

# Getting to the Points

## Five PCL Boys Players Over 1,000 Points

The Lima News – Jim Naveau – March 1, 2021

It's been a very good year for boys' basketball in the Putnam County League. In one way, it's been historic.

Ottoville's Josh Thorbahn, Kalida's Luke Erhart, Columbus Grove's Blake Reynolds and Tayt Birnesser and Continental's Mitchell Coleman all have scored more than 1,000 points in their careers.

Five players in the same class going over the 1,000-point mark made a little bit of Putnam County League history.

Until this year, there had never been more than three players in the same graduating class with more than 1,000 career points in the PCL.

Thorbahn and Reynolds are the all-time career scoring leaders at their schools. Birnesser is No. 2 and the others are near the top of the career scoring lists at their schools. Thorbahn broke the Ottoville single game scoring record the same day he became the career scoring leader earlier this season. Birnesser has the Columbus Grove record for 3-pointers in a game, 10, which he did twice.

Last year nine of the 11 players named first or second-team All-Putnam County League were juniors. This year eight of those same players were first or second-team All-PCL as seniors.

Thorbahn was the PCL Player of the Year as sophomore and this season and Reynolds won that award last season.

"You watch Division IV around here this year in Putnam County, and with the 'Cresviews' and 'Lincolnviews', those kids look different. They walk out on the floor and they don't look like Division IV basketball players," Kalida coach Ryan Stechschulte said. "We're spoiled this year to have so many of them in one grade."

Ottoville coach Keith Utendorf said, "We've had some good senior groups across the league, but this one is definitely the most unique group and probably the most talented I've seen. The talent level and character of this group is special."

Columbus Grove and Ottoville will be playing in the Elida Division IV District Semifinals on Tuesday night. The Bulldogs will play Lincolnview and the Big Green will go against Crestview. Kalia and Continental's seasons ended in last week's Sectional Tournament.

The team and individual match-ups in this year's senior group go all the way back to third and fourth-grade tournaments and junior high championships.

Ottoville won back-to-back championships over Kalida in the PCL seventh and eighth-grade tournaments when this year's seniors were in junior high. And Columbus Grove's seniors won Northwest Conference championships in the seventh and eighth grade.

When they weren't playing against each other they were often teammates on AAU teams.

Thorbahn said, "I've known everybody around the county for a long time and we've all kind of gone at it over the years. A couple of kids I'm actually really, really good friends with. We always go at it but I think it's pretty special to have that competition. Especially in the league you're going to have everybody's best shot every night. There's always somebody you want to go against," he said.

Columbus Grove coach Chris Sautter thinks the history the PCL's top players have with each other adds something whenever they match up on the court.

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“They’ve played with each other and against each other since they were probably seven years old. They know each other and they know each other’s games. I think there is kind of a thing of wanting to prove our senior group is better than your senior group. There is definitely a little bit of an added incentive there,” he said.

Coleman said, “You’re playing against those kids you’ve always played against or you’ve played with them over the summer. You really want to compete with them and show them what you’ve got.”

Thorbahn, a 6-5 guard, signed with NCAA Division II Findlay in November. He got an offer from the Oilers after his freshman year but wanted to explore all possible options.

“As a kid you want to play at the highest level in college. When I got my Findlay offer, I was like, ‘Maybe I can go a little higher,’” Thorbahn said. “But then, like everybody else, I got to the point where I just needed to make the best decision. I’m so excited to be a Findlay Oiler for the next four years.”

The other four 1,000-point scorers have not made a decision. Reynolds, who started at quarterback for Columbus Grove’s football team since the first game of this freshman season, is still debating which sport to play in college.

Birnesser has talked with several schools about playing basketball. Coleman isn’t sure what will be next for him. And Erhart, who wants to be a dentist and has a 4.0 grade point average, has an offer for an academic scholarship from the University of Toledo.

“I’m open to playing but I’m leading toward going to Toledo and just focusing on education at this point,” he said.

Columbus Grove, like Lima Senior, Shawnee, Ottawa-Glandorf and Parkway, saw their seasons end abruptly at the Regional Tournament level last season when the OHSAA tournaments were shut down because of the

COVID-19 pandemic. The Bulldogs were one of the teams which had already won their Regional Semifinal game before the games were stopped.

Reynolds and Birnesser said that has been motivation this year.

“My birthday is on March 13 and that’s when we would have been playing in the Regional Finals. So, I guess you could say that was one of the worst birthdays I ever had,” Reynolds said. “We just play every game like it’s our last, every practice like it’s our last. That’s just the motivation you have to go with.”

Birnesser said, “In one sense you do have to move on and focus on this year, but I can tell you that I never forgot that. It’s something that drove me all year.”

The question of what scoring 1,000 points in a career means drew a variety of responses.

“It kind of showed that hard work paid off. I’m more into team accomplishments, it’s a wins are better than stats kind of thing,” Erhart said. “But to be able to do that after four years of grinding every day in practice and shooting every day in the summer, it’s kind of nice to have those accomplishments at the end of the day.”

Coleman said, “Later in life going back and looking at it will be pretty neat, seeing your name next to some of those names you looked up to when you were a younger kid. Having your name up there and having younger kids looking up to you is pretty cool in my eyes.”

Reynolds said, “I don’t really want to be remembered as just a scorer. I want to be remembered as unselfish. I don’t have to score 20 a game or however many points. That’s just my mindset.”

Birnesser said, “It was always a goal I would work toward. It’s going to be awesome to have my name up there when I’m done. But I would definitely say winning that last trophy at the end of the year would mean a lot more.”