

# The History of Girls' Basketball in Putnam County

Putnam County Heritage – Mildred Ruen – February of 2017

I was one of the girls who wanted to participate in high school basketball when I was a student. I grew up in the 40's and 50's. The boys had competition in a state tournament in both basketball and baseball. No girls that I knew of thought to rock the boat and question why girls had no sports to participate in. When I decided to do this article, I took a lot of information from Dan Kern's History of PC Basketball.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that he gave equal treatment to girls' basketball and boys' basketball.

The boys had their first countywide tournament in 1922 and the girls had their first tournament in 1924.

The girl's teams that participated in the 1924 tournament were Ottawa Public, Crawfis College, Columbus Grove, Leipsic, Continental and Vaughnsville.

The boys team participation in 1924 were Pandora, Leipsic, Continental, Ottawa Public, Kalida, Vaughnsville, Crawfis College, and Palmer.

Glandorf and Ottoville did not have a gym at this time. Ottoville had tried to start basketball and play in the Parish Hall but the ladies of the parish nixed that when the plaster started to fall off the walls.

During the first tournaments of this era, all the teams arrived at the Ottawa Armory one hour before the start of the games to draw up the brackets. The boys and girls' games were staggered with a girl's game and then a boy's game. The same officials did all the games. That meant nine games the officials worked for the boys and six more for the girls. Both boys and girl's tournament were done in the same day. The girls never had as many teams as the boys did.

When they did have the tournament for girls from 1924-1940, the rules the girls played were different. Each team had six players but none of the team members could cross the mid court line. So, it was 3-on-3 game on each end of the floor (three defense and three offense.) The girls were permitted only three dribbles.

One year, coaches played a preliminary game for the enjoyment of the fans before the girls' championship game. In another year, they had a foul shooting contest.

In 1926 the girl's tournament ended in a tie but there was no plan to break a tie so Columbus Grove and Leipsic were both declared winners.

The teams did not like the tie so in later years they made a rule that the team with the most field goals won the game. Another time they had a rule in which one player from each team would shoot foul shots and the one with the most made foul shots was declared the winner. In 1936, another method

was a three-minute overtime and if still tied they shot foul shots.

Another rule that made a change for the girls was a decision in 1932 by the OHSAA that the girls could only play one game a week. One year before in 1931 they had girls and boys both playing two or more games in a day.

Early on OHSAA was never fond of the girls participating in inner scholastic sports but they did permit the girls to play in a county tournament from 1924 through 1940. The boy's programs have had state tournaments since 1924.

In 1940 the state stopped the girl's program on the county level and all sports programs for girls. They cited the war effort as one reason for this stoppage. The boy's tournaments were continued right through the war even though things got much worse with rationing and shortages later in the war.

Reason given why girls could not participate in sports are many and varied. Such ideas circulated that their organs would fall out, or they would cry each time they were touched. Another was that if they would win, they would become hysterical and if they lost, they would become melancholy.

The American Farmer Magazine suggested that females could obtain beauty of face and form if they participated in exercises such as rolling the hoop or battle lore. Callisthenic exercises were not to be permitted when males were present.

During the thirties the rules limiting girls' basketball came down on a regular basis. In this country schools with a large Catholic population did not have girls' teams.

Both Pope Pius XI in the 1930's and Pope Pius XII in the 1940's came out against women in sports. Both Popes felt that the "indecent dress" needed for sports would not be conducive to the modest female image that they felt young women should exhibit at all times. They felt the sports clothing destroys the female's natural spirit of modesty. The popes also wrote that the violent nature of sports was incompatible with the female spirit. Clothing was a problem also. Skirts got in the way so the girls wore their gym clothes.

Fifty-five percent of the schools had basketball for girls but in 1937 a vote was held. The OHSAA held a survey seeking votes from all the schools on the advisability of continuing county basketball tournaments for girls. The responding schools voted 67% to 33% to drop interscholastic sports for girls. That vote led to dropping sports for girls in 1940.

Between 1940 and the early 1960's some schools had basketball for girls in an organization called the GAA. (Girls Athletic Association).

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In the 1960's when things started to change a little, one player from each team could run the whole floor creating a four on four game. These changes did not move the OHSAA to allow girls to have interscholastic competition.

The 1960's brought a return of girls participating in basketball but in a very limited way. The girls had no uniforms but Rita Schnipke, an Ottoville Physical Education Teachers, remembers that the Home Economics class sewed pinnies for the girls. The girls used iron on tape or sewed the numbers on the pinnies.

Ottoville, Columbus Grove and Ottawa- Glandorf were the only schools that had girls game records in 1965 according to Dan Kern's book. Starting with 1970, they increased the number of games for girls but it varied from school to school.

Fort Jennings won the league in 1974, with Marilyn Calvelage as coach. Their record was 8-0.

Women were becoming more vocal in 1972, Title One was passed. This legislation stated there could be no discrimination in sports due to the sex of the participant. It took until 1976 for the state of Ohio to set up a tournament for girls.

Rita Schnipke had tried to start basketball at her high school, Grover Hill in the early 1960's but her principle refused the request. Rita did not forget that and when she got a chance to coach, after graduating from Bowling Green State University, she continued the girls' basketball at Ottoville in 1967. They had six games.

Rita had a Physical Education degree. She not only continued basketball but she also started track and volleyball for the girls at Ottoville.

She had to make do with all the equipment such as using folding chairs for hurdles. She had the girls raise funds to cover equipment and pay for officials. She purchased a shot put but it disappeared into the boys program the next year.

In the early 1970's, Rita switched to Crestview high school and her enthusiasm for girls' sports continued. It had been started by Ms. Perkins in 1966.

She along with other women Physical Education Teachers in the area started meeting to promote the girl's programs. They sometimes had the groups of girls meet at a high school on a weekend and introduced the different sports to the girls.

This group of women worked with Dee Beilhart who was the first female on the OHSAA board. Rita said Dee was a hard worker who worked with their small group and promoted the female programs in the high schools.

The first state wide basketball tournament that is counted in the OHSAA statistics was in the 1975-1976 school year. It was played one week before the boy's tournament and was held in St. Johns arena in Columbus. They had paid officials and it was run just like the boys.

After playing with girls' rules from the beginning in 1924 they switched to the same rules as boys in 1970. That change made basketball for girls a real sport.

The girl's old rules were full of restrictions. Some of them were not allowing the girls to run the whole court. They could only dribble three times. There were six girls on a team. If the girls held the ball the other team could not tie her up nor could you slap the ball out of her hands.

All of the girl's programs, when they started up in the 1960's, had few games. In Ohio for years the girls could only play one game a week in tournament.

No budgets were allowed for girls when they first started up again. They had to have fund raisers.

The men involved with the sports programs had the gyms when they wanted. They controlled the budgets and, in many instances, they showed resentment that their world was invaded by females.

Rita Schnipke took her team to the first girls state tournament and her team lost in a very close game. Rita's team lost to Adena with their star 6'5" Cindy Noble who gained fame at Tennessee and the Olympics.

Marilyn Calvelage was the head coach in Fort Jennings in 1973. She said they started the girl's games at 4:00, with the varsity playing first, followed by the reserve game. The game was stopped if they were not finished by 6:30 when the boys were ready to practice.

Marilyn also was an assistant coach with Ottoville in 1977-1978. When Sue Honigford scored her 1000 points the coaches asked the Athletic Department to give Sue a basketball which was what they done for the boys when they reached the 1000-point mark at Ottoville. The athletic department refused so Sue's coaches pitched in and bought the ball and presented it to Sue. Jerry Hoersten sent Sue flowers when she broke his record for the most points scored by an Ottoville High School player.

Every new thing is started by a dedicated individual or a group that just simply will not give up. Hats off to the dedicated ladies like Rita Schnipke and the groups of women Physical Education Teachers and coaches. I am glad for the present-day female players that things have changed.