

Basketball Flourished at Crawfis College

1922 – 1930 Crawfis College High School – Girls Basketball Teams

Putnam County Vidette – Mary King

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 1922. Basketball was the school's main athletic attraction for many years.

The teams Crawfis faced included: Pandora, Columbus Grove, Vaughnsville, Belmore, Glandorf, Leipsic, Hoytville, Ottawa and Continental.

The first season in 1922-23 was very successful for the boys. They won 15 of 19 games.

It was noted that the boys were defeated by Vaughnsville by one point and by Columbus Grove with a score 21-20. "However, in a thrilling game at Gilboa, they defeated Columbus Grove by the same score 21-20 in a game which required 12 minutes overtime," according to the yearbook.

The entire boys team returned to play in "the 1923-24 season. Of the 21 games played, the Crawfis boys were only defeated three times, once by Columbus Grove (8-6) and twice by Hamler.

In the next few years the boys' team did not fair as well. Meanwhile, the girls struggled in the early years of the program, posting losing seasons in their first few years.

In 1928, the girls' team at Crawfis College High School took the spotlight. A member of that team, Marie (Fenstermaker) Williams of rural Gilboa, recently 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 parents and fans didn't usually attend regular games as they do now. But her parents did attend 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," she recalled. "If the weather was bad and the road to our house was snowed in, he'd 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 when 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 we 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," she said. "Of course, we had to hand wash them and iron everyone of those peats," she added. The girls also wore full length tights under the uniforms.

When she was a sophomore, the team got trunks and matching shirts. They still wore tights with the uniforms. She said the short uniforms created discussion in the community. "Some of the people didn't approve," she said.

"We practiced two times a week, on Monday and Wednesday," she said. "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 recalls that the low ceilings 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.

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“Back then, girls only played on half the court,” she said. “You could just dribble once and take one step, otherwise, you had to turn over the ball. Six girls played on a team,” Marie recalled. “Three guards played defense, while on the other half a jumping center and two forwards played offense.”

Back then it was believed that overtime play would be too strenuous or emotional for girls. So, games sometimes ended in a tie. According to an area athletic historian, Dan Kern, if a girl’s tournament game ended in a tie, each team chose two players from the other team. Then a free throw contest between those four players determined the winner.

Marie played left guard. “I was a rough player. I think I fouled out of every game,” she said. “We had some good players on the team. Helen Compton was really good. She was 5’8” tall and was our jumping center.”

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,” she recalled.

“After home games, the coach gave us each a quarter to buy supper across the street at the Gilboa restaurant that ‘Bally’ Ferrel ran. 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,” Marie stated. (Dan Kern furnished the following stats from the 1928, 1929 and 1930 tournaments) In 1928, the Crawfis girls defeated Ottawa Public 20-19, Pandora 25-15 and Vaughnsville in the final game. Crawfis won that game 22-19.

Marie said one tournament game was very exciting. “Right at the buzzer Dorothy (Dode) Woods threw the ball up over a beam and into the basket to make the winning point!”

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

In the first two game of the 1929 county tournament, the Crawfis College High School girls 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 when Pandora won the field goal contest because they had made more field goals.

Marie was chosen Captain of the Crawfis girls’ team in 1930, her senior year. They had a 7-1 season. Once again, the Crawfis College High School girls dominated the Putnam County Tournament. That year they defeated Vaughnsville 36-12, Leipsic 38-14 and finally 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 where it is still on display.

Team Members – Catherine Chambers, Beatrice (Knepper) Wells, Marie (Fenstermaker) Williams, Margaret Sheidler, Helen Bracey. Frances (Miller) Hickey, Leona Miller, Beatrice (Fenstermaker) Neimire, Helen (Compton) DeWitt, Alice Ferrell and Ina Hickey. The coach was Mel Harmon.

EDITORS NOTE – Our thanks to Marie Williams, Bob and Dolores Hashbarger, Larry Dunn, Mr. and Mrs Alvin (Jigs) Compton and Dan Kern for sharing information with us.