

The Classic Event of the Year, the Putnam County Tournament

INTRODUCTION

The Putnam County Tournament, or the PCT, for boys' high school basketball existed from 1922-1964. The purpose of the PCT in 1922 was to determine which town had the best boys' basketball team in Putnam County. In 1924, its purpose was to determine which boys' teams could advance towards the state championship that was organized and run by the Ohio High School Athletic Association.

The PCT for the girls started in 1924 and ended in 1940. The girls and the boys' games were intermingled and played at the same site for the most part. However, this tournament's purpose was not to advance the winner to a state tournament, but only to determine the winner of Putnam County.

An article in the Crescent News in 1925 described the feelings of the OHSAA towards girls' basketball during this era.

"The advisability of girls participating in basketball contests under the same system inaugurated in the state last year for the boys by the Ohio High School Athletic Association is frowned upon by the Northwest Ohio District and State Boards."

"The State Board thinks it unwise for girls to participate in the strenuous work of a basketball tournament. However, we do not prohibit such participation, but the girls' teams taking part do not count in the number of teams in the tournament and, in no case, can any of the 10% gross be used to pay their expenses."

There were many facets to the PCT that were unbelievable when compared to today's way of thinking. Can you believe the following situations?

In 1926, Columbus Grove and Leipsic were tied 9-9 and were declared co-winners of the PCT. In 1928, the coaches of the boys' teams played a preliminary game to the finals to entertain the fans. In 1929, 21 teams (9 girls and 12 boys) played 20 games in two days at the same site, the Ottawa Armory, with the same two officials!

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

In the 41-year history of the Putnam County Tournament, 18 high schools, at one time or another, had a boys or girls team participate.

The schools were as follows: Belmore, Blanchard, Columbus Grove, Continental, Crawfis College, Fort Jennings, Glandorf, Kalida, Leipsic, Miller City, Ottawa, Ottawa Public, Ottawa SPPS, Ottoville, Palmer, Pandora, Pandora-Gilboa and Vaughnsville.

The following schools fielded a girls' team in the PCT: Belmore, Columbus Grove, Continental, Crawfis College, Glandorf, Kalida, Leipsic, Ottawa Public, Palmer, Pandora and Vaughnsville.

Blanchard, Fort Jennings, Miller City and Pandora-Gilboa didn't have a girls' team in the PCT because it ended before they were established.

Ottoville and Ottawa SPPS were the only two schools that never had a girls' team during this era. It was never mentioned in the county newspapers, but religious issues may have been a factor.

TOURNAMENT SITES

From 1924-1940, the PCT was held at four different sites, the Ottawa Armory, the Fourth Street Gym, Leipsic High School and Columbus Grove.

The superintendents and coaches had to deal with many problems concerning sites over the years concerning the PCT. From 1924-1940, the major issue was that so many games were being played at one gym in a limited period of time.

The Armory, which was used from 1924-1930, was a small gymnasium compared to today's facilities. The court was small and the parking was limited. The PCT was being played in two days so fans would stay from game to game and session to session. The gym was bursting at the seams for the big games. If the gym was full, fans would be allowed to enter only as others left.

In 1925 the Putnam County Sentinel stated that "The series drew the largest crowds in Armory history. Every available bit of floor space was taken and hundreds stood during each session. Scores were refused admission to the final game because of lack of room to accommodate them."

In 1929 the Putnam County Gazette stated that "The crowd was so large that the playing floor had to be narrowed down to give standing room for the audience."

In 1931, the tournament was moved to Leipsic High School. This new gym, which could hold 1,600 people, was nearly twice the size of the Armory. As a result, several changes quickly took place. In 1932, the tourney was moved to five days. This solved a major problem. Instead of playing two or three sessions in one day, only one would be played. Remember, a session still would have three or four games, but they would be played on separate days. Can you imagine eight Putnam County schools playing four games at

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one site, in one evening and EVERYONE getting in the gym at the same time?

From 1933-1939, the finals of the girls' PCT was held at Columbus Grove High School. In 1940, the finals were held at the Fourth Street Gym. All the earlier games were still being held at Leipsic High School.

TIME ISSUES

The starting time and length of time between games was an issue since so many games were being played within one day. From 1924-1931, the games were only fifty minutes apart. From 1932-1940, they were scheduled one hour apart.

On Friday, February 22, 1929, 13 games were scheduled to be played between 9:30 a.m. and 9:30 p.m.

TIE BREAKERS

If a game ends in a tie today, overtimes are played until a winner is determined. In the early days of girls' basketball, tie breakers were handled in several different ways.

In the Putnam County Tournament Finals of 1926, Leipsic and Columbus Grove were tied 9-9. There was no method for breaking the tie that year so both teams were declared as Co-Champions.

In the PCT Finals of 1929, Pandora and Crawfis College were tied 30-30. Pandora was declared the winner because they had made more field goals.

In the PCT Finals of 1931, Crawfis College and Palmer were tied 19-19. The tie breaker was that the center and forward from each team would each shoot two free throws. Crawfis College's girls made three-out-of-four and Palmer's girls made one-out-of-four. Thus, Crawfis College won 22-20.

In 1936, a tied game would go to one, three-minute overtime. If a tie still existed, each player of the competing teams will be allowed one free throw. The team making the most free throws would be the winner.

TOURNAMENT DRAWINGS

When the superintendents knew which schools were participating in the PCT, a bracket was drawn up with dates and times. The schools drew a "number out of a hat" which corresponded with a number on the bracket. There was no particular order and records meant nothing. It was the luck of the draw.

On Friday, February 22, 1924 at 6:00 p.m. the first drawing for the boys' and girls' basketball Putnam County Tournament, sponsored by the Ohio High School Athletic Association, took place with the County Superintendent in charge. Since all eight boys' teams were going to start play that evening, all were present at the Ottawa Armory. The girls' teams drew that night also, but they didn't play until Saturday with the first game starting at 7:00 p.m. Only the girls' representatives were at the drawing.

Since teams did not know when they were going to play until the drawings were completed, all the teams would be at the site prepared to play within the hour. Transportation and communication in the early 1920's was such that it would have been impossible to wait at home for the drawing information. The 1925 drawing was even more complicated because sixteen boys' and girls' teams were at the drawing.

In 1926, the drawing was moved to one week prior to the tournament. This solved three major problems. It allowed each school to send only the necessary representatives to the drawing and not the entire team. Secondly, the fans would know when their team was playing and could wait accordingly. Finally, the tournament site was able to handle the teams gradually coming to the site rather than twenty teams showing up at the same time.

From 1927-1940, the drawings were held ten to fourteen days before the tournament with girls' basketball ending following the 1940 season.

An indication to the importance and fanfare that the schools placed on the drawing was a quote from the Putnam County Gazette on February 4, 1932. It stated that on "Wednesday afternoon in the office of the County Superintendent the Coaches and Captains of the Putnam County high school teams met and held the drawings for the drawings for the final basketball classic of the year".

HOW MANY SESSIONS PER DAY?

A session in the PCT included one or more games for the price of one ticket. Sessions were conducted in the mornings, afternoons and evenings of any day of the week except Sunday.

In 1922, the six-team tournament was played in two days and was considered one session. In 1924, the boys' and girls' tournament was played together and the games were alternately played on two days in three sessions, Friday evening and Saturday afternoon and evening. The 1925 tourney was also a two-day, three session affair.

In 1926 and 1927, the tournament was expanded to four sessions over two days. The games were scheduled in the afternoon and evening. Some teams were still playing two games in one day. Another session was added on Friday

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mornings in the years 1928-1931. This made a total of five sessions for twenty games in 1931.

In 1932, the Ohio High School Athletic Association declared that it was "illegal for girls' teams to play more than one game in any one week and those in charge of arrangements in Putnam County did not want to eliminate the girls from the tournament, so they arranged to spread the classic out over a period of time long enough to allow the girls to compete". As a result, the 1932 tournament was played over five days and six sessions with games scheduled one hour apart. It was spread out over two weekends, going from Friday, February 19 to Tuesday, March 1. The boy teams were still playing back to back days, but the two and three games in one day were history. The one negative result of spreading out the tournament in this fashion was that the championship game for the boys and girls was no longer played on the same night.

In 1934 the afternoon sessions were eliminated and all games were played in the evening. Thus, from 1934-1940, the tournaments consisted of six evening sessions over six days. This decision was based on fewer people attending the games in 1932 and 1933 due to the 'stretching out' of the tournament format. It was thought that more people would attend in the evening versus the afternoon.

Girls' basketball ended in Putnam County in 1940. This had a direct effect on the boys' tournament of 1941 and 1942. To absorb the loss of the girls' tournament, the boys went to a double elimination event over seven days and seven sessions. Another change with the sessions was that the games were now scheduled an hour and fifteen minutes apart versus the normal hour.

ADVANCEMENT AFTER THE PCT

The Ohio High School Athletic Association did not allow the girls to have any tournament games beyond the Putnam County Tournament from 1924-1940. It did permit regular season play, but eliminated this also in 1941. Girls' basketball as we know it today was not sponsored by the OHSAA until 1976.

OFFICIALS

Officiating for basketball in the 1920's was quite different than in the 2000's. Only one official, Bert Mull worked the first eight games, four on Thursday and four on Friday, in the 1922 PCT. Mr. Mull had been the boys' basketball coach at Continental in 1921. Mr. Foulkes worked the final game of that year's tourney.

In 1929, H. I. Slocum and C. R. Lehman worked a twenty game, two-day tourney. It began on Friday at 9:30 a.m. and

ended at 11:00 p.m. There were three games in the morning, five in the afternoon and five in the evening. On Saturday, there were seven games. These two-day tournaments went on for ten years from 1922-1931.

Relief to the officials came in 1932 when the seventeen-game tournament was stretched out over a ten-day period. This tournament never had more than four games on any day. This tournament format stayed the same from 1932-1954.

It is amazing how few different officials worked the PCT from 1922-1954. It was common to use the same officials for a two and three-year period. However, two officials, H. I. Slocum and Welby Widner, stand out. H. I. Slocum worked eight tournaments, 147 games, from 1925-1935 and Welby Widner did six tournaments, 75 games, from 1944-1952. They must have been highly respected by the coaches, fans and administrators of Putnam County to be rehired so many times.

It is ironic, that Mack Schaffer, one of the most recognized and well renowned officials in Ohio, who worked more than a half-dozen state tournaments and numerous Sectional and District games, worked only one game in the PCT. In 1932, he did the championship game for the girls with H. I. Slocum.

WORKERS

It takes many people to run a tournament. The Putnam County Tournament was blessed to have several men help make this true. The tournament manager, timer, scorer and tournament committee members were the main jobs mentioned over and over in the county newspapers.

The tournament manager of a tourney was usually the superintendent of the host school until multiple sites came into play in 1956. This job was then rotated from 1956-1964. Mr. T. I. Curtis, of Ottawa and A. E. Shively of Leipsic fulfilled this job nearly every year for the first twenty years of the tournament.

Another important job was keeping score and time. Mr. Earl J. Shaffer was an official timer from 1932-1946 at Leipsic. He also stepped in and filled the tournament manager's position in 1947 and 1948. In 1948, Mr. Shaffer unexpectedly died the first weekend of the tournament and Mr. Ken Bowersox stepped in and completed the job. Mr. Bob Kress and Mr. Earnest D. Radenbaugh, both from Leipsic, were timers for nine years also.

Keeping score at the tourney was manned by basically three men, Mr. John R. White, Mr. John R. Laudick and Mr. Chester Haughn, all from Leipsic. These men scored the PCT from 1931-1955. What a model of consistency!

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An interesting story concerning the scorekeepers of the 1929 PCT was in the Putnam County Sentinel. It seems that a point scored by Leipsic was marked on the scoreboard, but the scorebook didn't record it. Thus, a 12-12 tie game was changed to a 12-11 win by Vaughnsville. A quote from the Sentinel stated that "We do not think the men handling the scorebook made the mistake intentionally; it was simply on account of their lack of knowledge of the game and the ability to follow such fast and furious contests as were staged during the entire contest." Ironically, the scorers for that game were Reverend March and Superintendent B. I. Perry.

TICKET PRICES

Tickets were sold to fans of basketball for the Putnam County Tournament in various ways. In 1922, a \$.50 ticket was good for the entire two-day, nine game tournament. An adult and child ticket cost the same.

Tickets were usually provided in two different ways, individual session tickets or season tickets. A session ticket was good for all the games at a session. This could be from one to five games. A season ticket was good for all the sessions.

The prices varied from year to year. In 1924, a child's session ticket cost \$.35 and a season ticket cost \$.75. An adult's session ticket cost \$.50 and a season ticket cost \$1.00. Season tickets were no longer offered to the fans after 1937. In 1964, a child's session ticket cost \$.50, an adult's session ticket cost \$1.00 and reserved seats cost \$1.25. It is amazing how little the cost of a ticket went up from 1922-1964.

Admitting people into the tournament site was an enormous problem as the crowds kept getting bigger and bigger. In the earlier years, there was not a large fan base for each school, but there were so many schools participating. Twenty to twenty-five passes were provided to each team for the tournament each year. When this number is multiplied by the number of teams (15-20) involved, there were possibly 300 to 500 passes available at each game plus the paid tickets.

A quote from the Leipsic Free Press in 1928 stated: "When the afternoon games were over, it was a rush to get a sandwich and to get back into line as near the Armory door as possible and to stand for two hours or more just to get a seat. There was more standing room than seats so many people stood during the three games."

In 1931, the Leipsic Free Press reported: "The season tickets for this year will be different from those issued in years past in that they will be in coupon form, with a coupon for each and every session. There will be no delay in entering the gym, as tickets will not be punched. All that is necessary is

to present the coupon for the session named thereon. Another feature of this year's tournament will be that the gym will not be closed at any time and persons who wish to enter immediately after the finish of a session may do so and choose the seats they prefer, and there will be almost two thousand of them."

Two entrances alleviated some of the congestion at the site. One entrance was for those purchasing tickets at the site. Today this is described as "purchasing at the door". Another entrance was for those who had a pass or a ticket which was purchased at each participating school. Today this is called a "presale ticket". The prices for door or presale tickets were the same, but the gates were opened earlier for the presale tickets and passes.

Later, all tickets at the door cost more than presale. Increasing the price and early admittance helped encourage people to buy presale tickets and alleviate the congestion.

RECEIPTS AND ATTENDANCE

The number of people that attended the Putnam County Tournaments over the years was difficult to determine. In 1922, \$385.25 was reported as the receipts of the first tournament. Since tickets were \$.50, the paid attendance was less than 800 plus the passes.

From 1924-1930, there were no published financial reports while the tourney was held at the Armory. The various county newspapers would make general comments about the crowds being very large, but no specific numbers.

In 1925, the Putnam County Sentinel stated that "The series drew the largest crowds in Armory history. Every available bit of floor space was taken and hundreds stood during each session. Scores were refused admission to the final game because of lack of room to accommodate them."

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The first recorded attendance for the PCT was in 1931 when 4,047 fans paid \$1,416.70. This figure did not include the hundreds of passes.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Special events were held at some of the Putnam County Tournaments to build up more interest and bring in more fans.

In 1929, foul shooting contests were held for several years.

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In 1935, a 110 piece all county band played during the final session.

However, the two most unusual special events happened in 1928 and 1930 when the coaches played a game amongst themselves before the finals.

COACHES

Before 1941, it was very common for one man to coach the boys' and girls' teams during the same year. The following men did both jobs: Melvin Harman at Crawfis College, Paul Stoodt at Palmer, Ralph Blauvelt at Leipsic, Earnest D. Radenbaugh at Leipsic, Merwin Hilty at Ottawa public and Glen Hilty at Pandora. It was a common occurrence to coach both teams, back to back, in the regular season, but it was unique when this happened during the PCT.

This situation had inherent problems such as running practices, preparing for games, getting the teams to and from the game site, supervising the teams, etc.

However, Palmer High School and Coach Paul Stoodt had a unique situation in the 1931 PCT. Palmer's two teams

played back-to-back games three times. On Friday at 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., the boys defeated Columbus Grove and the girls beat Vaughnsville respectively. On Saturday at 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m., the boys defeated Pandora and the girls beat Columbus Grove respectively. On Saturday at 8:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., the girls lost to Crawfis College and the boys lost to Vaughnsville respectively. Both of these games were in the finals of the PCT.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Putnam County Tournament was a significant part of the storied history of Putnam County girls' basketball. It is difficult to grasp how it worked so smoothly or even survived for forty-one years, but one must remember that "times were so much simpler then". We are so spoiled today in comparison to such matters as neutrality of officials, ticket prices, coaching, transportation, etc. It is fun to imagine how today's teams, fans, coaches and administrators would adapt if they had to go back nearly a century and deal with the day to day occurrences of the 1930s.