

# Vaughnsville's Stretch Goedde

## Stretch Ushers in 'Era of Big Man'

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Putnam County basketball history abounds with heroes. Ask a fan of the sport that has been around for a while, who the best basketball player in the county was and you will probably get a variety of answers. If the fan is from Ottoville, names like Scram and Trenkamp might be mentioned. A Columbus Grove fan might say Hartman or Stechschulte.

If you ask a fan from Vaughnsville who the greatest player in the county was, chances are that, without hesitation, he would say "Stretch" Goedde. Goedde, whose first name is actually Sylvester, is a local superstar who led Vaughnsville to victory in the Putnam County Tournament in his sophomore, junior and senior years of high school, from 1939 to 1942. Goedde's achievements include setting many records. One record the 6'8" center set that still, to his knowledge, stands, is for the total number of points scored in a high school career in the county. Goedde scored over 1,400 points, while in high school. He also set a record for his time, of most points scored in a single game. Goedde scored 49 points in a single game for his team. To make the feat even more remarkable, in those days, the accent was on defense and a team that scored 40 or 50 total points in a ball game was considered exceptionally hot in the shooting department.

Goedde was active in baseball as well as basketball, participating in both sports all four years of high school. He later played baseball professionally for the Toledo Mud Hens and is currently on the voluntarily retired list of professional baseball.

Goedde, who is now superintendent of schools in Van Wert, says that his interest in basketball began in grade school. "I suppose that I first became interested in the sport in the sixth grade," explains Goedde. "At that time, we had a junior high tournament in Columbus Grove."

He was later encouraged by his high school coach. "My real interest in basketball was nurtured by Gale Williams, formerly from Gomer." Williams began coaching baseball and basketball for the then-existent Vaughnsville school district when Goedde was in the eighth grade. "He took me under his wing," explains Goedde. "He showed a lot of patience with a big, awkward farm kid and from then on, my sports career just started to unfold to whatever it unfolded to."

One the things that Goedde's career unfolded to was Putnam County championships for his team three years

straight. "In the 1938-1939 school year, we got beat in the tournament. I was a freshman and don't remember too much of that year. I do remember that we won more games than we lost.

During the 1939-1940 season, Goedde, then a sophomore, traveled with his team to Ottawa for the Putnam County Tournament, which they won. "As a sophomore, we had a really good ball team. That year we won the Putnam County Tournament, went on into the district tournament and finally got beaten by the Holgate team.

The starting lineup for Vaughnsville's team that year included Goedde, William Sakemiller, Donald Fortman, Robert Blockberger and Vernon Hughes. Hughes, a resident of Columbus Grove, recalls that season as one that surprised many Putnam County basketball fans. "We won the Putnam County Tournament, though we weren't slated to. At that time, Louis Heckman had a pretty good ball team and they were favored over us," remembers Hughes.

"I don't remember our record for that year," states Goedde, "But it was pretty good." That year Goedde received All-Ohio Honorable Mention, Class B.

In the season of Goedde's junior year, 1940-1941, the Vaughnsville team won the Putnam County Championship again, and this time made it to the finals in District competition. They were finally eliminated by the team from Delta. That year, Goedde was named Second Team, All-Ohio, Class B.

In Goedde's senior year, Vaughnsville came out on top of other area teams to once again win the Putnam County Championship.

By that year, 1942, "Stretch" had attained his full height of 6'8". One of his opponents, Winford Diller, then a center for Liberty-Benton's team, remembers Goedde's remarkable height. "He was the tallest player around. Once his teammates tapped the ball to him, you could say goodbye to it," recalls Diller. "At that time a height of just 6'2" was considered exceptional." It was not height alone, but skill, that caused Goedde to be named captain of the First Team, All-Ohio Class B that year.

Vaughnsville was beaten again by the team from Holgate in District competition. "In my years on the team, we never got to go on to state competition," states Goedde.

Whatever disappointment, Goedde might have felt must have been alleviated when he was awarded a basketball

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scholarship at Georgetown University, Washington D.C. to begin in September of 1942.

Goedde's high school sports career included four years of pitching for his school's baseball team. "We always got to District, but never made it to State competition until my senior year," states Goedde. That year the Vaughnsville baseball team won their first game in the state tournament, but was defeated in their second match.

It was baseball Goedde turned to when the students of Georgetown University were informed that their school would be converted into an armed service base as part of the U.S. war effort, in the autumn of 1942.

That winter Goedde entered the world of pro baseball as a pitcher for the Toledo Mud Hens. "I signed up to play with Mud Hens in January or February," recalled Goedde. "I played baseball that summer up until July." Goedde's baseball career took him to Elmira, New York, where his team won the Eastern League playoffs.

In that year, 1943, he enrolled in Toledo University. At that time, he was restrained from participating in the school's basketball program because his pro baseball employers feared that he might be injured. His status as a professional baseball player prohibited his participation on the university's baseball team.

In the summer of 1944, Goedde again pitched for Mud Hens, aiding the team to achieve a 14-6 season. "It was a good year," recalls Goedde.

He attended Toledo University for the 1944-1945 academic year, again facing restrictions that prevented him participating in sports.

Spring training in 1945 marked the beginning of the end for Goedde's promising career in professional baseball. Goedde suffered arm injuries during that season's spring training. He pitched for the Mud Hens until July that summer, when he was sent to Little Rock, Arkansas, in the hope that a warmer climate would aid in the healing of his arm. He returned to the team in mid season, where they won four games in Elmira.

Goedde returned to Toledo University for the 1945-1946 school year where he finally was allowed to play basketball leading the team to a 21-5 season.

In the summer of 1946, he was sent to San Antonio, Texas, in another effort to let the recuperative powers of a warmer climate work on this still-injured arm. Goedde's

arm never healed and that summer he went on the voluntary retired list.

In 1947, Goedde played basketball for Toledo University, until an emergency appendectomy just before Christmas, forced him to sit out the rest of the season. Goedde graduated from Toledo University in 1948.

Goedde began his career in education in Ironwood, Michigan, where he taught and was basketball coach for four years. "I received my master's degree from the University of Michigan and have been in education ever since," says Goedde. His career included nine years as a high school principal. He has been superintendent of Van Wert Public School since 1964.

Goedde sums up his basketball career. "Basketball was an experience that I thoroughly enjoyed." He expresses a firm belief in athletics on the high school level. "Participating in high school athletics is a good experience. You learn to give and take. Most importantly, you learn to accept losses."

His son, Ed, is involved in Van Wert's varsity basketball and golf programs.

Although he praises high school athletics, Goedde admits that the activity is not always an easy one. "My advice to anyone who wants to be a good athlete is that he is going to have to spend a lot of time in practice. To be a good, it takes a lot of dedication, self sacrifice, and work."

He believes that the advantages of high school athletics are two-fold:

"All sports play a very important role in the school program for two reasons. Number one: they give the student an opportunity to participate in a very wholesome activity. Number two: they give the student boys an opportunity to identify with something that brings them all together in a common purpose." "A good sports program does this for a school, whether they have a winning team or not, he adds.