

# Basketball Flourished at Crawfis College High School

The Times – Mary King’s interview of Marie – Fenstermaker - Williams

In spite of the fact that Crawfis College High School was a small school and did not have a gymnasium, basketball programs for boys and girls were established there in the fall of 1922. Basketball was the school’s main athletic attraction for many years. The Crawfis girls struggled in the early years of the program, posting losing seasons in their first few years. However, in the late 1920’s, the girls’ team at Crawfis College High School took the spotlight.

Marie - Fenstermaker - Williams, of rural Gilboa, shared memories of her years on the girls’ basketball team.

“Our dad didn’t want us to play,” Marie said. “But they kept sending the uniforms home with us and finally he let us play.” Both she and her sister, Beatrice, were team members. Marie said that her parents didn’t usually attend regular season games, but did attend the tournament games.

She said a school bus transported them for away games but everyone got off the bus in Gilboa. Her family lived in the country a few miles from Gilboa. “The school superintendent, Dale Rikard, would take us home. If the weather was bad and the road to our house was snowed in, he would drop us off at the corner and we’d walk on home, about a mile. We didn’t think a thing of it,” Marie said.

“I remember one night where there was a lot of snow and we had to walk through lots of snow drifts. We had those old four buckle boots and the buckles were hitting our legs as we walked. We were just about frozen when we got home, but didn’t let on because we knew Dad didn’t want us to play anyway,” she said.

Their uniforms were very different from what the girls wear now. Their colors were green and red. “Our first uniforms were old fashioned pleated bloomers that were down to our knees. Of course, we had to handwash them and iron every one of those pleats. The girls also wore full length tights under the uniforms,” she added.

When Marie was a sophomore in 1928, the team got trunks and matching shirts, but still wore tights with the uniforms. The short uniforms created quite a discussion in the community and “some of the people didn’t approve,” she said.

“We practiced two times a week, on Monday and Wednesday. Since we didn’t have a gym, we practiced in the old Grange Hall that used to be in Gilboa. Home games were played there, too,” she said. Marie recalled that the low ceiling of the Hall made it difficult to play there. There was no indoor plumbing and the building was always cold, especially upstairs where the team had to change clothes.

“Back then, girls only played on half the court. You could just dribble once and take one step, otherwise you had to turn over

the ball. Six girls played on a team. Three guards played defense while on the other end of the court, a jumping center and two forwards played offense. It was also believed that overtime play would be too strenuous or emotional for girls. So, games sometimes ended in a tie.

She recalled that the coach, Mel Harmon, was a good coach, but never praised the girls for their efforts. “No matter how well we did, he never praised us. However, after home games, he gave us each a quarter to buy a supper across the street at the Gilboa Restaurant. We could get a sandwich pop and soup, all for a quarter,” Marie said.

“The tournaments were played in the old National Guard Armory in Ottawa. On one tournament day our coach made us stay inside the hotel in Ottawa all day. We had lunch but no junk food. We could look and see the Vaughnsville girls walking around having a good time, while we were inside. We didn’t like that at all. But we did win the game against them,” she stated.

In the first two games of the 1929 Putnam County Tournament, Crawfis College defeated Columbus Grove 19-10 and Belmore 43-13. The final game ended in a 30-30 tie between Pandora and Crawfis. The tie was broken and Pandora was declared the winner because they had made more field goals.

Marie was chosen captain of the team in 1930, her senior year. They had a 19-0 season. Once again, the Crawfis girls dominated the Putnam County Tournament. That year, they defeated Vaughnsville 36-12, Leipsic 38-14 and Columbus Grove 33-17.

“We were one of the smallest schools in the county and didn’t even have a gym, but we sure had a lot of fun playing basketball,” Marie said. When Crawfis College High School closed, the 1930 Putnam County Championship trophy was taken to the Gilboa school and put on display.