

Untouchable Records and Yesterdays Legends

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In a few days, the basketball season in Putnam County will get underway. In looking through the record books to recheck last year's records and rosters in an attempt to get a picture of what this year's teams will look like it's all too easy to drift and find back too many years in the records and rehash the scores of games played by the fathers and even the grandfathers of today's athletes.

Basketball has always been the big sport in Putnam County for fans and players alike. The most commonly accepted theory as to why basketball has always outranked other sports in the area deals with the rural nature of the county. Most sports take place in the spring or fall when many farm kids were traditionally excused from school to work harvesting or planting. Winter is the only time when farm kids were free to play and the fans could leave the chores to watch.

It would be impossible to determine when someone first nailed a bushel basket to a barn and played the first game of round ball in Putnam County but the Sentinel records date back to 1924. That was the year of the first state sponsored tournament.

In that year Vaughnsville (who consolidated with Columbus Grove in 1962) took the county championship. Continental was second and Miller City third. A year later in 1925 Ottawa Public won the county title but second place Leipsic won the district tournament and became the first Putnam County team to go to Columbus. In those days 16 teams entered the state tourney. Leipsic won the first game but lost in the quarter finals to Oberlin 33-16.

In the 54 years since then, eight Putnam County teams have gone to Columbus, four of them since 1977. Only one team, Miller City in 1950, has even won the state championship in basketball. Putnam County has always kept a winning average. Twenty-one teams have entered regional competition. Records on district action start in 1947 when the tournament was restructured and Putnam County has placed at least one team in the district in all but eight of the last 32 years.

Ottawa-Glandorf, Continental and Ottoville have each gone to Columbus twice. Ottoville made an appearance in a 16-team state tournament in 1937 and again in the semi-finals in 1978. Continental went in 1972 and 1977 while O-G made two consecutive bids for the state crown in 1977 and 1978.

Kalida earned the trip in 1967 and along the way beat Miller City out of the district title in a 48-47 double overtime heart-stopper that Miller City fans still remember with a certain amount of antagonism.

The only county team to ever actually win the championship was the 1950 Miller City Wildcats, a Cinderella team which still has old timers talking. A short team, with only two players at the six-foot mark; they played out of a converted barn and dominated area basketball for two short years. Some of the records set by this team are still undisputed and may never be matched. Twenty-nine wins in one season is an untouchable mark since fewer games are played in the modern seasons. The Wildcats also hold the record for the most consecutive wins of any county team, 34 in 1949, 1950 and 1951.

Though a far cry from the farm boys that played in a barn, the 'Terrible Titans' of 1977 and 1978 earned a place in the record books by going to Columbus two years in a row, an unprecedented feat for the county.

In addition to strong teams and winning records, Putnam County has also produced outstanding individual stars throughout the years. The leading record holder in the annals of Putnam County round ball is S. F. (Stretch) Goedde who played for Vaughnsville for four years, 1939-1942.

Goedde's career total of 1,538 points has never been matched. His season average of 31.5 his senior year, has never been touched. However, Tom Heckman of Ottawa-Glandorf came close in 1965 with a 29.9 average and Mike Schmidt of Continental threatened in 1971 with a 28.3 average. The high season mark of 629 Stretch scored in 1942 fell to Continental's Greg Spitalone who scored 640 in 1974 and Spitalone's brother, Brad, topped that with 661 two years later. Goedde's high game score of 49 points fell to Schmidt who scored 51 points in a single game on January 2, 1971. Goedde, who is now superintendent of schools at Van Wert, played in the low scoring days when his 31 points were sufficient to win most basketball games.

Dennis Haselman, Leipsic, 1962, holds the field goal record with 21 in a single game and Jim Rump, Miller City, 1964, holds the game high free throw record of 23.

As team records go, Continental holds the highest season total of points, 2,051 scored in 1974 and the most points yielded 1,650 in the same year. In 1971, Continental set the record for most points scored in a game, 130 in a 130-91 win over Lima Perry which was also the highest composite score (221) in Putnam County history. In the same year, Continental set a record for the highest team scoring average at 84.4 with 1,603 points in 19 games. Pandora-Gilboa came close that season setting a second-place mark of 82.9 per game. The Rockets also got the dubious honor of posting the highest losing score by a Putnam County team with a 102-109 loss to Kalida in 1971.

Ironically the booby prize for the worst record goes to Vaughnsville who lost 37 consecutive games in 1958, 1959 and 1960, following many years of dominance in the round ball sport in Putnam County.

As athletic programs expand and start athletes younger, new records are set and the competition seems to get tougher each year. But no matter how big the gyms get or how professional the programs become, today's athletes will never be able to upset all the records or disrupt the legacy left them by the kids who played in the barns, dirt lots and tiny gyms when schools like, Vaughnsville, Palmer, Blanchard, Sts. Peter and Paul, Ottawa Public and Gilboa were high schools also.

Even though this article was written in 1979 and some of the records have since been broken, a few are STILL in place. If you desire to know, START LOOKING!