't think I haven't noticed this about you. This action alone says so much about you guys. Your eagerness to hear what I say to you signals your great desire to win a game. You've demonstrated that as well as any team could possibly do this year.

"We've had some close ones, yes, but you are still undefeated, and that is something very few teams have ever accomplished."

The coach went on with one more bit of advice and encouragement. "You guys are the greatest winners to have ever come out of this part of Indiana. Don't forget that. Don't panic if they get a lead. You guys understand how to finish the game. You've shown me many times in the regular season."

Rex knew that his boys' inspiration simply came from the love of playing this game. It showed every time they walked out onto the court. He ended his pre-game talk.

"Just know how proud I am to be your coach. Now go out there and play your hearts out. And whatever the outcome, just know that I . . . well, you know how I feel about you guys. I have the greatest respect for you and you'll never know the joy you have brought to me."

The team loved their coach and they always appreciated his pregame talk. Coach Wells had a calming effect on his team that always put them in the right mood to go out on the court and play with a sort of determined relaxed pace, yet they would out-hustle so many other taller players and bigger teams. Sometimes it's the bigger heart that has more to do with winning than physical

size and strength, and the Valley Boys had a lot of heart.

Sixth man Jack Belcher, who had contributed much in the last couple of games, raised his hand.

"Yes, Jackie?"

Never one to be too serious, Jackie asked, "Coach, why does this team call themselves 'the Alices?'"

The coach paused, scratched his head, and rubbed his chin, then answered. "I don't know. I really

don't know."

"Okay, thanks, Coach," Jackie replied. The boys all laughed. Some of the pregame tension was eased once again by the boys just being themselves— another rea-



"The Big V," early-season team picture

son, perhaps, that this team handled pressure so well. They simply didn't take this next big game more seriously than all their others.

The boys took the floor for their warm-ups. As Frankie dribbled toward the sideline, where Thelma was seated only a couple of rows up in the Booster Club section, he looked her way. She winked, and Frankie's heart was overwhelmed for a moment. He could hardly believe that his team was playing for the regional championship title, and that his sweetheart was there, watching the game. He was proud of his girlfriend, as she was proud of him.

"Hey Frankie, I think the pep band is going to play, 'All I Have to Do Is Dream,'" Marvin said, laughing as he dribbled by his teammate. Frankie realized sheepishly that he'd just been standing there with the basketball under his arm, staring at Thelma.

Marvin's quip snapped the guard out of his daydream. Frankie just smiled at Marvin and yelled, "Okay, I'm back now!"

"Let's get this game won," Bob chimed in. "Let's just do it!"

"Yeah, let's do it," echoed Mike Watson, standing beneath the basket, as he heard the conversation going on at the foul line.

The Valley Boys were just a little nervous, as their banter was revealing. Even with all their previous wins, and their typical nonchalant attitude, the Valley Boys did realize just how gigantic this game was—for them, for their hometowns, for Springs Valley.

No team from either French Lick or West Baden had ever made it this far in the tournament that rolled around every March. Most of the Valley residents had made the trip across State Road 56 and down 231 to Huntingburg to cheer on their team. These tournament games were anticipated more than Christmas with all its suspense at what opening the next present might bring. Right now, the Hawks had given their citizens 22 wins in a row, just about the best present a fan could hope for. For the last four months, the Hawks were the gift that kept on giving. But the next four quarters would be the Hawks' greatest test to date.

The Alices of Vincennes—Tip-off time was 7:30. The game started a few minutes late, as so many fans had descended upon Huntingburg. All the local restaurants had filled with hungry guests from out of town between the afternoon and evening games, and the fans created a traffic jam on the one road going in and out of town. That meant fans were arriving to the Huntingburg gymnasium a few minutes late.

Some of the fans of the losing team from the afternoon game had sold their tickets, but most wanted to

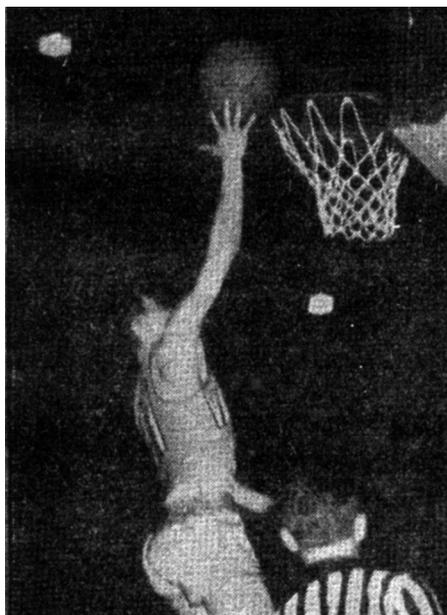
see the outcome of the Valley vs. Vincennes game. The gym again was standing room only. There were simply not enough tickets for all the people who just had to see this game tonight between the Black Hawks and the Alices of Vincennes.

The Alice name shows up in various places throughout Vincennes as part of an historical legend. In 1779, during the Revolutionary War, the French had retaken Fort Vincennes from the British. The story goes that the French soldiers rescued Alice, an Anglo-American girl who had been kidnapped by Indians. She was adopted by a prominent French family who brought her back to a life among English-speaking Protestants.

This story became a very popular novel, *Alice of Old Vincennes*, written in 1900, and became a well-known Broadway play in 1901–02. Taking advantage of a cultural phenomenon, the town became full of "Alice" references, including an Alice Park, an Alice Hotel, an Alice Soda Shop, and an Alice Movie Theater.

The name finally came to rest with the high school sports teams. Why not? It had been used for everything else, including the logo for a canned tomato company. Still, the Alices' name didn't sound very manly to the Hawks.

The local newspaper sports writer believed that Springs Valley had gone as far as it could go. The team was now competing with a team of a new caliber. It was thought by most that Vincennes would teach this team from the hills of Orange County a lesson or two about playing out of their league.



Frankie's winning shot!

The teams got through their warm-ups and ran to the sidelines. The players could feel the high energy and exuberance of the fans. "David vs. Goliath," the sports columnist headline had read. The expression had been so overused since the Milan Indians Final Four upset back in 1954, but it was still a fitting description since Vincennes had boys much taller than the tallest Black Hawks player. The columnist, apparently an Alices fan, wrote: "*The Hawks, who have left quite a wake by winning all of their games this year, will have a chance to show the entire state where they truly rank. Are they really in the top 10 teams, right next to the Alices? No more will the size of Springs Valley's opponents come into play in the assessment of the Hawks' ability.*"

Vincennes is the best team they will have played this season, and everyone is hoping for this matchup in the night game."

The column seemed a bit condescending toward the

Hawks. But Vincennes got its wish. Ten boys met at the jump circle at center court. This was going to be an electrifying game.

The Alices, their center a full five inches taller than Paul, got the tipoff, and their star guard came down the court and sank a 15-footer. The hometown crowd went crazy.

Valley took the ball out. Butch was still at the guard position when the coach put Jack Belcher in for Frankie because of the Alices' height advantage. Butch brought the ball up the court and passed to Marvin, who came around Paul's pick at the foul line. He was immediately double-teamed and tied up. His pass to Jackie was intercepted, and Vincennes' fast break gave them an easy layup for a 4-0 lead.

On the next Valley possession, Butch brought the ball down the court, and passed to Marvin, who fired it to Paul. He banked in an easy two points. Coach Wells shouted, "Press, press," and Valley put a full-court press on the Alices, but they passed out of it to an open man under the basket for another Vincennes score. It was 6-2.

Then Vincennes returned the favor and put on a full-court press that trapped Butch at mid-court. He called a smart timeout rather than lose the ball with a wild pass.

"Guys, you gotta relax out there and start playing your game," Rex counseled them. "You're letting them dictate the tempo so far. Stop thinking about how big this team is. Sure, they're bigger, they're strong, but you guys know how to play smarter!

"Now, get out there and start outsmarting them!"

The coach's instruction seemed to go unheeded on the next play. The Hawks inbounded the ball and Butch passed it to Marvin, who took it down court for his patented one-handed jump shot. The ball went in and out, spinning around the rim once and spurting out into a Vincennes player's hands.

Marvin, in his frustration, let go a "DAMN IT!" as he ran back down on defense. Butch looked up at the scoreboard the next time he had the ball. It was now 8-2. Boy, this is a tough team, he thought to himself. Maybe those sportswriters were right. Maybe we have met our match . . . and then some.

Butch swung a quick pass to Paul, who touch-passed it to Marvin, who hit his jumper. Swish. It hit only the bottom of the net! 8-4. The fouls then began to get called against Valley. The heavy whistleblowing that followed made it seem the refs were not going to let even a touch get by them without calling a foul on the Hawks.

Coach called a time out. This time he didn't ask his usual calm question, "What's wrong and how do we fix

it?" He simply said to the boys, "Everybody, just remain quiet for one minute," and the boys just huddled there together with their coach.

Only their breathing could be heard within the circle, with Coach Wells kneeling in the middle. No doubt the crowd thought Rex was giving his boys instructions on how to guard or rebound against these taller players, but only silence was needed to calm his players down.

Not a word was spoken during the timeout. It worked-The Hawks came out of the silent huddle playing a stifling defense the Alices had never encountered. They held Vincennes to only one more point with two minutes left in the first quarter, and caught up, tying them, 9-9. But Vincennes was not going to roll over.

They scored three more buckets to Valley's one to wrest a 15-11 lead at the quarter's end.

Valley was back to playing its game of calm, collected, but determined basketball. Marvin turned on the juice and hit five jump shots in a row to begin the second eight minutes of play. Marvin's mom could be heard as usual by everyone around her: "That's my boy!"

Marvin's shooting brought Rex up off the bench, cheer-

ing his boys on. Oh, how a coach loves to see those outside shots go down. As was usual, the rest of the starting five contributed as well, with Paul hitting a shot underneath and Bob making two of his free throws. At the halfway mark, the score was tied, 26-26. The Hawks were holding their own. The Vincennes fans and players were more than surprised.

No talk was needed in the locker room. The coach had said his piece prior to the game, and realized that quiet and calm was all his players needed during the break. By now, they knew how to win games, and tonight was just one more game. They had the great desire to win, and they knew what they had to do in the second half. The little mascot's dad, Harold "Hooper" Agan, brought oranges from his grocery store for the boys to eat at halftime. Only the sound of 10 boys downing some vitamin C could be heard.

When the game resumed, Coach Wells looked at Frankie and said, "Go back in for Jackie. We need your quick hands."

Frankie had not been starting since the beginning of the sectional games, when Jack Belcher was put in the games for his height under the boards. They had won those games, but this one was so very close, Rex determined he needed his "defensive player of the year" back in the game.



Frankie shooting, with Paul, Marvin, and Bob under the bucket.

Jim Conrad, on the bench, whispered worriedly to Jerry Breedlove. "Man, now we're goin' smaller? We're already smaller than Vincennes!"

At the start of the third quarter, Vincennes began pulling ahead, earning a nine-point lead. The Hawks' fans were getting very tense; this was the largest lead the Alices had had in the contest. Now was the time for Valley to change the momentum.

Frankie was playing his usual great defense, tying up his man and making it difficult for the Vincennes guard to get any shots off. He got to the line for three free throws and made them. Paul hit three of his shots from his forward position—10-foot jump shots or hook shots from just beyond the lane line. Marvin sank one more jump shot in that period.

Still, they found themselves down by seven points at the beginning of the fourth quarter, and to the Hawks' fans' dismay, the scoreboard read 46-39. They hoped fervently that their Hawks would again find a way back in the late minutes of the game, as they had so many times before.

After six minutes of play in the fourth period, the Alices held an eight-point lead. But Coach Wells was not worried. He had confidence in his boys, because he had seen how they reacted to pressure again and again. And they had remained as cool and calm as their coach. With only two minutes left in the game, Coach called timeout.

"Boys, this game isn't over yet." He noticed that Paul now had tears in his eyes, thinking that eight points with so little time left on the clock was insurmountable.

"Hey, it's only four baskets. Give me the ball," Marvin said confidently. "Just give me the ball."

During this game, in fact, he had been hitting most of his outside shots, from 15 to 20 feet out.

It was the Hawks' ball, and Marvin kicked into high gear. Frankie brought the ball down with Marvin trailing. Frankie penetrated, then passed the ball back to Marvin. He nailed his next five shots in a row, racking up a quick 10 points. One writer dubbed him "the long-range sniper." He was on fire, finding the range for his shot. By now his mom was losing her voice.

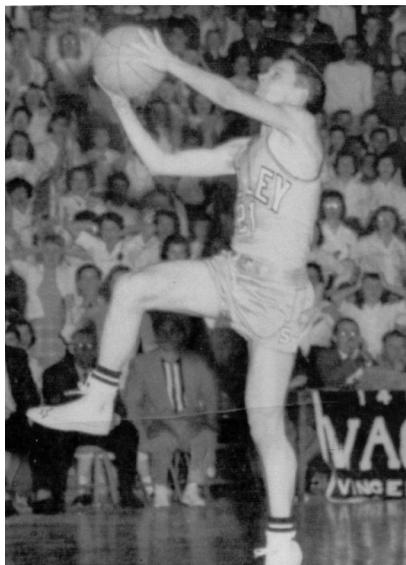
The Black Hawks' fans were now on their feet on every possession. Frankie tossed in another bucket and a couple of free throws. Bob McCracken threw in four more points. But Vincennes would always answer with their own scoring, and the score was tied with only 46 seconds remaining. It was the Hawks' possession, and Springs Valley held the ball for a final shot. They got it to Marvin.

In and out, The final buzzer sounded on a tie game, 54-54. Overtime!

The tension, anxiety, and apprehension the Springs Valley fans endured going into extra minutes was ex-

cruciating.

Both teams played a slower game in the overtime period, holding the ball longer on each possession. Marvin hit another shot from beyond the arc, but the Alices came back with their own outside shooter, who drilled the basket. Valley failed to score the next time they held the ball, but the Alices didn't miss their next opportunity to score as Butch fouled out of the game, and they hit the ensuing free throw.



Frankie and his winning shot!

Jackie was back in the game for Butch. Valley didn't score again on its next turn with the ball. The Alices' star player, Larry Wright, was fouled during his shot on the next play, sending him to the free throw line again. He hit both to give Vincennes a three-point edge, 59-56, with only 34 ticks left on the clock! The Alices believed they had this one in the bag.

The Hawks were perilously close to having their season end at last. Their defeat looked imminent. But they could never be counted out until those last seconds were off the clock. This would be the "highlight reel" game of the year.

Frankie's Dream—The following day, one sports column read: *"The caliber the two teams showed in the overtime period was impressive. There was no scurrying around. It was a methodical business operation. The teams played somewhat cautious but determined. This game truly seemed as if the last team with possession of the ball would win. After nearly 5 minutes of cautious play, and low scoring, the Vincennes Alices were up on the Hawks, 59 – 56."*

The writer then continued, in apparent disbelief.

"From here on the New Republican newspaper cannot vouch for the accuracy of its report. Six points and a three-point victory for Orange County's first regional champions was almost too much for this paper's weak-hearted reporters. With less than 34 seconds left, the Blackhawks were down one point after Jack Belcher grabbed a rebound and put it back in. Vincennes was going to hold the ball till the final seconds when Frankie Self stole the ball from their careless guard, streaked down the court alone and laid in two points, putting the Blackhawks in the lead, 60-59."

As Alices guard Frank Landy had brought the ball toward their basket, he made a pass to his fellow guard, Roger Benson. Roger was planning on just holding the ball as he stood in the center circle, letting the seconds tick off the clock. Frankie, reading the pass, grabbed the ball from Roger the second it hit his hands. Frankie was like a cobra striking. He grabbed the ball so fast

that the astonished Vincennes guard just stood there as Frankie raced toward the Hawks' basket. The Alices' fans were even more astonished.

The radio announcer screamed, "Frankie Self intercepted the pass!" but Frankie simply took the ball out of Benson's hands before the Alices guard had complete control. He raced down court and laid the ball in to give Valley a one-point edge. The Hawks had not had a lead for the entire game until now.

The "little guard that could" had saved the game with 10 ticks of the timer's clock remaining, but the Hawks had to defend to keep Vincennes from going up on them by a point with one final basket.

It was bedlam in the gymnasium. The Alices brought the ball down the court with 10 seconds remaining to take the shot to win the game. In too much of a hurry, they got a shot off but missed it, and the rebound came to Frankie, who was immediately fouled.

With only three seconds left, the 5'7" guard sank his two free throws, putting the game on ice. The scoreboard read 62-59. The Black Hawks had won another game that they weren't supposed to. But in the minds of the Springs Valley fans and students, the outcome was exactly as they had envisioned.

Regional champions- Frankie hugged Thelma court-side as soon as he could get to her while the Hawks' fans flooded the court.

"Your dream . . . your dream, Frankie. It just came true. It just came true!" Thelma shouted above the sounds of jubilation. Frankie's steal and two points, plus his two free throws, had won the game. He now knew what it felt like to hit the winning shot in a game.

Frankie, only now realizing this, just replied, "Yeah, yeah, it did. Wow! I guess it did!"

The cheerleaders for the Alices were lying on the floor crying, and the Vincennes fans were sitting in the bleachers, stunned at what they had just witnessed. How could this have happened? No one seemed to be able to comprehend what had just transpired before their eyes.

The next morning's sports column headline read: "Self's Winning Basket Quite a Thrill; Sends Black-hawks on to Evansville." The article included: "It took an All-American performance by substitute

Frank Self to protect that victory string."

It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.

The Hawks were going to the semi-state in Evansville. This simply was not to be, according to most prognosticators in the sports world—but it was happening. It was really happening. One sportswriter spoke for many when he wrote, "This may be another Milan Indians story that occurred as the greatest upset in Indiana State Finals basketball just four years ago."

The boys from the Valley were in the semi-finals. History was being made before everyone's eyes.

Triumphant at Home - The local barbershop brigade back in French Lick, having been rather negative back

in September about the upcoming basketball season, were now singing a very different tune. Men who had derided the young coach and his choice of players were now proclaiming the virtues of the coach and pontificating about how the consolidation of the two schools was the greatest thing to happen since the two iconic hotels had been built at the turn of the century.

One old fella sprawled in a chair in the waiting area.

"I knew somethin' unusual was a-goin' on back last fall when I saw them kids carryin' them signs with that ol' hawk painted on 'em. I just had a hunch that we were enterin' into a new time.

"I reckon change is good," he added at the end of his barbershop speech, as if proclaiming his prophetic skills.

No one challenged the prophet, even though the barber, at least, distinctly recalled this same man complaining that his son didn't make the team last October. They were all simply too happy now to argue about anything.

Everywhere one went, folks were smiling and being more polite than usual. There was no other topic being spoken of. No one cared that Elvis was now in the Army or that Sputnik, the Russian spacecraft, had orbited the earth. World news didn't matter—only what was happening locally, where everyone was expecting things to get much bigger in these next two weeks.

The boys were heading to Evansville. They were playing in the semi-state finals! They were in the Sweet Sixteen for the very first time for any team from either French Lick or West Baden.

It was something the team hadn't even slightly considered back in September. This basketball squad was living a dream. Not one of the 10 players and two coaches ever wanted to wake up.

"Drea-ee-ee-ee-eam, dream, dream, dream . . ."

Sweet Sixteen- It was not a dream. The Hawks were in the Sweet Sixteen. They were one of only 16 remaining teams in the entire state, and the next two games would determine whether they would be one of the last four teams standing.

As the practices and scrimmages went on during the week preceding the games in Evansville, the boys seemed more and more relaxed. Of course, none of the boys nor their coach ever verbalized anything that would sound like they were overconfident. The boys didn't try to psychoanalyze or buy into any of the hoopla. They just knew they loved to play and tried their hardest to win games.

Winning was much more fun than losing, so why not win 'em all?

The Hawks realized they had done something no other high school team had ever done. Theirs was a brand-new school, and it had never had a team loss. Yet it somehow felt natural to them, as if they had planned it years before in the days of playing on those asphalt and concrete outdoor courts.

Everyone felt there was a specific destination they

had begun throttling toward five months earlier at the start of the season. It was more than just earning one more win. A sense of purpose beyond the basketball court had attached itself to these hoopsters.

Not many people in life ever get to live their dream. Frankie, Marvin, Paul, Bob, Butch, Jack, Mike, Jim, Jerry, and George, along with Rex and Doc, were living a dream season. But dreamers all awake sometime. The only question is, "When?"

Redemption - "Keep those prayers going, Paul." Now, Marvin was encouraging his Bible-believing buddy to keep in touch with the omnipotent one.

"I've never stopped," Paul would answer. "And I also pray for you to come to Jesus."

Marvin would pretend he didn't hear this last part, but in his heart the sharpshooter was doing his own bit of praying. This extraordinary season was now giving Marvin reason to consider deeper things. *"Why us, God? Why me?" he asked. "Are you there, Lord? If so, please help me and our team play its best. And, uh, sorry for all the cussin'."*

Marvin admired Paul and his contentment in life. He ended his prayer with, *"Help me be more like Paul . . . uh . . . amen, I guess."*

Marvin now felt something inside he'd never felt before. And for the first time in his young life, he had just spoken aloud to the Creator of the universe.

"The Alpha and Omega. The Beginning and the End. The One who holds all things together," as Paul would always remind everyone around him. Marvin was connecting with the One who knows the outcome of all things. He felt that a great weight had been lifted off his

shoulders, and he was experiencing a love and contentment he'd never realized before. For the first time, he felt like everything would be okay—no matter what happens on the basketball court. The pressure he had always felt to perform at his peak of 20 or more points per game seemed to disappear. He felt a calmness that matched Coach Wells's outward demeanor.

Marvin wondered to himself, "Is this the 'peace that passes all understanding' that I've heard Paul go on and on about?"

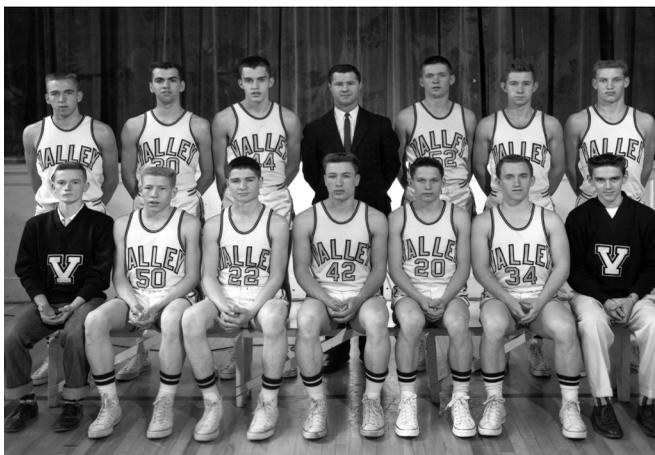
It was that "peace," as Marvin would later conclude. He no longer felt the weight that his performance on the court was the only way to measure his worth. He felt love. He was starting to understand Paul, and why he was always so calm and in a good mood. He knew he was part of a team. The outcome wasn't up to only him. He didn't have to make that last-second shot any longer to be Marvin Pruett.

That night while going to bed, he breathed a deep sigh as he fell asleep, resting better than he ever had—not dreaming of upcoming games, but of the past, of playing this game for fun with his buddies.

His last thought as he drifted off: "I love this game, but I love these friends of mine even more. I'm one lucky guy.

"Thank you, God."

"The Valley Boys" is available through the Hall of Fame gift shop, at www.wtimothywright.com and other outlets.



↑ Post season team picture-compliments of the Springs Valley Herald
 Front row, Left to right: Billy Rose, George Harrison, Jim Conrad, Bob McCracken, Frankie Self, Mike Watson, Bob Trueblood, Back row, Left to right: Jerry Breedlove, Marvin Pruett, Paul Radcliff, Coach Rex Wells, Jack Belcher, George Lagenour, Butch Schmutzler