

Basketball



SHS (DES MOINES)

in Iowa

by Clare L. Kernek
and Leah D. Rogers

Basketball—unlike other team sports played at the turn of the century in Iowa—did not have its origins in a historical tradition nor did it spread from Europe. Rather, the sport often referred to as being truly the “American game” was invented, literally overnight, by a young YMCA instructor in Springfield, Massachusetts. In the winter of 1891, James Naismith was in charge of a physical education class at the International YMCA Training School in Springfield (later Springfield College). Vocal complaints about the school’s program of rote calisthenic exercises had already caused two frustrated instructors to quit the class. Naismith tried adapting various field sports such as rugby, soccer, and lacrosse for play inside a gymnasium, but without success. Then one day, after attending a psychology lecture on the process of invention, in which the formulation of a game was used as an example, he became

Invented in 1891 in Massachusetts, basketball soon spread to Iowa. Left, a Muscatine team, 1898. Right: Simpson College players, 1902.



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

inspired to try to create a completely new indoor sport for his students.

The game Naismith worked out that night was based partly on aspects of lacrosse, although with a larger ball; partly on a children's game called Duck on a Rock, in which players used small stones to knock a larger stone off a platform; and partly on the indoor practices of his rugby team, where the players had fun aiming the ball into boxes used as goals. Another consideration was how to eliminate the roughness that had resulted from his earlier experiments with indoor games. He wanted to avoid hard-thrown balls and crowding around the goal as in rugby, and he had the idea of suspending the goals from the balconies, which were ten feet high. That would later become (and still is) the regulation height of baskets for the sport.

Naismith wrote out 13 rules for the new game, which were typed up the following day and posted on a bulletin board in the gymnasium for the students to study. For all the careful thought Naismith put into his new game, however, a key feature resulted entirely from chance. The school's superintendent of buildings, Pop Stebbins, couldn't find the boxes Naismith had requested for goals, so he brought the teacher a couple of old peach baskets instead. "And that," as one writer concludes the legendary tale, "is how James Naismith almost invented boxball."

Upon seeing the posted rules for the new game, Naismith's students greeted his latest idea with their usual lack of enthusiasm. Naismith recalled, "I asked the boys to try it once as a favor to me. They started, and after the ball was first thrown up there was no need for any more coaxing."

By all accounts, the game was an instant success. That first game resulted in a melee as the players fiercely scrambled for possession of the ball and charged en masse into the gallery above after shots that had missed their marks. The game was immediately popular with spectators, too. Students who heard about the fun in Naismith's class crowded the balconies during the noontime games and got in on the action by kicking at the ball through the railings. After a few days of this, Naismith solved the problem with another innovation: the first backboards.

Although many aspects of Naismith's original game would be tinkered with in years to come to allow for smoother and more fluid play, all the elements were there for an enjoyable indoor sport that filled the void between football in the fall and baseball in the spring and summer. Naismith objected to his students'

suggestion that the game be named for its inventor, saying he believed that would ensure its quick demise, and so word soon spread of the new sensation called "basketball."

The new game emerged at a time when industrialization was providing more time for recreational activities, and the network of YMCAs around the world facilitated its rapid spread. Students at the Springfield school went on to become instructors at health clubs in different regions and countries, and took the new Y game with them. A *New York Times* article from 1893 noted "more than ordinary elements of interest" and reported that the sport was already being played at Oxford and Cambridge, and had traveled as far as Australia and Japan.

Amos Alonzo Stagg and H. F. Kallenberg introduced Naismith's invention into the Midwest when they took positions for the 1892/93 school year at the University of Chicago and the State University of Iowa. Kallenberg, the director of physical education at the University of Iowa YMCA, organized the first known basketball team in the state (which was soon followed by the formation of a YMCA team in Cedar Rapids). The first basketball game in Iowa was played between these two teams on April 26, 1893, in the gymnasium in Iowa City's Close Hall, where the Y was located. As was often the case with athletic events in those days, the match was part of a program of other entertainments, such as exhibitions on the parallel bars and the flying rings.

The University of Iowa was one of the first three colleges in the United States to have a basketball team, and a game organized by Kallenberg against the University of Chicago team is generally considered by sports historians to be the first ever intercollegiate basketball game with five on a side. (That game was also played at Close Hall, on January 16, 1896.)

The team at Iowa continued to play irregularly scheduled games against other YMCA and town teams, as well as the occasional college team, until 1902, when the university had its first official intercollegiate schedule, competing against teams from Grinnell, Upper Iowa University, and, reportedly, "a college at Wilton Junction, Iowa," as well as schools in Kansas and Minnesota.

Basketball was distinguished from many other team sports by the fact that it was, from its earliest days of existence, also a women's sport. Just a couple of weeks after the game got started in Naismith's class, a group of female teachers from a local grade school asked if they could play; they enjoyed the new game so much that they formed the first girls' team at their



African American athlete Sol Butler and his teammates at the Dubuque College and Seminary, 1917/18. The school's first black student, Butler also excelled at football, baseball, and track and field. He was twice named All-American broad jumper.

school. Senda Berenson, physical culture teacher at Smith College, taught the game to her students in 1892, and by the winter of 1893 it had been enthusiastically adopted by the women of Wellesley College and Mount Holyoke. Women were also taking up the game at Iowa's colleges. A physical culture instructor from New Haven, Connecticut, had introduced the sport at Grinnell College by 1894. At the State University of Iowa and Iowa Agricultural College in Ames (now Iowa State University), women learned along with the men at their schools' YM-YWCAs. In Ames, women students played men students on a grass court in the center of campus.

Basketball was also spreading rapidly to the high schools and academies across Iowa. Oftentimes a college student returning home would teach the new game to siblings and friends. Although it seems to have been popular wherever it was introduced, some have speculated that midwestern rural communities (especially in Indiana and Iowa) embraced it particularly enthusiastically. One reason was that the long winter months between fall harvesting and spring planting left people eager for social and recreational activities, especially when diversions offered by cities were distant. In addition, basketball seemed especially well suited to smaller towns because the equipment needed was minimal, and only five players were needed for a team. In the larger towns, high schoolers learned the game at their local YMCAs and then requested that their schools start programs. Between 1898 and 1902, Fort Dodge, West Waterloo, Ottumwa, Boone, Sioux City, and Cedar Rapids all formed teams.

Both boys and girls took up the new sport with enthusiasm. As early as 1893, girls were playing basketball with boys at the Dubuque YMCA; by 1898 they had formed their own team, as had Marshalltown High School girls. By 1900, girls' basketball had also taken root in Algona, Boone, Centerville, Council Bluffs, Des Moines, Le Mars, and Ottumwa. In some places, such as Spirit Lake High School, the girls picked up the game first and then taught it to the boys. Teams from high schools played each other, as well as teams from YMCAs and sometimes nearby colleges. Towns without YMCAs or school gyms played in church basements, opera houses, and armories.

By the second decade of the new century, the sport was so popular that schools felt the need for gyms of their own, with room for spectators as well as players. By 1914, Boone, Sioux City, New Hampton, Spirit Lake,

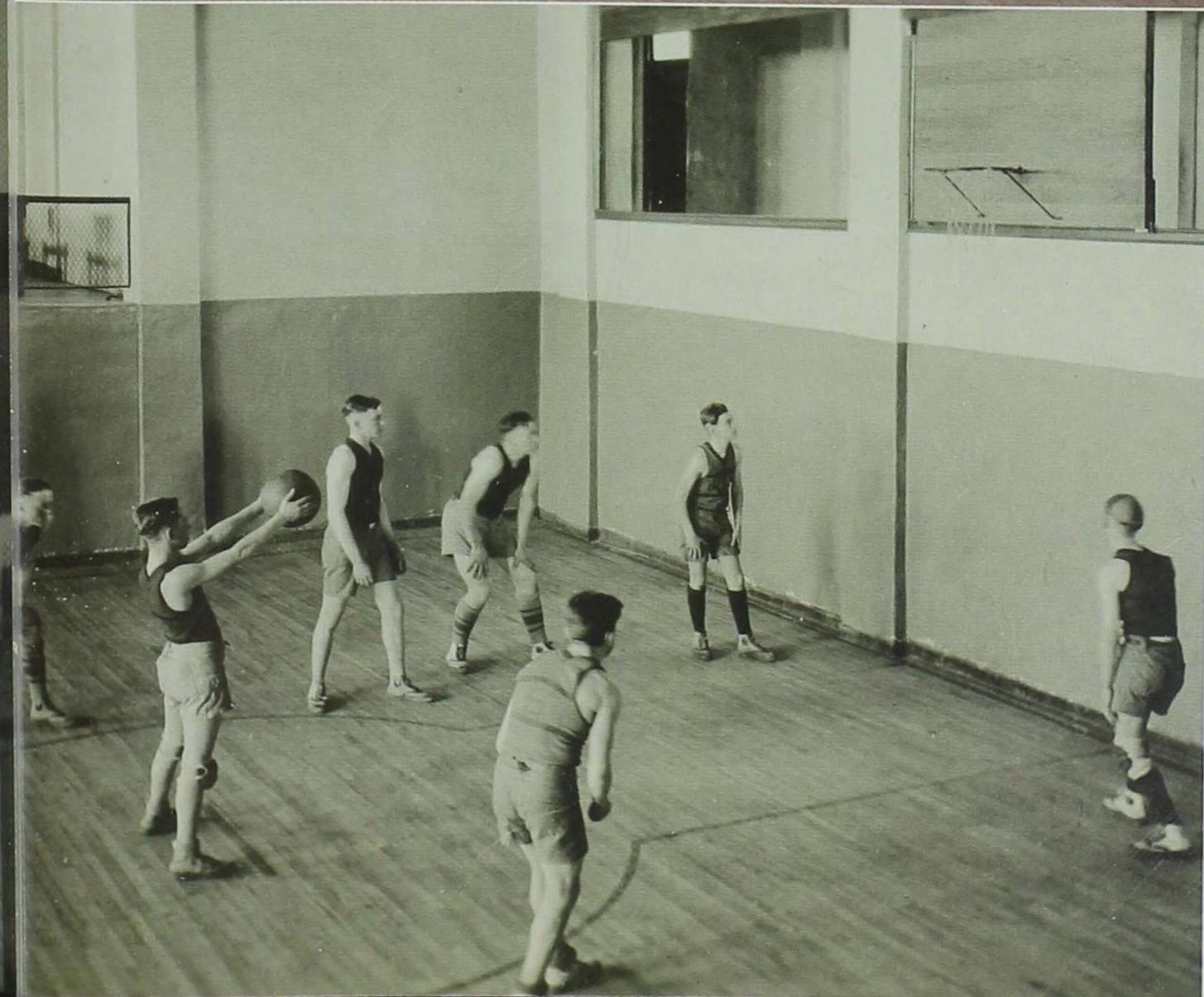
and Diagonal were among the earliest high schools with gyms, built primarily for basketball. In 1917 in Onawa, a school editorial called for the construction of a high school gymnasium: "Basketball for both boys and girls has been practically impossible in Onawa because of the lack of indoor room. . . . In such a building rooms could be provided for amusements as well as for religious purposes that would serve the needs not only of the boys and girls of the High School, but of all the young people of the community."

As early powerhouse teams developed, particularly at the larger schools, proud claims to the title of "state champion" began popping up, based on team records or various invitational tournaments. For example, in 1904, the Muscatine girls made such an unverifiable claim, as did the boys in Ottumwa. An organized, statewide competition was needed to prove which schools actually were Iowa's best. An official tournament for boys was organized first, in 1912 (girls would have to wait until 1920). The boys' invitational was sponsored by the University of Iowa, and the Iowa High School Athletic Board selected four regional teams: Sioux City, Grundy Center, Wilton Junction, and Ottumwa (which won, beating out Sioux City, 38-31). Two years later the tournament changed to a sectional system of preliminary tournaments, in Ames, Des Moines, Grinnell, and Cedar Falls. Beginning in 1923, the boys' tournament came under complete control of the Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA), which had been formed in 1904 by school principals and superintendents to impose order and standardized rules on high school athletics. Throughout the 1920s and '30s the tournament grew to become one of the largest in the nation, and the IHSAA expanded from a board of part-time members to a full-time staff with its own offices, first in Des Moines, then in Boone.

Teams from the larger towns tended to dominate the boys' state championships. Sioux City, Boone, Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, Ottumwa, and

SHS, IOWA CITY





Early physical education classes and teams played basketball in crowded facilities, like the small room above. In this class line-up for a photo, the shortest girl holds the ball. In the corner, a metal screen protects the window from high-flying shots.

Left: Seating for fans was often confined to stages and balconies. Here, a player prepares to shoot a free throw underhanded.

SHS (DES MOINES), MARIE TURNER HARVEY COLLECTION

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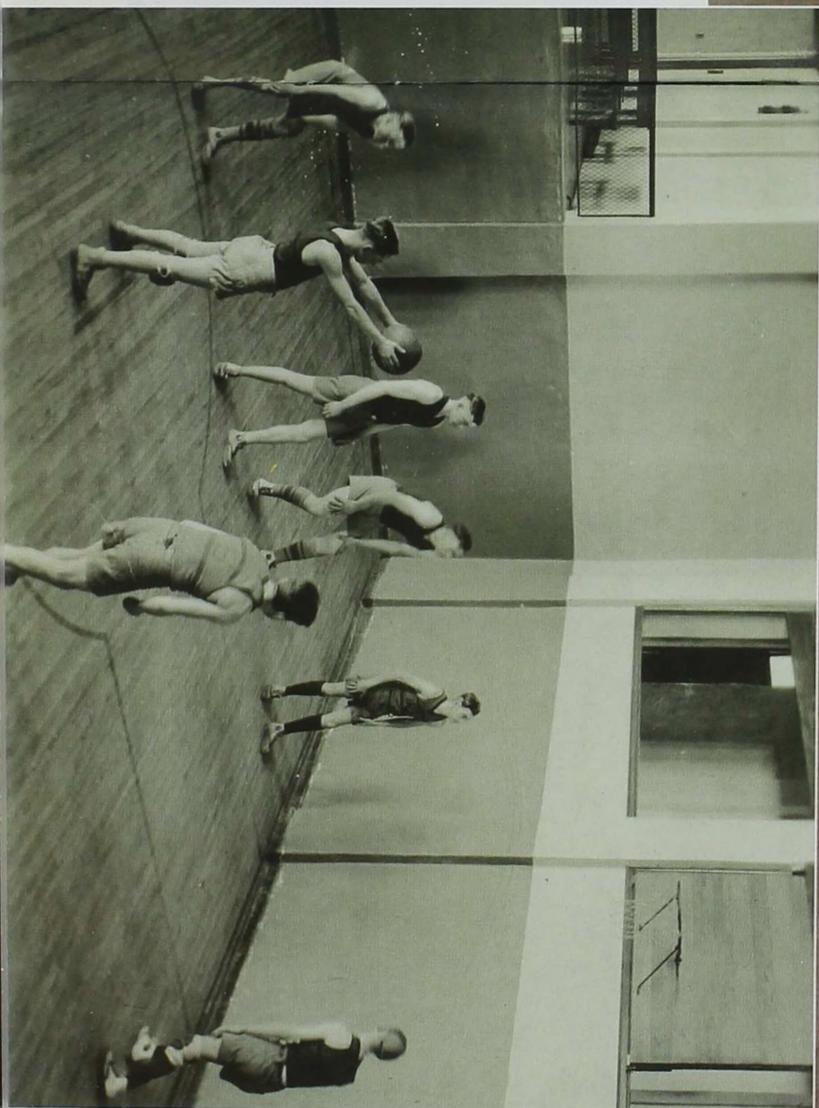
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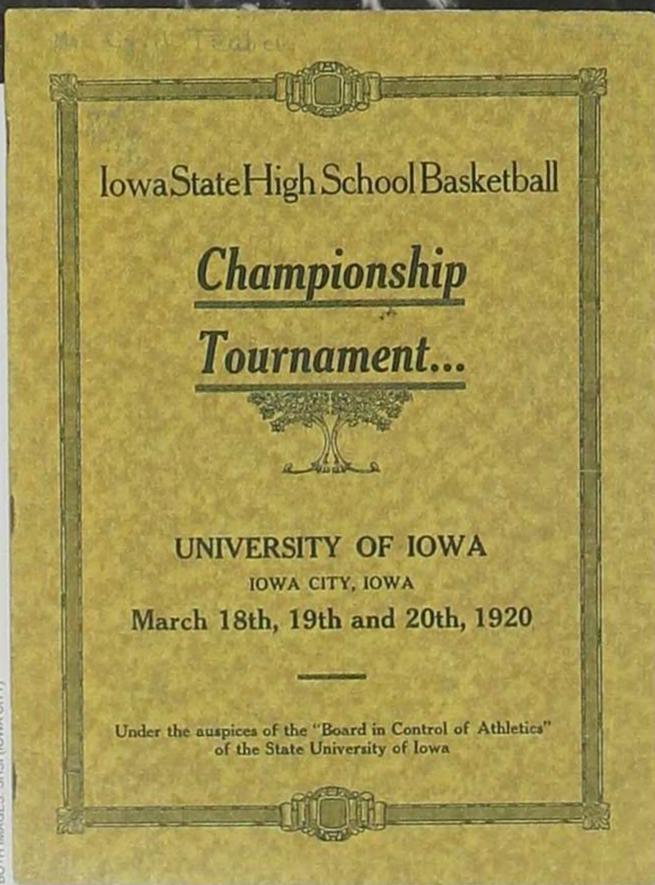
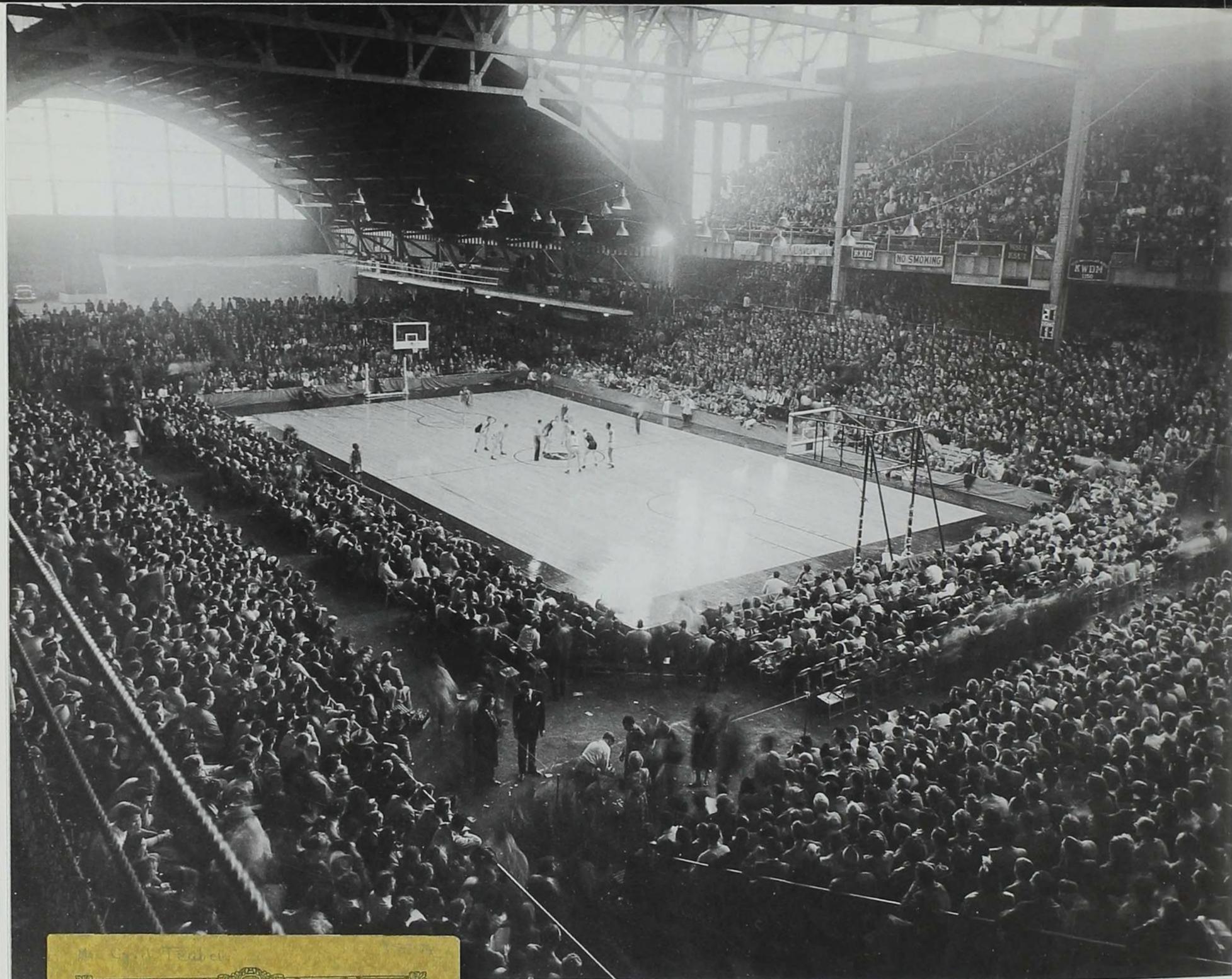
SHS (DES MOINES); MARIE TURNER HARVEY COLLECTION

The team and coach of the consolidated school in Early, Iowa, 1921/22. The boy holding the ball seems particularly stalwart.



SHS (DES MOINES), MARIE TURNER HARVEY COLLECTION

With slight smiles, the girls' basketball team and coach of the considedated school in Early, Iowa, pose for the camera.



BOTH IMAGES: SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Above: All eyes are on the tip-off at the Iowa boys' tournament, about 1949.

Left: A program for the 1920 boys' tournament in Iowa City. The Davenport Blue Devils edged out Springville, 21-20.

Fort Dodge made regular appearances in the finals and on the All-State teams.

However, the team that ruled from the 1920s through the '50s was without question Davenport High School (now Davenport Central). Although the Blue Devils were successful from the start, their heyday is associated with Coach Paul Moon, who arrived in 1928. The very next year, Moon coached his team to a championship win. Davenport became the first program to win titles in four consecutive decades. Sports editor Al Grady remarked, "Any recollection of the state tournament brings Davenport to mind first, because in those days Coach Paul Moon and the Davenport Blue Devils virtually owned the state tournament. . . . When Davenport DIDN'T win, or came close to losing, that was big news!" Moon's zone defense and fast-break offense became the Blue Devils' trademarks. Before retiring in 1954, he had won 7 state championships (a record number of titles

under the same coach) and made 16 tournament appearances, yet another record.

State tournament fans loved to root for the little schools that from time to time defied the odds and progressed all the way through sectional and district meets to get a shot at the state title. Such Cinderella stories made for particularly dramatic and emotional climaxes, and stand out in the reminiscences of fans. According to veteran sports broadcaster Bob Brooks, the three most famous small schools were Roland, Melrose, and Diagonal. Diagonal, with a population in 1940 of 600, was "always a sentimental favorite of the crowds," according to one sports publicist. In 1938, Diagonal beat out Cedar Rapids and Ames, among others, to capture the championship.

One of the most exciting tournaments

WE HAD TO COME

**1942
BASKETBALL
TOURNAMENT**

**PLAY-BY-PLAY
DESCRIPTION
BY
GENE SHUMATE
AND
ANDY WOOLFRIES**



You see, there are thousands of sports fans throughout Iowa who couldn't attend this great basketball event. They're at home by their radios for the play-by-play account of the games brought to them by the Iowa Dairy Industry Commission.

You can depend upon these stations for sports news always!

KRNT—Des Moines
1350 on your dial

WMT—Cedar Rapids-Waterloo
600 on your dial

WNAX—Sioux City-Yankton
570 on your dial

Above: An ad in the 1942 boys' tournament program urges fans to follow the games on the radio. On another page the program notes that while 923 teams "started their quest" for the championship, "scores of young men are . . . now fighting a much bigger battle." Below: In 1950 the Davenport Blue Devils again took home the trophy.

SCHEDULE of GAMES

<p>DES MOINES (East), AA*1339 Tuesday, 1:30 P. M. <i>Winfield 63-41</i></p> <p>WINFIELD, B *96</p>	<p>ALBERT CITY, A *122 Tuesday, 2:45 P. M. <i>Sioux City 40-35</i></p> <p>SIOUX CITY (Central), AA*1,316</p>
<p>Thursday, 1:30 P. M. <i>Winfield 44-42</i></p>	
<p>DUBUQUE (Loras), AA*1,145 Tuesday, 7:30 P. M. <i>Marion 58-39</i></p> <p>MARION, A *310</p>	<p>ANKENY 46-41 Friday, 7:30 P. M. <i>Semi-final Winner</i></p>
<p>Thursday, 2:45 P. M. <i>Ankeny 47-46</i></p>	
<p>MELROSE, B *48 Tuesday, 8:45 P. M. <i>Ankeny 56-45</i></p> <p>ANKENY, A *101</p>	<p>DAVENPORT 67-28 Saturday, 8:45 P. M. <i>Champion 1950</i></p>
<p>Saturday, 7:30 P. M. <i>Davenport 78-15</i></p>	
<p>KEOKUK, AA *538 Wednesday, 1:30 P. M. <i>Shelby 52-48</i></p> <p>SHELBY, B *82</p>	<p>DAVENPORT 71-22 Friday, 8:45 P. M. <i>Semi-final Winner</i></p>
<p>Thursday, 7:30 P. M. <i>Davenport 70-28</i></p>	
<p>DAVENPORT, AA*2,308 Wednesday, 2:45 P. M. <i>Davenport 70-28</i></p> <p>NEWKIRK, B *60</p>	<p>DAVENPORT 71-22 Friday, 8:45 P. M. <i>Semi-final Winner</i></p>
<p>Friday, 8:45 P. M. <i>Davenport 71-22</i></p>	
<p>DINSDALE, B *42 Wednesday, 7:30 P. M. <i>Dinsdale 39-34</i></p> <p>MONTEZUMA, A *162</p>	<p>DINSDALE 49-47 Thursday, 8:45 P. M.</p>
<p>Thursday, 8:45 P. M. <i>Dinsdale 49-47</i></p>	
<p>ATLANTIC, A *355 Wednesday, 8:45 P. M. <i>Atlantic 37-34</i></p> <p>MASON CITY (Holy Family), B*95</p>	<p>ATLANTIC, A *355 Wednesday, 8:45 P. M. <i>Atlantic 37-34</i></p>

70	28
78	15
71	22
67	28
286	
93	

TOURNAMENT OFFICIALS

Referees

EVERETT BARR
Algona

BENNIE BECKERMAN
Des Moines

RALPH HIBBS
Leon

KEN KOCH
Manning

RICHARD LEYES
Burlington

M. M. ROGERS
Sumner

BILL RYAN
Stuart

KENNETH WELLS
Ames

Scorer

WALTER BARNARD
Des Moines

Assistant Scorer

EMMET MOWERY
Ottumwa

Timer

H. G. SCHMICKLEY
Dayton

Assistant Timer

C. T. MAU
Charles City

Public Address

FRED WINTER
Cedar Rapids

Tournament Manager

LYLE T. QUINN
Boone

The Right to Play Pre-supposes the
Obligation to Observe the Rules
and to Abide by the Decisions.

An Athletic Contest Is Only a Game—Not a Matter
of Life or Death for Player, Coach, School, Official,
Fan, Community, State, or Nation.

involved Roland, in 1951. The defending champions, the Davenport Blue Devils, were at the height of their reign and once again charging towards another state title when, for a heart-stopping moment, it looked like the Roland Rockets might stage a remarkable upset. It would have been the first time Davenport had ever lost to a Class B team. Although the Blue Devils rallied and brought home the second of what would be

three consecutive state titles, Roland sophomore Gary Thompson, the lead scorer, went on to make both All-State and All-American three years in a row, a feat that hadn't been repeated since Mike McMichael (Des Moines Roosevelt) was chosen four times in the 1930s.

Such David-and-Goliath tournament games didn't actually happen very often, but they added to the suspense and romance of the boys' state tournament. Division of the classes into different finals in 1967, while giving the smaller schools a fairer shot at a title, removed the possibility for such games, which have become part of Iowa folklore.



BOTH PAGES: SHSI (DES MOINES) DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

Basketball was in its earliest years a rougher game than now and "more nearly resembled an indoor football scrimmage than the fast-flowing game it has become," writes historian Glenn Dickey. Within a few years, "the YMCA simply couldn't reconcile the form the sport was taking—the all-out effort to win, the roughness, the fan abuse—with the overall YMCA program, and so, the YMCA moved to deemphasize the sport it had created, by discouraging the formation of teams and the holding of tournaments." In fact, the origin of professional basketball is attributed to YMCA's withdrawal of support. Teams were then forced to rent auditoriums and other venues, and charge admission to cover costs.

Similar and even stronger concerns would be raised over basketball's propriety for women. Within only a few years of basketball's introduction, female physical education instructors who had first taught it at eastern colleges felt the responsibility for "taming" the game to make it more appropriate for women. Senda Berenson, who had first introduced basketball to Smith College, believed that "rough and vicious play is almost worse in women's

Top: The Marshalltown boys' team dined in style after they took home the trophy in 1961. **Bottom:** Telegrams from home cheer on the Waverly high school team before they take on Sioux City in the 1958 tournament. **Right:** At the 1962 tournament, Marshalltown's Jerry Gazaway shoots a backward lay-up.





Iowa girls and women embraced basketball with the same fervor as did their male counterparts. In spite of their sometimes demure or fetching poses (above), girls were often described as aggressive and passionate players, on courts both indoors and out (see center).

than in men's play." Berenson helped form the National Committee on Women's Basketball, which included other physical education professors at eastern colleges. Another reason for establishing standardized rules for women was the fact that the game was spreading so quickly and to so many places, that there seemed to be no one version. Developed in 1899 and published in 1901, these standardized rules divided the court into three parts, and players did not travel outside their section. This was meant to encourage teamwork and to make the game less strenuous on women, who were believed to be less capable of prolonged exertion than men, due to their physiognomy and smaller hearts. Teams consisted of five to nine players (in Iowa six was the typical number by the 1920s). A team comprised two forwards, two guards, a jumping center, and a side center. To limit roughness, players could not grab or bat the ball away from an opponent. A limited dribble of three bounces before passing or shooting was instituted to ensure that the ball kept moving in this more sedentary version of the men's game.

Although many schools quickly adopted the new rules for girls and women, others chose not to. In Iowa, the men's rules continued to be used in some places for several years. It took time for the new rules to spread to Iowa, but it also appears that basketball for girls was generally less controversial here than in the East, par-





BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY)



ticularly at the high school level. The new rules seem to have been instituted at the college level first, where many instructors were from eastern schools. One Iowan recalled that when she played basketball at Algona High School in the early 1900s, the girls "played all the way up and down the court. There was no three division court as there was when I was in college at Iowa Agricultural College in 1907-1911."

Eventually most high schools switched to the new rules, and the three-division court game was played at the first girls' state tournament, in 1920. This invitational was sponsored by Drake University in Des Moines and held at the Drake Field House. In all, 24 teams participated. The team that became the first ever girls' state champions, Correctionville, had almost missed its chance to compete when the school refused to pay for the trip to Des Moines. But the community of Correctionville was eager to see their undefeated girls' team—which hadn't lost a single game in three years—compete at the state level. Fans and local businesses donated enough money to cover the team's expenses. During the depression of the 1920s and '30s, many Iowa communities held fund drives to support their girls' teams. Such financial backing demonstrated the support for girls' competitive basketball in Iowa, especially in small towns.

Just as Iowa girls' basketball was entering a new phase of statewide competition, the question of whether women should be competing against each other grew more controversial across the nation. "The increasingly vocal debate in the '20s focused on . . . how dangerous the win-at-all-costs spirit was to the proper development of girls, both physically and mentally," writes historian Joanne Lannin. Alarmed critics "did not see hundreds of healthy girls have a wonderful time. Instead, they saw an intense, highly charged atmosphere inhabited by young women who had lost all dignity and refinement." Some feared that the girls were exploited by playing before spectators and by being influenced by male coaches. Others thought the focus on competition between schools excluded girls who were not on the teams "from the benefits of physical activity and team play." Instead only intramural games should be played.

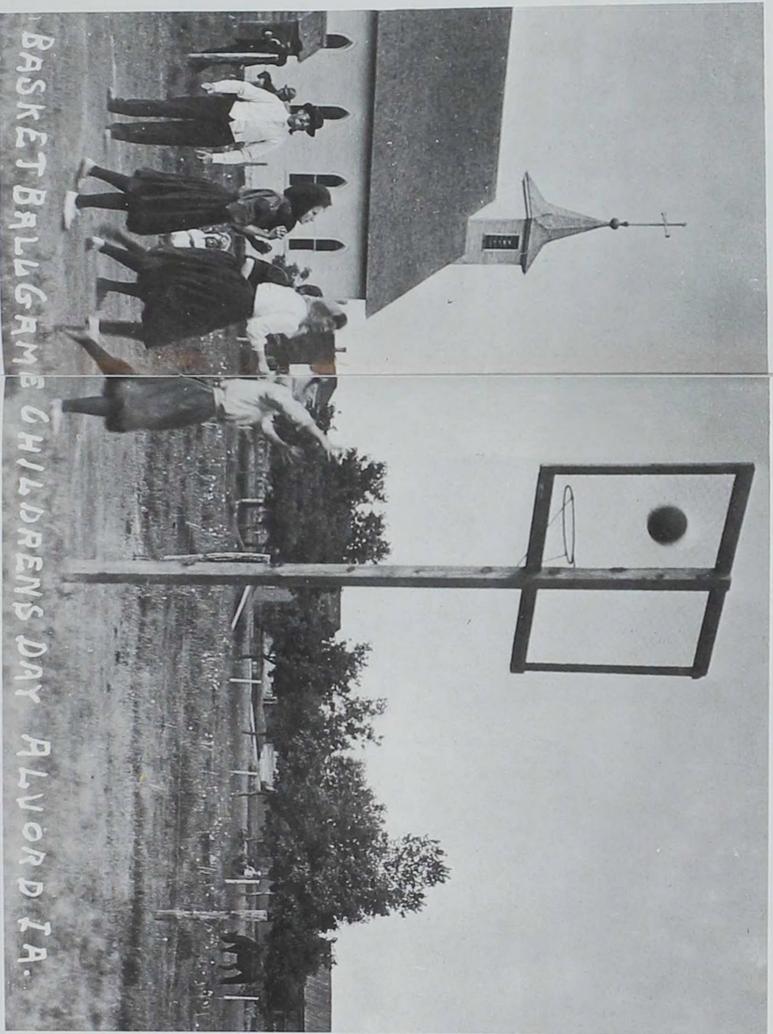
At Drake University, when the women students started a basketball team in 1905, they met with strong disapproval from Mary Carpenter, the dean of women. At first Carpenter allowed women's intramural play (provided they wore modest outfits, with long sleeves and bloomers) but later declared that the sport "was



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Eventually most high schools switched to the new rules, and the three-division court game was played at the first girls' state tournament, in 1920. This invitation was sponsored by Drake University in Des Moines and held at the Drake Field House. In all, 24 teams participated. The team that became the first ever girls' state champions, Correctionville, had almost missed its chance to compete when the school refused to pay for the trip to Des Moines. But the community of Correctionville was eager to see their undefeated girls' team — which hadn't lost a single game in three years — compete at the state level. Fans and local businesses donated enough money to cover the team's expenses. During the depression of the 1920s and '30s, many Iowa communities held fund drives to support their girls' teams. Such financial backing demonstrated the support for girls' competitive basketball in Iowa, especially in small towns.

Just as Iowa girls' basketball was entering a new phase of statewide competition, the question of whether women should be competing against each other grew more controversial across the nation. "The increasingly vocal debate in the '20s focused on . . . how dangerous the win-at-all-costs spirit was to the proper development of girls, both physically and mentally," writes historian Joanne Lannin. Alarmed critics "did not see hundreds of healthy girls have a wonderful time. Instead, they saw an intense, highly charged atmosphere inhabited by young women who had lost all dignity and refinement." Some feared that the girls were exploited by playing before spectators and by being influenced by male coaches. Others thought the focus on competition between schools excluded girls who were not on the teams "from the benefits of physical activity and team play." Instead only intramural games should be played.

At Drake University, when the women students started a basketball team in 1905, they met with strong disapproval from Mary Carpenter, the dean of women. At first Carpenter allowed women's intramural play (provided they wore modest outfits, with long sleeves and bloomers) but later declared that the sport "was

not appropriate for women" and banned it outright.

At the high school level, attitudes about girls competing also began to shift in Iowa's larger towns. By 1914 in Dubuque, for example, the girls were limited to the less competitive games between classes. Sports historian Janice Beran believes the "real reason" behind restricting competition between larger schools was simply because of limited gym space. "In the city schools with their larger enrollment the boys' sport

had top priority, and the girls' basketball teams interfered with their gym practice and game time. So it was natural for the boys' coaches to agree with the leading physical educators around the nation who were saying that basketball competition between schools was too strenuous for girls."

In Iowa's small towns, however, there was apparently little concern, and much support, for competitive girls' basketball. Beran suggests several reasons for this

PHOTO COURTESY OF *OUTSIDE IN: AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY IN IOWA, 1838-2000*



Thelma Howe (back row, second from left) played on Bedford's integrated basketball team in 1923/24. Images and accounts of African American girls in Iowa who played high school basketball are seldom discovered by historians.

perspective in rural Iowa. She believes that girls from a farming culture were accustomed to physical exertion, and that other community members were used to seeing them in such roles and did not consider them physically fragile. Many rural girls came from ethnic backgrounds (such as German, Czech, Danish, and Swedish) that emphasized gymnastics and physical activity for women. For example, Beran points out that Audubon, a 1920s powerhouse, was associated with the Danish component of the community. Girls' basketball also provided an outlet for community pride and a welcome entertainment in the winter.

In 1925 the controversy over competition in Iowa girls' basketball came to a head at the annual meeting of the Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA). The Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Foundation had passed a resolution against competition between schools, as well as any gate receipts from or promotion of women's games. The National Association of Secondary School Principals supported the resolution and urged U.S. high schools to stop organizing tournaments for girls and to end their interscholastic games. Many schools, especially in the East, complied, and in Iowa, at the IHSAA meeting, a 259-member majority of the superintendents, coaches, and teachers voted against sponsoring any more girls' state tournaments. This outraged a minority, mostly from rural schools. John W. Agans, of Mystic, declared, "Gentlemen, if you attempt to do away with girls' basketball in Iowa, you'll be standing in the center of the track when the train runs over you!"

Agans and some 25 school officials gathered in a corner and decided to found a separate program dedicated to supporting organized basketball competition for girls, including the state tournament. The board of this new organization—the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union (IGHSAU)—comprised representatives of each quadrant of Iowa: M. M. McIntire, of Audubon; Claude W. Sankey, of Ida Grove; the outspoken Agans, of Mystic; and A. W. Clevenger, of Waverly. Because all of these men were from small towns where basketball for both boys and girls enjoyed strong support, they could be confident that their schools and communities would back their action. Audubon perhaps had particular reason to be proud of its girls' team. Coached by school superintendent McIntire, the girls had won the state championship for four consecutive years, 1921 through 1924. Beran calls McIntire "the real father" of the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union.

Thanks to McIntire and the other IGHSAU founders, girls' competition between schools continued in Iowa at a time when much of the nation was doing

away with it. In a few other states, including Texas and Oklahoma, there was resistance to the movement to end girls' basketball; they, too, were largely rural states where the sport was an important part of community life and identity. Iowa, however, is the only state to have continuously had an annual state basketball tournament for girls since 1920, and is, to this day, the only state with a secondary school sports association devoted solely to girls' athletics.

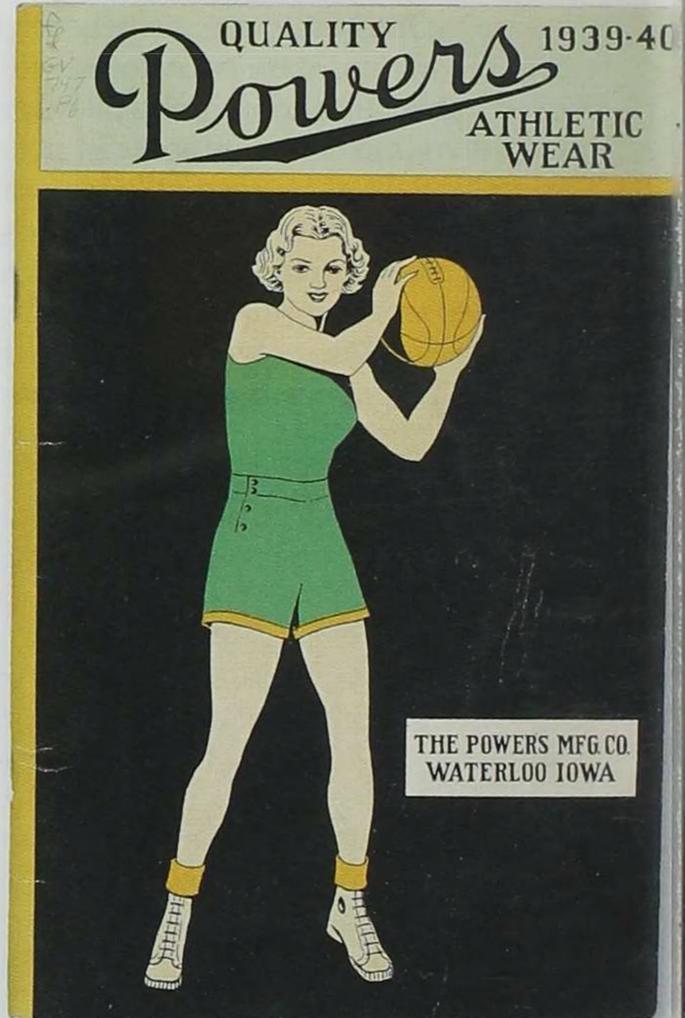
The first state tournament sponsored by IGHSAU was in 1926 at Hampton High School. Of the 159 schools fielding girls' teams that year, 16 district tournament winners competed for the state title. Hampton was victorious in the round-robin final, defeating Audubon, Mystic, and Ida Grove. Over the next few years the state tournament was held in various sections of the state, and was hosted and attended by many of the same small towns that had participated in the earlier invitationals. At each location the size of the venue and limited number of spectators made for a rather modest end-of-season climax. But in 1931, Bert McGrane, the nationally known sports writer for both the *Des Moines Register* and *Tribune*, was brought on board as manager of the event. (He would remain influential in staging the tournament into the 1950s.) McGrane and the IGHSAU board chose a venue with a large seating capacity—the Drake Field House. This was also the first time many of the girls—used to playing in what Beran describes as "cracker box size gyms"—played on a boys' regulation-size court. The next year, the dimensions were cut back down.

Unfortunately for the promoters of the 1931 tournament, the players were not the only ones who might have been overwhelmed by the size of the gymnasium. The 2,500 spectators at Thursday's competition and the 3,000 at the finals "were almost lost in the grandstand seats," wrote one IGHSAU official. Basketball was simply not yet a huge spectator sport. Beran writes that "although the players thought playing basketball was vigorous and exciting, it was not a crowd pleaser." Particularly before the 1920s, as an IGHSAU official remembered, a basket "was cause for a civic celebration." For example, the highest scoring game of the girls' first state tournament was 24-8; the lowest was 3-2. More typical scores were 15-0 and 12-11. This was not, as Beran explains, because of an emphasis on waging a strong defense, but because play then was "a slow, almost stately game with careful passing and deliberate shot selection from an almost statuelike pose." Movement of the players was limited by the court division;

Long hair, long black hose, full length sleeves, and full bloomers of woolen material for the basketball girls in 1918. Uniforms were a sorry sight at the end of a game; ribbons missing, hair streaming, hose torn, bloomer legs hanging to the ankles because of ripped elastic. The players from left to right are: Esther Wedel, Olga Gilbertson, Marie Falb, Joyce Grath, Georgia Mae Schori, Florence Lehman, Hulda Meyer



BOTH PHOTOS THIS PAGE: SHSI (IOWA CITY)



until 1934 the court was still divided into three parts. The running center and jumping centers were restricted to the center third. A center jump to determine ball possession followed every basket, further slowing the pace of the game. As girls gained shooting and handling skills, the game became more fluid.

Then, in 1934, an important change in the rules transformed the pace of play. At a coaching clinic held by the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) in Des Moines, coach R. C. Bechtel persuaded the superintendents present to officially adopt the AAU's game of two-court division basketball. More than 200 officials voted to adopt the change by a wide margin, and from then until 1994, the six-player, two-court game was the official girls' game in Iowa. (Following Iowa's example, the two-court game was adopted nationally as the official girls' game in 1938.) Beran explains that the 1934 change eliminated "the positions of running center and jumping centers." Now there were three guards and three forwards, with one playing center. Eliminating the center jump after every basket speeded up the game. Players had greater room to maneuver and could shoot on the run. The result was a more exciting game for both players and fans.

The game itself was evolving. The jump shot, introduced to boys' basketball in 1937, was soon taken up by Iowa girls. The new seamless ball introduced in the mid-1930s made ball handling easier, and its inflatable air pouch meant that it did not lose its shape or bounce irregularly. The pivot shot, the lay-up, and the bounce pass became widespread.

Girls' uniforms had evolved, too. The earliest "costumes" — voluminous bloomers (sometimes with long skirts over them), heavy stockings, and high-collared blouses — covered nearly every inch of flesh. Throughout the 1920s the outfits became gradually less restrictive, and by the late 1930s, the more modern uniforms were appropriate to the more active game. Indeed, they consisted of so much less fabric, Beran writes, that they "would only have served as foundation garments for the players of the 1890s-1920s."

Throughout the 1930s and '40s basketball's popularity grew among players and fans. According to Beran, the number of schools with programs continued to increase. By 1950, "700 of the state's 834 schools offered basketball." Girls' basketball continued to be a

BOTH PHOTOS THIS PAGE: SHSI (DES MOINES)



Opposite page: A photo caption from an Elgin, Iowa, scrapbook bemoans the girls' uniforms, a "sorry sight" by the end of a game. The team's record in 1918 was 9-1.

Center: As this 1939 catalog cover illustrates, girls' uniforms eventually lost their multiple layers and needless bulk. Powers Manufacturing in Waterloo also made uniforms for several other sports.

Left: Cedar Valley's Ruth Wallestad and Betty Carlson demonstrate weight-lifting exercises that increased their stamina and jumping power (March 1957).

phenomenon in small towns, which enjoyed the recognition they received through their winning teams. Tournament participation was regarded as an opportunity for the girls to travel and meet new people. Those who played basketball were often following in the footsteps of older sisters and mothers who had also played, and so felt part of a tradition, another reason behind the strong community involvement. Beran notes that "as one out-of-state journalist wrote, it is only in Iowa that middle-aged men would sit by the fireplace reminiscing about the basketball play of their wives—or that a high school boy would have been said to have inherited his mother's basketball skills."

Powerhouse teams were a great source of community pride, and, Beran writes, "the smaller the community and school, the greater the pride." Wellsburg made it to the state tournament five times—1920, 1922, 1928, 1930, and 1932—before capturing the title in 1934. The team did not win another championship until their famous victory in 1949, resulting in a resounding homecoming. Before the girls' bus even reached their hometown, thousands of excited citizens in towns along the way turned out to greet the team and ask for speeches, and then joined the caravan. By the time the bus reached Wellsburg, a line of cars six



Suited up and ready to go, two players from the Iowa State School for the Deaf, in Council Bluffs, use sign language to perfect their game, January 1942.





SHSI (DES MOINES) DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

miles long stretched behind it, reaching all the way to Grundy Center. A newspaper account described what happened next: "At Wellsburg, things broke loose again. The entire town of 700 people was waiting on Main Street, and each girl blushing spoke her piece via loud speaker. They aren't over it yet, up Wellsburg way. Probably never will be. Best of it is that everyone else is just as happy about the whole thing as is the town of Wellsburg. The team with the toughest row to hoe, the team that beat most of the state's best clubs sometime during the year, the team that everyone agrees is the best in Iowa, came from a little school with 83 students, 36 of them girls."

Other perennial girls' teams at the state tourney included Hampton, Centerville, Waterville, Mallard, and tiny Wiota, population 275. Seymour went to the state tournament every year in the 1940s, and made it to the finals each of those years but two. In 1947, the year they won it all, fans sent the players flowers and congratulatory telegrams, and accompanied the team home in a 400-car caravan. Seymour holds the record for most trips to the state tournament of any team through 1960, 16 in all (Wellsburg, with 10, was the runner up). One

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Left: 1958 boys' tournament—Roland beats Saint Mary's of Iowa City 72-60, and the fans explode. Above: As the high school tournaments burgeoned, so did the media coverage.



SHS (DES MONES) DES MONES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

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SHS (IOWA CITY)

Left: 1958 boys' tournament—Roland beats Saint Mary's of Iowa City 72-60, and the fans explode. Above: As the high school tournaments burgeoned, so did the media coverage.



factor in Seymour's success was the Cole "family dynasty." In the years between 1938 and 1951 when the seven Cole sisters played for the school, Seymour's win-loss record was an outstanding 341-41-2. (The most talented sister, Lois, went on to play for the Davenport-based AAU team, the Stenos, which won the national title in 1942/43.)

As Joanne Lannin has pointed out, however, while the state title was the ultimate prize for every basketball-playing girl in Iowa, the trip to the tournament in Des Moines was an event in itself. She described it as the "thrill of a lifetime" for the girls from Hansell, the 1940 state champions, who stayed at a fancy hotel downtown, ate breakfast with the governor, engaged in the tournament-time tradition of shopping for their prom dresses, and were featured in *Life* magazine. It wasn't uncommon for most of the population of a small community to travel to the tournament to give hometown support to their girls. Even the occasional March snowstorm could not keep the crowds away.

Throughout the 1940s the girls' tournament garnered increased attention from the media and spectators. Most of the newspapers in the Iowa Daily Press Association and several radio stations were covering the tournament and the games leading up to it. The press association began selecting All-State teams, a practice pioneered by Jack

Left: Driving in for a shot, Royal's Bonnie Hagedorn fouls Grafton's Clarise Kruger, March 1955.

BOTH PAGES: SHSI (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



Tournament time sometimes means the pursuit of both trophies and prom dresses. Below: When the Goldfield girls won the 1955 state championship, 2,400 supporters welcomed them home.



North in 1939. Two years before, he had started a syndicated column on girls' basketball, "With the Queens of the Court," carried by 16 Iowa newspapers. Tournament organization improved when R. H. Chisholm became IGHSAU's first full-time executive secretary in 1947. According to Chisholm, attendance "jumped from around 3,000 for all games in 1926 to 40,000 in 1949." In 1951 demand for tickets exceeded the supply, and that tournament was Iowa's first high school athletic event to be telecast live. Media coverage soon was expanding into out-of-state newspapers and *Sports Illustrated*.

SHSI (DES MOINES): DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



March 1958: Jan Hansen of Twin Rivers shows what it feels like when the rival (State Center) overcomes a five-point deficit in the final minute.

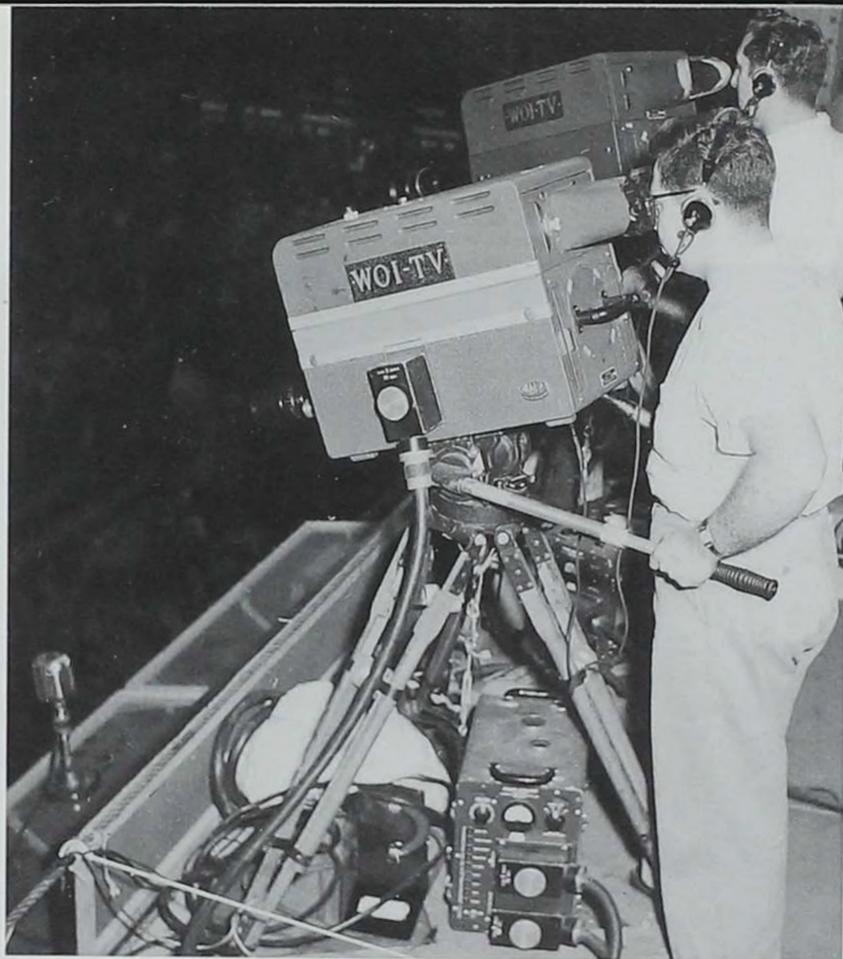
Fortunately, Des Moines was building a huge auditorium and convention center, and in 1955 the girls' tournament, along with the boys', moved into the still-unfinished Veterans Memorial Auditorium. More than 15,000 fans watched the final game, nearly 2,000 more than the combined populations of all 16 towns participating that year.

The first championship game to be televised in color was the unforgettable 1968 "shoot-out" between Denise Long of Union-Whitten and Jeanette Olson of Everly. The stars of the top-seeded Everly and second-seeded Union-Whitten had already set records at that

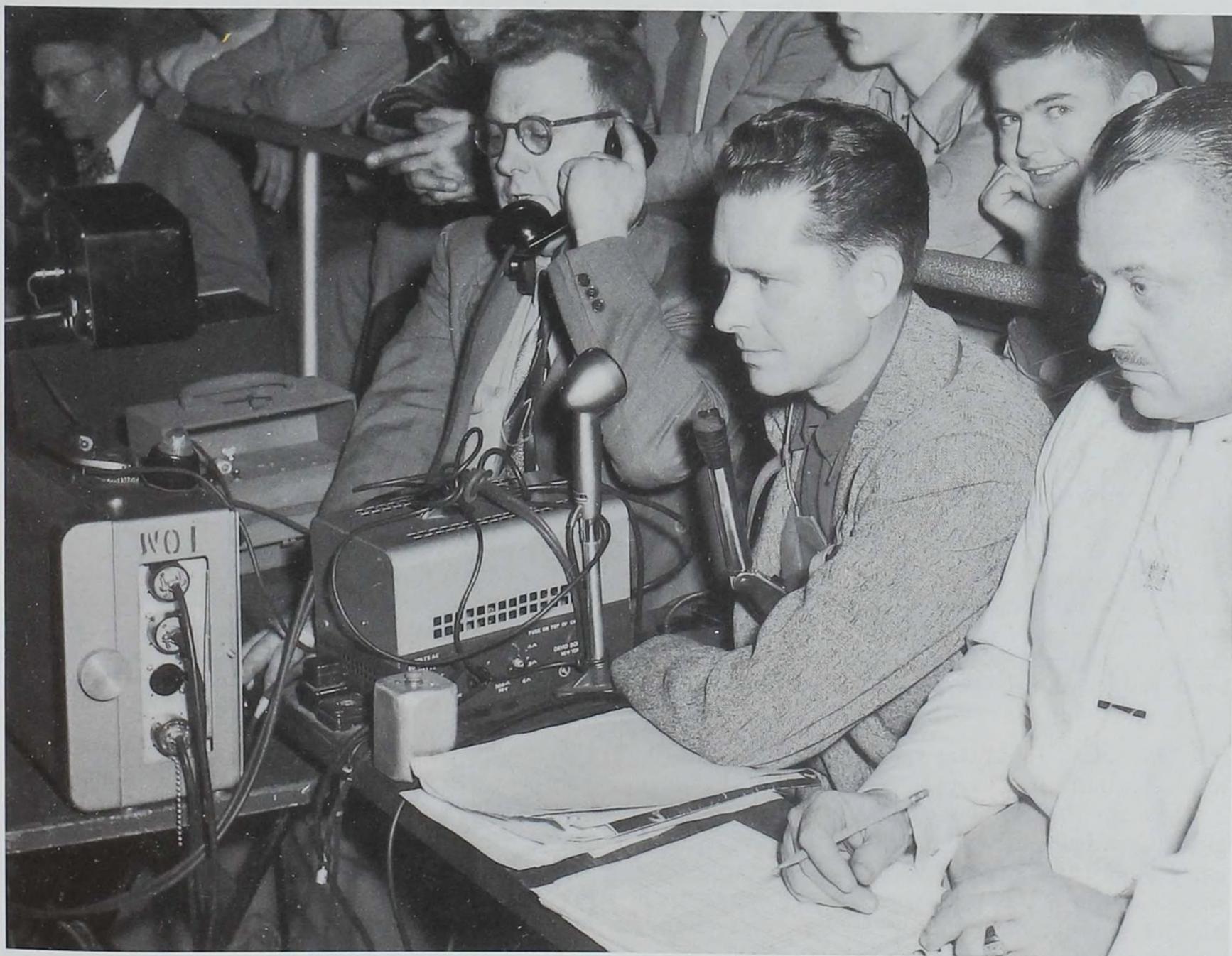
year's tournament: first Olson, with 74 points in a game, topped a day later by Long with 93. The meeting of the players in the final game, eagerly anticipated by both the crowds and the media, resulted in one of the most exciting moments ever in Iowa sports. Although Olson outscored Long 76-64, Union-Whitten upset Everly 113-107 in what *Sports Illustrated* called "a delirious overtime." "If the madcap struggle between the state's two top ranked teams wasn't the best title game in history," declared the *Des Moines Register* the next day, "it will do until someone figures out a better one."

The IGHSAU's new executive secretary, E. Wayne Cooley, whose arrival coincided with the move to Vets Auditorium, made the most of the new venue and television coverage by turning the sporting event into a circus-like spectacle worthy of P. T. Barnum, with whom he has been compared. *Sports Illustrated* once described the week-long extravaganza as "a state fair and world series rolled into one." Cooley, who explained in 1979 that "Americans are still spectators, they look for entertainment," is credited with adding much of the fanfare now associated with the event, such as the half-time performances by bands, drill groups, and dancers, and, on the final night, the elaborately staged Parade of Champions.

School consolidation in the 1950s and '60s and enactment of Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972 brought about major changes in girls' basketball in Iowa. In fact, one of the reasons small communities often fought school consolidation was because of pride in their high school basketball teams. In 1940, 70 percent of teams at the tournament came from schools with less than 100 students; by 1977 many of those small-town teams had been absorbed into larger, consolidated schools. Title IX prohibited sex discrimination in education programs that received federal funds. The objections against girls playing competitive sports were dying away, and with the passage of Title IX, larger schools that had banned girls' competitive teams now fielded such teams and joined the IGHSAU. The first large school to send a girls' team to the tournament, Cedar Rapids Kennedy, in 1972, had an enrollment that exceeded the total en-



THREE PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Camera men and announcers for WOI-TV capture and comment on tense moments at the 1953 state tournament.



Emerson High had the only girls' team with male cheerleaders in the 1958 tournament. Here cheering for the girls are Trent Cole, Bob Winders, Ray Seipold, and Gary Shelley. Each also played on the boys' team. Seated on the sideline, a nurse maintains her professional composure. Opposite: Iowa's smaller towns and consolidated schools reigned at the 1960 tournament.

rollments of all 16 schools that had competed in the tournament in 1957.

Title IX brought about another major change in girls' basketball—the end of the two-court, six-player game. Some believed that Iowa schools, by keeping the six-player game, were depriving girls of being competitive for college scholarships. In 1972, five-player, full-court basketball became the official women's game nationwide, and Iowa was one of a handful of states

still playing by the old rules. In 1984 a lawsuit was brought against the IGHS AU by three girls from larger schools that were not a part of the tradition of girls' basketball. Title IX provided the legal basis for the suit, on the grounds that having a separate version of basketball for girls was not equal treatment. The IGHS AU managed to avoid the lawsuit by deciding that each school could decide which version of the game to play. While most larger schools quickly decided on five-on-

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IOWA GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC UNION

35th Annual

GIRLS' STATE BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

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(DOUDS)

Wales-Lincoln
(EMERSON)

South Page
(COLLEGE SPRINGS)

Bondurant-Farrar

Seymour

Senral
(FENTON)

Pekin
(OLLIE)

Corwith-Wesley

Valley
(ELGIN)

Lost Nation

Roland

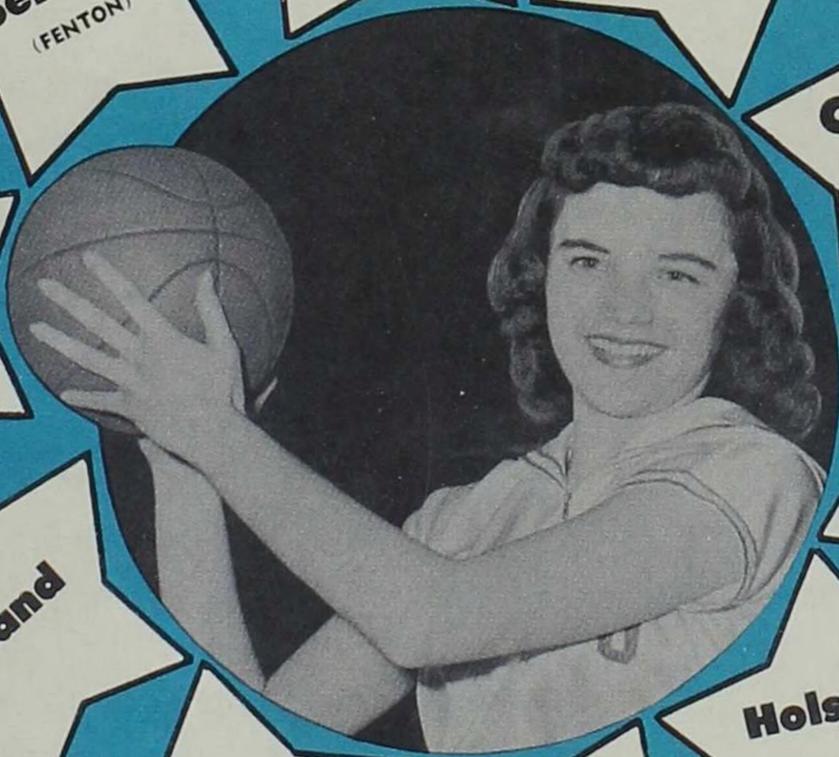
Holstein

Ida Grove

Gladbrook

Eldora

Grand
(BOXHOLM)



MARCH 8-9-10-11-12, 1960

official program

25¢

VETERANS AUDITORIUM DES MOINES, IOWA





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five, the majority of schools did not switch. However, more schools were adopting five-player ball every year, and IGHSAU's executive secretary E. Wayne Cooley, seeing the eventual outcome, made a decision that shocked many, including the board of the IGHSAU. "For all that six-player basketball has done for us, we cannot let it die a second sister," he told the board in 1993. That year IGHSAU announced the official end of six-on-six basketball in Iowa following the 1994 tournament.

Reactions were strong on both sides of the issue. Some players were excited about the prospect of no longer being limited to playing only defense or offense. Others felt that six-on-six was what had made girls' basketball special in Iowa and were saddened at the loss of a 60-year tradition. "I love six-player basketball," a 1990 All-State player explained. "You had to use your wits. You had to do what you could with the two dribbles and out-think people. It was really a thinking game. Five-on-five, it's like who can out-strengthen who." Many were concerned about the effect the switch would have on girls' basketball, both for the experience of the players and the enjoyment of the fans. Some coaches decided to quit rather than make the switch.

Since the change in 1993, there has been a marked decline in both the number of girls playing basketball in Iowa and the number of fans turning out to watch them. By 2001, the number of girls playing on high school teams had dropped below 11,000,

The exuberance of these Twin River fans will turn to despair as the last minute ticks away and the State Center girls win by one point (March 1958). The enormous support of fans has always characterized Iowa's high school tournaments.



PHOTO BY (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

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down from 16,000 in 1993, the last year of six-on-six. Because players no longer specialize, they need to be more skilled in all aspects of the game, and many believe this has limited the number of girls who are able to participate. In addition, the more physical game requires increased stamina and thus harder training and a greater time commitment. Players in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, for example, were expected to participate in a wide range of school activities. In earlier decades, teens on farms were also expected to help with farm chores. Today's school athletes are required to devote long hours to their sport.

It seems that former *Des Moines Register* columnist Donald Kaul was right when he commented in 2003 on the inevitability of the change, for better or worse. "It was essentially a small-town phenomenon," Kaul wrote. "When small-town Iowa began to die, so did six-girl basketball." ❖

March 1955: Victory has been declared, and the referee's job is over—if only he can get off the court before he's trampled. A. W. Vanderwil squeezes through the rejoicing Royal team, which had just beaten Graton 66–62.

NOTE ON SOURCES

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For the complete survey, listing all sources, contact the SHSI's historic preservation staff.



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For the complete survey, listing all sources, contact the SHSI's historic preservation staff.





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