

Bob Seggerson's All-Time Putnam County All-Star Team

The Lima News – March 6, 2013 – By Bob Seggerson

I have always been intrigued by the basketball played in Putnam County over the years because it is fueled by a passionate fan base and has produced some of the greatest players to ever hit the hardwood in this area.

Here's my shot at naming an all-time starting five from Putnam County. Please keep in mind that I have no real expertise on the subject other than my own personal observations and connections. If anyone wants to discuss Putnam County basketball with a real expert I suggest they contact Dan Kern who has written a wonderful history on Putnam County sports. Dan's book is the size and weight of a New York City phone directory and it is an absolute treasure.

SYLVESTER "STRETCH" GOEDDE
(1942 – VAUGHNSVILLE)

Any attempt at naming the best players to ever compete in Putnam County has to include this legendary athlete. Over 70 years after he played his last high school game, Goedde's name is still invoked by serious basketball fans.

Vaughnsville High School, which merged with Columbus Grove in the 1960's, won three consecutive Putnam County titles with Stretch leading the way. His Putnam County scoring mark of 1,538 points held up for an astounding 62 years and remains the second highest individual career scoring mark.

At 6-feet, 8-inches, Goedde was a giant among men and dominated the game like few others. Goedde also led his high school baseball team to the state tournament, pitching a one-hit shutout in the regional final game.

His basketball exploits earned him a scholarship to Georgetown University but he left after one year to pursue his dream of playing professional baseball. Three seasons and 19 wins later, much of it with the Toledo Mud Hens, Stretch made the decision to end his baseball career after suffering an arm injury.

He returned to play a couple of years of basketball at the University of Toledo, where he graduated. After earning a master's degree from the University of Michigan, Goedde began a successful career in education and retired as the long time superintendent of the Van Wert city schools.

KEN VENNEKOTTER (1958 – MILLER CITY)

Ken makes my team because he was not only a great player who still ranks in the top ten all time scorers in the County but because I also had the pleasure of actually playing against him.

When I was in high school, our coach, Bill Clark, often had a team of older athletes from Miller City scrimmage against us. I can still vividly recall watching this collection of veterans coming into the LCC gym for our scrimmage and think "What are these old guys doing here?"

What they were doing there was kicking our rear ends for four quarters and showing us how the game should be played. I was often matched up with Ken and grew to respect his skill and his attempts to help me with my own game.

"Cot" Marquette was Vennekotter's coach for three seasons and remembers that Ken "was chiseled out of stone and could jump out of the gym."

Miller City was a combined 58-9 in Vennekotter's three years on the varsity and won the Putnam County championship each year.

Coach Marquette recalls those years with great fondness. "I loved my time at Miller City and coaching Ken just made it that much more special," says Coach Marquette. Vennekotter closed out his high school basketball career as the "Player of the Year" in Putnam County. The years have been good to Ken. He stills looks like he could step on the floor and play the game.

DENNY POTTS (1964 – KALIDA)

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Denny makes my team because he was one of the best round-ballers to ever compete at Kalida High School and still ranks as the fifth leading scorer in school history.

I also had the pleasure of playing with Denny in college. Potts was the captain of our squad in my sophomore year and had a positive influence on every member of that team. He was an outstanding college player but an even better leader.

He had a great pull-up jumper and was a real student of the game. Denny was a quiet but fierce competitor. My most endearing memory of Potts was when he returned to college for his senior year with a bride, Barbara, a beautiful redhead.

St. Joseph's College was an all-male school at the time, surrounded by miles and miles of nothing but cornfields. We could go months without seeing a member of the opposite sex. And then Denny arrives for his senior year with the prettiest girl in 10 counties.

Great move Denny, your best ever. It solidifies your place on my all-time Putnam County team. Potts recently retired from the Continental High School where he taught and coached for many years.

TOM HECKMAN (1965 – OTTAWA-GLANDORF)

Tom was another player I was very familiar with because I competed against him. I was matched up with Heckman and discovered that he was almost impossible to guard. Tom was always the quickest player on the floor and had an incredible shooting touch and range.

Putnam County fans recall that many of his shots came from well beyond today's three-point line but only counted for two in that era.

In spite of that limitation, Heckman still ranks as the No. 3 all-time scorer in Putnam County history with 1,537 points.

The other element of his game I recall is that Heckman had the uncanny ability to get to the free throw line. Like some many great scorers, Tom would get his defender off balance and then absorb contact while shooting. He still holds the O-G records for career attempts and makes from the charity stripe and once made 17 free throws in one game.

Tom played for Glandorf High School in his first three seasons before it merged with Ottawa to form Ottawa-Glandorf High School in 1964. His 29.6 scoring average in his senior year remains the highest ever at O-G and included four games where Tom dropped over 40 points on his opponent.

Heckman's basketball exploits earned him a scholarship to University of Dayton. Tom currently resides in Ottawa and was a long time junior high coach and also assisted with the O-G girls' basketball program.

TIM POLLITZ (2005 – OTTAWA-GLANDORF)

Pollitz is the top scorer in the history of Putnam County basketball, an impressive achievement when measured against the many great players who competed in the county over the years.

Tim helped lead the Titans to a mind-boggling 96 wins over his four-year career.

That included four Western Buckeye League titles, four sectional and district titles, one regional and one state championship.

There are many who believe that O-G would have won three state titles in that era if they did not have the misfortune of running into Akron St. Vincent and their star, LeBron James, in the regional tournament.

From an opposing coach's point of view, Tim, and his twin brother Eric, were a load. I can recall the frustration of trying to game plan against the Titans during their reign. We managed to keep the games tight but in the closing moments, Tim, who at 6'5" was unstoppable near the basket, would wander out and bury back-breaking three point shots. The Pollitz brother signed scholarships to play at Miami University.

Tim was named first-team All Mid-American Conference following his junior and senior seasons. Tim had a contract offer to play profession basketball overseas after graduating from Miami University but he turned it down. He battled serious knee problems over his last two years of college and felt that his body simply needed time to recover. Tim and his brother, Eric are following in their father's footsteps and currently preparing for the Ministry.