

Jane (Stemen) Wright's

Memories of Girls' Basketball at Vaughnsville in 1939

Putnam County Vidette – Dianne Wright – January 1, 2004

As much as Jane enjoyed her music and theater while attending Vaughnsville, she also enjoyed sports. Her greatest memory was when she was a freshman and played basketball.

“It was 1939, the last year that they allowed girl’s state competition in basketball.” In 1940 the state decided that basketball was too strenuous for girls and it was stopped. But for Jane’s freshman year it was wonderful.

“Dorothy Peters was our coach and there were eleven of us on the team,” she said. “We played nine other teams in our league before the Putnam County League tournament began.” Practice was every Tuesday and Thursday night. The boys had the gym for practice every Monday and Wednesday night. Friday night was game night for all of them. The first game on Friday nights was the boy’s junior varsity game, the second game was the girls’ team and last was the varsity boys. All three games were played on Friday night. The 1939 basketball season ended with three wins, five losses and one tie.

“After every away game, we returned to Lefty Litten’s restaurant in Vaughnsville for a snack,” Jane said. Since there was not an athletic department to supply funds for the girls, the hosting team’s school gave to each girl 50 cents to spend for an after-game snack. “We had cheerleaders too”, said Jane, “and they were not all girls either.”

Girls basketball was different in 1939. There were six girls on the floor at one time, three forwards and three guards. The forwards were the only ones who were allowed to shoot the ball. That was true even if it was a guard who was fouled. The girls were only allowed to play on half of the court. Guards could not cross the line and neither could the forwards. Team members were only allowed one dribble before passing the ball. The game was started when the referee threw the ball to one team. It was not the physical sport that it is today.

“It was in our tournament game against Columbus Grove and the last two minutes of the game,” said Jane. “They put me in because Betty Seaman had fouled out. We were down by two points. I got the ball and I was the closest player to the basket. I had been coached to feed the ball to Peg Benroth so even though I could hear my parents and the other fans yelling ‘shoot it Jane’ I did as I was coached and threw the ball to Peg. She took the shot and missed and we lost the game 16-14.” It was very disappointing loss and the last of its kind for many years.

In 1976 the state sanctioned girls’ basketball as a state competition sport. Jane, who will turn 79 this month, is still a very active, competitive person. She loves to see the Columbus Grove Bulldogs win. She has watched two of her grandsons play football at Columbus Grove and she is an avid fan, cow bell, and all.