

Last Decade May Be Known as Golden Age of Putnam Sports

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Further widespread publicity came to Putnam County early in 1950. That fame was brought about by a bunch of Mighty Mites from Miller City High School.

In the spring of that year, a non-descript basketball team, coached by a man in his first year of coaching and using a remodeled barn as a gymnasium, went all the way and brought back the first state championship to Putnam County.

Miller City went undefeated though 29 straight games that season, polishing off the defending state champion from Delphos St. John's en-route to the state title and beat Eaton, the state champion from two years previously in the finals at Columbus by a score of 44-36.

The state champs were greeted by a noisy parade when they returned to Ottawa the next day and were given a banquet in the Eagles hall here before going back home to Miller City.

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FOR DAYS afterward State Route 108, which goes through Miller City, was one of the busiest in the area as hundreds of people from all over Ohio came to see the barn and its pot-bellied stoves in which the Wildcats played and which received so much publicity while they were en-route to the title.

The 1950's may well be the golden era for sports in Putnam County. The 12-team high school basketball league was regarded as

one of the toughest among smaller schools in the state and Putnam teams always went far along the tournament trail.

In that ten-year period, there were 10 teams which reached the finals of the district tournaments and six of these won the district tournaments and entered the regional to be among the top 16 in the state.

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AFTER MILLER CITY started things rolling in 1950, Columbus Grove cagers reached the regional in 1952. In 1954 the county hit the jackpot as Leipsic and Ottoville both won their district meets and entered the regional and both lost to Delphos St. John's which advanced to the state finals again.

Ottawa Sts. Peter and Paul made it as far as the regional meet in 1957 and the next year Fort Jennings got there.

Leipsic won the county tournament three straight times from 1954 to 1956 and two players from those teams went on to further glory. Bill Warren their tall center went to Amherst College near Boston, Mass., where he became one of that school's greatest basketball players in history and also one of the great cross country stars among the eastern small colleges.

Another Leipsic star, Dale "Bo" Chamberlain made a name for himself as a football player at Miami University and has

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just signed a contract to play professional football with the Pittsburg Steelers.

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BASKETBALL HAS been Putnam County's chief claim to sports fame, but Columbus Grove has upheld its end very well in other sports. That school has dominated track very well, sending several of its track members to the state meets in the spring of the year.

Only three schools in the county have football teams and in this sport also Columbus Grove has generally been a power. The Bulldogs won the Northwest Conference titles in 1959 and in 1952.

Columbus Grove and Continental have been perennial powers in baseball but Putnam County teams have never gone very far in tournaments out of the county.

Adding further emphasis to the county's basketball prowess was a basketball team sponsored by the Ottawa council Knights of Columbus. The local squad won the state K. of C. tournament championship six times in an eight-year span from 1952 to 1959.

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IN OTHER big sports news of the 1950's there was a new golf course opened near Ottawa in the summer of 1959 and later the same summer a new 12-lane bowling alley was opened in Ottawa. Bowling alleys were also opened in Leipsic, Continental and Pandora in the past several years.

In 1957 lights were installed on the race track of the fair grounds and this county was moving into the limelight as the home of many great horses and horsemen. The barns at the race track are full of activity each spring as horsemen use the Ottawa track to train their thoroughbreds for the summer racing season.

However longer Putnam County can hold its position as a power in Class A basketball ranks is now becoming a matter of question. As one of its final moves of 1959, the State High School Athletic Association voted to increase the size of Class A schools beginning in 1960 and many schools in this district which are now Class AA will fall back into the "A" classification and may prove to be just too powerful for our schools to handle. The 1950's may well be long remembered as the golden age in sports for this county.

It is obvious from this article that much has changed in Putnam County on two fronts, girls' athletics and baseball. There were no organized, interscholastic sports played by the girls in the 1950's. Baseball was also a minor sport compared to basketball, football and track. Even though Vaughnsville and Kalida participated in the state tournament, it was not even mentioned. It was not until the mid 1970's that baseball in Putnam County became a major high school sport led by Leipsic and Miller City's state championship seasons in 1976 and 1977.