

Genesis of High School Basketball

Basketball received its initial impetus wherever a Y.M.C.A. was located in Iowa. Within a fortnight after the Iowa City "Y" beat the Cedar Rapids "Y," the Iowa City Academy played the Iowa City Commercial College (Willis & Williams), winning the game by a score of 7 to 2. During this same period basketball was being introduced into other communities by the local Y.M.C.A. As academy, high school, and college students learned the sport they urged that it be placed on their school athletic program, along with baseball, football, and track.

It was easier for small communities to adopt basketball because it required fewer students to make up a team. It also cost less for the physical set-up and equipment. Even the cost of transporting a team on an out-of-town trip was less than for baseball, track, and football.

Since basketball started as a Y.M.C.A. game it is natural that most high school teams in larger cities began as "Y" teams, played in the "Y," or sometimes were made up of boys playing on both the "Y" and high school teams. Generally speaking, basketball started in the larger towns soon after Naismith invented the game in 1891. Fort

Dodge appears to have adopted basketball in 1897, West Waterloo in 1898, and Ottumwa before 1900. Such towns as Boone, Sioux City, and Cedar Rapids organized their first basketball teams in 1902 and played their first out-of-town opponents the same year.

Davenport, Fort Dodge, Mount Pleasant, Oskaloosa, Ottumwa, Sioux City, and Council Bluffs all played their first games in the local Y.M.C.A. Thus, the "Y" was opened at Oskaloosa in 1903; the very next year Oskaloosa organized its first basketball team. The first out-of-town high school was played in 1905. Oskaloosa did not open its own gym until 1917.

West Waterloo had a small gymnasium handling crowds of less than two hundred but played their big games in the "Y." Ames and Cedar Falls Teachers had high school gyms in 1912, Boone in 1913, and Sioux City, Spirit Lake, Cedar Falls, New Hampton, and Diagonal in 1914. Some of these gymnasiums, such as the ones at Boone, Spirit Lake, and Sioux City, were outstanding.

In addition to forming class teams, most early high school schedules included a game with the alumni, the "Y" team, some nearby academy or small college team, and frequently the freshman squad of the larger colleges. A sampling of two Davenport and Ottumwa seasons illustrates the above and also shows how quickly basketball entrenched itself in Iowa.

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1907-1908			1908-1909		
Davenport	58	Tipton 8	Ottumwa	43	Burlington Y 17
Davenport	31	West Liberty 44	Ottumwa	66	Keokuk 21
Davenport	23	Alumni 26	Ottumwa	59	Chariton 19
Davenport	24	Iowa City 14	Ottumwa	46	Cedar Rapids 16
Davenport	33	Moline 31	Ottumwa	48	Keokuk 13
Davenport	30	Augustana 24	Ottumwa	89	Chariton 8
Davenport	15	Peoria 57	Ottumwa	58	Muscatine 31
Davenport	34	Clinton 20	Ottumwa	53	Cedar Rapids 50
Davenport	19	Wilton High 36	Ottumwa	36	Grinnell Fr. 16
Davenport	25	Iowa City 13	Ottumwa	43	S.U.I. Fr. 20
Davenport	22	Moline 14	Ottumwa	39	Sioux City 32
Davenport	24	Augustana 12	Ottumwa	30	Muscatine 25
Davenport	24	Galesburg 20	—		
Davenport	32	Clinton 19	Ottumwa	610	Opponents 268
Davenport	44	West Liberty 12			
Davenport	21	St. Albans 23			
Davenport	22	Galesburg 41			
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Davenport	481	Opponents 414			

Almost one-half of the Iowa high schools had probably introduced basketball before the first state tournament was held in Iowa City in 1912. During the following decade most of the remaining Iowa schools had adopted the sport. Almost all had been confronted with the problem of building a proper gym, employing a sound coach, and insuring good financial and school support.

The first issue of the *Iowa City Red and White*, printed in December, 1905, presents the typical situation:

Basket Ball in the High School is a new sport, and as a result the teams of the High School have not been of the first class, but this year's team it is hoped, will at least rank with the leaders of the state. At the game played in the High School gymnasium on December 15, there were

only about thirty in attendance. Boys and girls, if you wish to see athletics in the High School flourish, don't be "tight." The admission was only ten cents, the proceeds to go for a new ball and other things needful to the team.

It is not the proper spirit for only fifteen or twenty people to take interest in a school of over three hundred. It is hoped that at the games played in the future, the attendance will be gradually increased. The members of the Athletic Association might as well attend our games to help pay expenses, as to be assessed in order that they may be paid out of the treasury.

Although only two of the previous year's five remained on the team in 1906, the outlook was encouraging. In the opening practice game the first team defeated the second — 57-26. The superiority of girls in a cheering section was revealed in the *Red and White* for December, 1906.

One of the main features of the game was the rooting of the girls. They fairly made the "gym" shake as they gave yell after yell, cheering for everybody from the referee and the first team down to the poor freshies and completely drowning out the boy's section.

Despite the fact that Iowa City lost most of its games, the season of 1906-1907 was a success financially. The team lost two games to West Liberty by scores of 93-25 and 38-16, the latter on the Iowa City floor. Cedar Rapids crushed Iowa City 118-22 in a game in which the optimistic *Red and White* declared that Marshall "played a star game" for Iowa City.

The same situation prevailed at Keokuk. The *Comment*, issued at Commencement, 1905, reveals

that Keokuk high school athletics were at a low tide in the Gate City of Iowa. Keokuk did have a track team for the first time in "some years" but was unable to arrange baseball games with outside clubs because of a "large debt" hanging over the team from the previous year. The football season was the most disastrous in some time; Keokuk had no coach and, with its light, inexperienced boys, lost its games with Quincy, Biggsville, and Ottumwa, but managed to tie the Keokuk Medical College. Basketball had a hard time getting started in many Iowa towns under such circumstances.

Actually, the state athletic program was under close scrutiny by Iowa educators. Football was not permitted by members of the Iowa High School Athletic Association. This organization was backed up by local boards of education. Thus, the Iowa City board approved the following stringent restrictions on April 12, 1905:

1. Football was forbidden.
2. Pupils were prohibited from going away as representatives of the school under its responsibility. That is, all school games were to be played at home.
3. The soliciting of funds for the benefit of athletics was forbidden.
4. All was subject to the regulations of the State Athletic Association rules.

At the last meeting of the Board, November 21, 1906, the *Red and White* was glad to record that the above measures were modified as follows:

1. Base ball, basket ball and track teams are allowed to go away from home.
2. The rules and regulations of the State Athletic Association must continue to be strictly upheld.
3. Students participating in any form of athletics must have written permission from the parent.
4. Teams leaving town must be accompanied by, and under the direction of, a member of the faculty.
5. No pupil can participate in inter-scholastic contests whose school work, behavior, or deportment, is not satisfactory.
6. The prohibition of foot ball and of the soliciting of funds remains the same.

The need for an official arbiter to determine statewide rules was recognized from the start and has done much to maintain a well-balanced sports program in Iowa.

The story of the beginnings of basketball in high schools a half century ago is typical of the experience of scores of other schools. Since Davenport and Ottumwa have won so many championships their early experiences are especially interesting.

Basketball at Davenport has always been popular. This is attested by the first volume of *The Griffin*, published in June, 1907. During the season of 1906-1907 Davenport lost to the Alumni 29-31, to the Rock Island Maroons 28-32, and to the Morrison (Illinois) Independents 13-27. Davenport did beat West Liberty 49-30 and 48-26 that year, while their "sensational" 52-32 victory over Moline "made up" for a stinging football defeat.

The basketball program was developing fast at Davenport by 1907, and much of its success was attributed to the fact that inter-class games afforded splendid training for future varsity players.

Davenport won 11 and lost 6 during the season of 1907-1908. The team won all its home games except those with the Alumni and Peoria. It was felt that they could have won all the out-of-town games they lost had they been played on their own floor, except Peoria, the Illinois champions that year who had beaten Davenport handily 57-15. Attendance had increased, a good spirit prevailed, and the future prospects were bright, with receipts running ahead of expenses.

The following season (1908-1909) was equally successful. The year book recorded that basketball had always been a paying proposition because of the large attendance. Davenport lost to Grinnell at Davenport 13-14 and Grinnell shortly began laying claim to the state championship. A return game was played at Grinnell which Davenport won 14-9.

The season of 1909-1910 sounds like a page from the exploits of one of Coach Paul Moon's fabulous teams. Davenport won 17 of 19 games, running up 732 points to their opponents' 332. They scored double victories over such teams as Grinnell (22-15 and 53-4), Moline (34-20 and 29-8), Clinton (30-16 and 50-14), and Augustana College (28-21 and 38-33). The only losses

were to Cedar Rapids 27-29 and to Ottumwa 26-54. The overwhelming defeat at Ottumwa was attributed to the nature of the floor, but it was agreed that, except for Ottumwa, the Davenport team was the best in Iowa.

As early as 1910 the Davenport annual declared basketball the "most favored branch" of high school athletics. Undue partisanship was decried, the editor urging that the true sportsman would always want the better team to win. It was hoped that "all who hold basketball in esteem will continue to cultivate the attitude of fair play." During the 1910 season \$50 was paid for bleachers and \$35 for suits, but because of increased attendance the basketball fund was \$100 larger than it had been at the beginning of the season.

Ottumwa, which won the tournaments in 1912, 1915, 1928, 1942, and 1949, stands second only to Davenport in the number of state championships. The history of Ottumwa's basketball teams closely parallels that of Davenport. Actually it appears as though Ottumwa may have introduced basketball before 1900, possibly as early as 1897 or 1898.

In February, 1902, *The Argus* recorded a 43-16 victory over Bloomfield at Ottumwa and a closer game at Bloomfield, 19-11. Two games were scheduled with Fairfield in March, and *The Argus* expressed hope that more students would attend

the game than did the Bloomfield contest. The March issue of *The Argus* reveals the outcome:

The Basket Ball team played the Fairfield High School team at Fairfield on Wednesday, March 12, defeating them by a score of 33 to 11. Owing to the members of the Fairfield team being behind in their studies a return game could not be secured at Ottumwa. But a game on the same date, March 20, was played with the Parsons College team. The game was well attended and a few dollars above expenses were made. Score, Parsons College, 19; OHS 24.

Two years later, in 1904, *The Argus* recorded a situation which was by no means unique.

Basket ball has more than ever captured the enthusiasm of the Ottumwa people. It is a time-worn saying among athletic circles that the public will support a winning team. This has been the case with the basketball teams, both Y.M.C.A. and High School, for neither team was beaten in the state during the season. At first the High School was unable to secure a place in which to play its home games. Although the members of the team were allowed to practice in the Y.M.C.A. gymnasium, it is a rule of that institution that no games can be played on that floor except by a team representing the Association. For this reason O.H.S. played but one game, defeating Central College of Pella, Iowa, by the score of 23 to 17.

The Y.M.C.A. team, however, which played many games and won for itself both the regular and Y.M.C.A. state championship is composed, with the exception of two players, of High School students. Consequently when O.H.S. secured permission to play in the Y.M.C.A., Manager Buckner immediately sent challenges to the high schools of Cedar Rapids and Davenport, both of whom

had claimed the championship. These were refused by both teams in spite of our offers to pay all expenses of the trip both to and from Ottumwa. Considering these things, our school has the champion basketball team of Iowa.

A distinguishing feature about these early high school basketball teams was their willingness to claim the state championship on the slightest pretext. Ottumwa, Davenport, Sioux City, Grinnell, Cedar Rapids, and many more were annually boasting of their fine teams. Some sort of state tournament was inevitable to take care of this situation.

Marvin T. Nodland of Sioux City Central writes that the Little Maroons began their inter-class play and out-of-town play in January, 1903. One of the students served as coach, captain, manager, and player. Many of their early games were with local Y.M.C.A. league teams. Sioux City had one of the finest teams in the northwest. In 1906 they were good enough to play Morningside College. In 1911 the Sioux City Chamber of Commerce sent the team to Evanston, Illinois, to play in the Central States Tournament. Sioux City beat Grundy Center in the first game and Hyde Park, Illinois, in the second game, but lost to Evanston, Illinois, in the third game. The following year Sioux City was invited to the first State Tournament in Iowa City. Sioux City beat Grundy Center (its foe at Evanston) in the 1912 tournament but lost to Ottumwa in the finals.

Measured in terms of modern training, equipment, and facilities, Iowa's first basketball teams were ill prepared. Superintendent R. L. Gowen of Sidney writes that when the Cowboys began playing there was no coach, the boys bought their own suits, practiced outdoors, and scheduled catch-as-catch-can games.

Coach John Webb of Spirit Lake recalls that girls played basketball at Spirit Lake before the boys. The girls actually taught the Spirit Lake boys how to play, a situation which no doubt prevailed in many Iowa communities. Webb, himself a player at the time, recalls that on the occasion of their first game with Hartley, the Spirit Lake boys (accompanied by the girls who were also scheduled to play) took the train to Spencer, where they had to wait all day for the train to Hartley. The Spirit Lake boys and girls spent the time roller skating in Spencer.

When they arrived at their destination without basketball suits the Hartley team was shocked. They refused to play such a nondescript team. The situation was finally resolved when Hartley loaned the Spirit Lake boys their second team's uniforms. But Bert Noll, one of the Spirit Lake players, refused this kind offer, shuddering at the thought of exposing his bare limbs to the public. Noll insisted on playing in long trousers.

The difficulty of securing train connections was doubtless a deterring factor in the adoption of bas-

ketball. In its first season (1916-1917) the Cherokee basketball team, according to Boyd Sinkey, one of the players, went by train to Marcus, a dozen miles away, got caught in a blizzard, and spent the next four days in Marcus.

H. Clay Harshbarger, another member of this Cherokee team, recalls that when a game was scheduled with Correctionville, they found the train did not run on Sunday and would not return them to Cherokee until Monday. So five players went ahead by train while the coach and two players (Harshbarger to show the way) followed in the coach's car to bring the boys back. Unfortunately a blizzard swept across their path, and Harshbarger, the coach, and the other player were marooned at Quimby.

Since the inauguration of boys' basketball numerous lopsided scores have been recorded, many of them prior to 1930, although one still reads about them in this era of the fast break. A survey of some thirty schools that were good enough to go to the State Tournament at one time or another over the years reveals the following one-sided scores:

Cedar Rapids	108	Tipton	0	Ellston	75	Kellerton	6
Sidney	88	Elliott	0	Ames	60	Ogden	6
Luther College	80	New Hampton	0	Council Bluffs	64	Logan	8
Dunkerton	68	Fairbank	0	E. Waterloo	64	Vinton	9
Sioux City Cent.	85	Sergeant Bluff	1	W. Waterloo	64	Manchester	12
Boone	50	Adel	2	Waverly	70	Decorah	10

Many other one-sided victories were often remembered. Diagonal annihilated Gravity 110-0 in 1916 and crushed Conway 117-21 in 1950. Two years later, in 1952, Truro administered an 85-31 defeat on Diagonal. Red Oak crushed Malvern 57-7, Newton trounced Prairie City 80-17, and New Hampton humbled Fredericksburg 67-18. Cedar Falls high school gleefully remembered when they defeated East Waterloo by a score of 43-2 in 1919 but ruefully recalled that Spencer beat them 49-21 in 1920. Davenport's most lopsided victory was an 87-24 triumph over East Waterloo in 1948. The Blue Devils considered their most crushing defeat a 29-13 setback by Moline in 1928. Ames picked their 49-22 defeat by Ankeny in the State Tournament in 1948 as their most humiliating setback. West Waterloo thought their 18-4 man-handling by East Waterloo in 1934 their bitterest pill. Newton could not forget a 66-30 defeat by Waverly, while Boone listed its 46-9 defeat by Fort Dodge as most catastrophic. Waverly considered its 70-10 defeat by Decorah as the most unpalatable basketball experience. Needless to say, it was easier and pleasanter for Iowa high schools to list their most lopsided victories than it was to recall their most crushing defeats.

In addition to such scores, other unusual experiences were recorded. Harry R. McPhail recalls that in 1934 Muscatine defeated Ames by a score

of 3-2. The only points came on a field goal by Bob Craig of Ames and a field goal and a free throw by Muscatine. Illustrative of how teams can go from cold to hot, and hot to cold, is a 1944 game when Rock Island led Davenport 2-0 at the half, only to lose when the final score showed Davenport winning 23-12. A complete reversal of form is shown in a game between Davenport and Ottumwa in 1931. In the first half Davenport led 13-2 and looked like an easy winner. In the second half Ottumwa scored 13 points and Davenport only 1, giving Ottumwa the victory, 15-14. A similar score is remembered by B. C. Berg of Newton. During the season of 1929-1930 Newton scored 6 in the first half while Oskaloosa went scoreless. In the second half Newton was blanked while Oskaloosa scored 8, thus winning the game 8-6. In 1947, when Ottumwa was inundated by the rampaging Des Moines River, Ottumwa played Davenport in a flood benefit game that raised \$1,015 for Ottumwa flood relief.

As the basketball craze swept over Iowa the demand for gymnasiums was sounded in the press, in the service clubs, at PTA meetings, and around corner drugstores. Typical of the feeling in most communities is this editorial by Francis Hansen, of the class of 1917, entitled "Our School in the Future," which appeared in the first volume of *The Purple and Gold* published by "The Washingtonian Literary Society" of Onawa High School.

. . . on another corner could be placed a gymnasium. Basketball for both boys and girls has been practically impossible in Onawa because of the lack of indoor room; this is true of physical training of all kinds, yet every one admits that the physical education of the individual must be looked after if he is to be a fully developed member of society. 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. The school should be a social center; but until a further investment is made it will be impossible for the community to receive the largest returns on the investment already made.

A dream you say? Yes, but the realities of today were the dreams of the past and the realities of the future are the dreams of today.

Such arguments did not fall on deaf ears. In the period between 1915 and 1920 scores of Iowa communities built high school gymnasiums: Sidney in 1916, Nevada and Oskaloosa in 1917, and Jesup, Mount Pleasant, and Osceola in 1918, to illustrate a few of those who early appeared in the State Tournament. Even such large schools as Fort Dodge, Dubuque, Ottumwa, and Roosevelt of Des Moines did not get their modern gymnasiums until the 1920's. By 1930 most of the fine present-day Iowa gymnasiums had been erected.

The addition of a new gym brought much pleasure, but with it the problem of developing the new sport. Mrs. Katherine M. Falvey found the following item in the *Albia Screech* of 1914.

The winter term brought many happy occasions to the Student body of Albia High School, but amid all of the joy and excitement the High School gym, arena of all winter sports offered the most exciting events. It was here Greek met Greek. It was here the blue and red fell in defeat many times but later scored victories.

The boys who played on the 1913-14 basketball team can boast of the fact that they were members of the first team sent forth from the Albia High School.

Up to this time basketball had never been attempted, owing to the fact that no room of sufficient size could be found, and when the new High School was opened every one looked forward to this phase of athletics. Mr. Hamilton, the coach, found it very difficult to select the men for the team, for no one in school had ever played before. It was only after much practice and careful consideration of the most promising men, that the team was chosen. . . .

Mr. Hamilton's faithfulness to the team must not be forgotten, for his task was long and hard and almost endless. During the season we met the following teams, playing return games with all: Eddyville, Corydon, Beacon, Centerville, Mt. Pleasant, and Moravia.

Meanwhile, the popularity of basketball had reached such heights that by 1912 the Iowa High School Athletic Association determined to do something about the holding of state championship meets to determine which schools were developing the best basketball teams. Regional invitational meetings were already being held in Iowa, and some schools were going out of state to accept challenges. The boys' basketball tournament has developed into one of Iowa's colorful spectacles.

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