

Girls' Basketball -- 1950-68

When Union-Whitten defeated Everly 113-107 in an overtime for the Iowa high school girls' basketball championship March 16, the game was a fitting climax for the almost two decades of the Television Era. The final was the first to be shown in color with cameras brought from Omaha, and the telecast reached nine states. The winner came from northeast Iowa, the section that has dominated championships since 1950. The period has been one of high scoring forwards, and this game matched two with the greatest season totals in Iowa history—Denise Long of Union-Whitten and Jeanette Olson of Everly.

In 1967, Long had averaged 51.4 points per game and Olson 51.2, for the highest averages at that time. But Olson's team, unlike Union-Whitten, reached the 1967 state tournament, and for the second straight year, the Everly forward was the highest scorer in the meet with 191 points, nearing the record set in 1958 by Vivian Fleming of Emerson with 200 points.

For the 1968 season, Long had scored at a record pace of 62.4 points per game, with Olson close behind her at 59.7. The opening night of the tournament, Olson broke the single game rec-

ord with 74 points. Long had previously scored 111 to break the regular season game mark that had stood since 1926 — 110 by Irene Silka of Maynard. In her first tourney game, the Union-Whitten forward approached this total with a record 93 points against Bennett. She then went on to score 282 for the entire meet to Olson's remarkable 258. Long broke Vivian Fleming's 4-game mark by the end of the third game.

"What a great one it was," Ron Maly of the Des Moines *Register* wrote of the final game which he termed, "the madcap struggle." The 5-foot 10-inch Olson out-scored 5-foot 11-inch Long 76-64, shooting 24 of 25 free throws. Denise's cousin, Cindy Long, made 41 points, and with the score tied at the end of regulation time at 101, Union-Whitten won in overtime.

Numerous tournament records were set. Olson shot 91.1% of her free throws with 72 of 79. Long had 90.3% with 56 of 62. But Long hit 71.9% from the field to Olson's 58.9, making 14 straight field goals against Rockwell City in the semi-final and 28 of 30 shots in all.

Letters came to the Iowa Girls' High School Athletic Union office from excited viewers in nine states. But the Television Era had begun in 1951. The meet was straining the capacity of Drake Fieldhouse, Des Moines, where all tournaments had been played since 1931. Final night tickets were sold out in December. Bert McGrane of the

Register, who with Jack North had managed the Des Moines tournaments, suggested WOI-TV, Ames, carry the last two nights. At that time there were 47,000 TV sets in Iowa. Twelve engineers worked until 40 minutes before the first semi-final to get the games on the air. They succeeded, with Dale Williams and Harry Burrell the announcers. The bad weather of the night extended coverage. Sets in Monona 200 miles away, and Emmetsburg 170 miles received the broadcast. WOI-TV estimated the audience at 260,000 persons.

Since 1951, tournament telecasting has been annual. When the meet was moved in 1955 to Veterans Memorial Auditorium, with then over 15,000 seats, TV was so important that Local 89 of the United Packinghouse Workers unanimously resolved that the finals be telecast. TV carried the games along with coverage by 25 radio stations and 30 newspapers.

Among the 25 stations was WHO, Des Moines. Announcer Jim Zabel had, two years previously, received enthusiastic letters for game broadcasts heard in Schenectady, New York; Salem, Oregon; Palm Springs, California; and Springville, Alabama. When the station had carried earlier games only on FM, supplies of FM radios in stores were exhausted.

The Television Era has indeed been one of northeast Iowa dominance. Since 1950, the sec-

tion has had 11 championships and 7 second-place finishes. The northwest has had 4 titles and 6 runners-up; the southeast and southwest, 2 championships and 3 second places each.

Previously state quadrants had been very close in tournament success. From 1920-50, the northeast had 10 titlists and 6 runners-up, but the southwest won 9 times and finished second 7; the northwest had 8 champions and 7 runners-up and the southeast with 4 titles led in second-place finishes with nine.

The 1950 meet was won by Slater, who traveled to Texas to play state champion Dimmitt. The Texans with Pat Tate and Lometa Odum, later All-Americans, defeated Slater 47-20 to even the interstate rivalry at two wins each. In Des Moines the next year, Dimmitt defeated Hansell 38-30 in the terminal game of the series.

Many would have liked to see the 1952 Iowa champions, Reinbeck, play the Texans. The meet final that year brought together three girls, averaging 6-foot 1-inch. The tallest was Monona's Norma Schoulte, a 6-foot 4-inch girl who could shoot accurately right and left handed hook shots from 25 feet. Reinbeck had twin players, Francis and Francine Billerbeck, a forward and a guard. With six minutes to go in the third quarter of the championship game, Coach Max Liggett of Reinbeck positioned Francine in front of Schoulte, who got only seven more shots at the basket. The

Monona forward, who a few weeks later set a national tourney record with 110 points, hit 20 field goals in 29 shots for the game, but Francis Billerbeck made 16 goals and Reinbeck won 61-55. To counteract Schoulte's height, Francine Billerbeck tipped rebounds back to other guards. In this game only four free throws were shot; 24 were declined by the 1952 option that allowed a team to shoot free throws or keep the ball.

The year 1953 brought to Des Moines the girls from Garnavillo with the peppermint-striped suits. They were soon named the "Kandy Kids," and their ace forward, sophomore Sandra Fiete, was dubbed "Dandy Sandy."

Fiete, who later made All-America five times, the most by any native Iowan, was the star of a highly disciplined offense that rarely made a mistake, keeping the ball until the good shot. Only twice during the 1954 season did this team shoot under 50% from the field. The style carried the Kids to two consecutive titles under different coaches, L. E. Dailey and Bob Allen.

Fiete still has the highest career scoring total in history with 4,875. Harriett Taylor of New Sharon is second with 4,798; Jeanette Olson, third with 4,634, and Peg Petersen, also of Everly, fourth with 4,458. Denise Long, only a junior, is fifth with 4,264; Norma Schoulte sixth with 4,187, and Vivian Fleming seventh with 4,168.

Another Garnavillo star was Jean Overbeck.

Born with a hip injury that permanently stiffened a leg, Overbeck developed her play to a point that for six years her teams either won a state title or lost to a team that finished champion or runner-up. Making the Garnavillo team as a seventh grader, she, for two years, competed against Monona and Schoulte and, then, had two championship years. Moving to Monona after her sophomore year, she led that team to a defeat of Garnavillo with Fiete, only to lose to the 1955 champs, Goldfield. West Central of Maynard took Monona out of the state series in Overbeck's senior year. Her Garnavillo scoring records were lost, but indications are she finished competition as one of the five greatest scorers in Iowa history.

When the 1955 tournament was moved to Veterans Auditorium, the meet became even bigger and more colorful. Napier, population 40, appeared with 450 fans. Gilbert, with 297 people, brought 700 boosters. Girls from non-competing schools came by the thousands.

The quarter-final story was Ardith Ann Mairs of Gilman, who made 15 out of 20 shots from the field and 23 of 27 free throws. Holstein, the favorite, featuring the defense of Verna Leckband, the scoring of Mary Jan Leonard, and the passing of a future Miss Iowa, Jerri Cole, beat three undefeated teams to reach the finals. Then Goldfield, led by forward Marcia Robinson and guard Jane DeWitt, won in an overtime before a record

15,333 fans. There was inspiration in the Goldfield surge. Mrs. Roy Axon, blind for eight years, sat beside her husband in the stands, listening to his description as daughter Mary played forward for the winners.

From 1956 through 1959, West Central of Maynard with Virginia Henniges, the only girl ever to play in four championship games, finished either first or second. The four tournaments were unique in that each year the team with the highest scorer finished second. In 1956, Sylvia Froning of Garrison led, but West Central was champion. In 1957, Garrison won, but Glenda Nicholson of West Central out-scored Froning. In 1958, the hard-driving Vivian Fleming totaled a record 200 points that stood for 10 years, but West Central again won. Then in 1959, Virginia Henniges scored 194, but Gladbrook won the first of two straight titles, beating West Central in the finals after losing two earlier games to Maynard.

The tournaments had players who re-wrote records — 1956's high scoring Harriett Taylor, New Sharon; Karen Anderson, Blakesburg; and Beth Walters, Beaconsfield are still in the top 10 all-time scorers. Hall of Famer Ruth Wallesstad of Cedar Valley (Somers) played in the 1956-57-58 meets. Judy Hodson of Donnellson was in the 1956 tourney; Myrna Hauschildt of Gladbrook and Philis Bothwell of Pisgah in the 1959. All later made first All-America. Carolyn

Nicholson, Glenda's sister, starred in the 1956 title, and the 1959 meet saw one of the top career scorers, Linda Lory of Rockwell City.

Two of Iowa's greatest guards — Jan Armstrong of Eldora and Bonnie Suntken of Meservey — became forwards to help their teams. Armstrong was second high scorer of the 1956 meet; Suntken, third high in 1958.

As the 1959 final was played, a blizzard developed, and 5,000 spectators spent the night in the auditorium. For a while, a band, that had played at the game, continued to provide music, but when bandsmen heard of a theater midnight show, they left. "Frosty" Mitchell, now manager of KGRN, Grinnell, was then on the KIOA, Des Moines, staff. When he learned that thousands, many of them students, had no music, he walked six miles to his station, picked up records, and conducted a dance at the auditorium until daybreak. Concessionaires sold 15,000 doughnuts, 6,600 sandwiches, and 12,000 soft drinks.

In 1960, Gladbrook repeated as champion with the closest game the 60-58 semi-final against Valley (Elgin). Fans were already debating whether Valley forward Dianne Frieden or Mona Van Steenberg of the 1950 Prairie City team was the greatest rebounder in Iowa history.

By 1961, Valley was champion, and Frieden was the leading tournament scorer. But two players on teams earlier eliminated were readying

themselves for other years — Karen McCool of Guthrie Center and Peg Petersen of Everly.

Petersen led the scoring in the 1962 meet, which was won by Van Horne. The winners, named the "Tiny Tots" because they had only one player over 5 feet 5 inches, were led in the back-court by post-guard Joanne Heitman. Although they had lost three times to Garrison during the season, they beat their conquerors in the first round of the state. Due to a national bowling meet in Des Moines, the tourney was played in hospitable Waterloo. An example of hospitality was the Russell Lamson Hotel. Previous to the meet, the night occupancy record was 394; one tournament night, the hotel housed 618 guests.

Karen McCool and Guthrie Center won in 1963. From early season, Guthrie had been rated Number One by Jack North, who had joined the Girls' Union as publicity director in 1961, after over 40 years picking all-state teams for the Des Moines *Register*. Guthrie's hardest test was the semi-final against Everly and Petersen. Guthrie Center won on a shot at the final gun. McCool led all tournament scorers with Petersen second.

Western Iowa continued with the champion in 1964 as West Monona beat a fast-developing South Hamilton team 70-67. In this meet Sandy Butler of Lewis Central (Council Bluffs), set the single game record of 69 points that stood until 1968.

Butler, a fine 6-foot 2-inch forward, was matched in height by Pat Burda of Oxford Junction, who made 50 points against Everly. Knowing Burda was a fine free-thrower, Everly never fouled her, and Oxford Junction tried only 4 free throws to 41 by Everly. Another player in the 1964 meet was Betty Gaule of Clearfield, who made the United States team for the 1967 Pan-American Games.

South Hamilton won in 1965 with the Hill twins, Karma, a guard, and Karla, a forward. Everly gave western Iowa its fourth straight title in 1966 as Jeanette Olson, then a sophomore, led all scorers. She repeated in 1967, but Everly did not, losing to South Hamilton in the semi-finals. Mediapolis, with guard Sheryl Wischmeier, brought southeast Iowa the title that year.

Intrinsic in the development of girls' athletics has been the administration of Wayne Cooley as executive secretary of the Girls' Union. Cooley assumed the post in 1954 and immediately started plans to extend competition beyond the single sport of basketball. Softball was added to the program in 1955. In 1956, golf and tennis championships were first staged. The initial state track meet was held in 1962. Fall distance running began in 1966. Swimming was added in 1967. In 1968, 20,500 girls are competing in track, while basketball attracted close to 22,000. Basketball receipts carry other sports in almost all schools.

During Cooley's tenure, the state tournament has been noted for sparkling half-time shows. In 1968, the program included high school stage bands for all sessions. In addition, there were 20 other acts, including five different color guards, a large chorus, a national champion drill team, gymnastic performers, and many high school drill-dance units.

Of tournament teams, Guthrie Center has been the leader since 1950, playing in nine meets. For all time, Seymour and Wellsburg lead with 15 tournaments.

As to coaches with teams at state, Russ Kraai, Holstein, has had seven since 1950 and eleven for all time. O. E. Lester retired after bringing his twelfth team to the meet—Oakland in 1956. For high finisher, Mel Kupferschmid of West Central, Maynard, has had two championships and two seconds since 1950. Chuck Neubauer, who retired after the 1968 season, had six teams to state during the era. He won two championships with Gladbrook, and second place with Valley, West Des Moines, after a fourth place with Guthrie Center. Vernon McLearn of Mediapolis also had six tourney teams, with one winner and one runner-up. Of coaches winning a championship, Ben Corbett of Garrison has brought five teams to state, and Dale Sorenson of South Hamilton, Larry Johnson of Everly, and Bob Smiley of Guthrie Center three each. Lovell Diddy of Meservey,

who won the 1939 title with West Bend, had third and fourth place finishes in 1957 and 1958. Dale Fogle, coaching Valley (Elgin) and Allison-Bristow, had four teams in the finals, with one title and one third place team. Darrell Breneman of Wellsburg, Charles Weatherwax of Blakesburg and Pocahontas, Ken Hulsebus of Perry, and "Whitey" Thompson of Ida Grove brought five teams to state during the era. Bill Haines of Everly, Derald Swisher of Twin Rivers (Bode) and Grand Valley, and Leon Plummer of Farragut had four each.

Coaches have developed the Iowa game until it is truly national in scope. For three decades, more than one out of five first All-Americans have come from Iowa. In the 1940's, Iowa produced 23% of the All-Americans; for the 1950's the percentage was 19, and for the 1960's it is 21%. Native Iowans who have made All-America have played primarily for four schools: Iowa Wesleyan with 11 honorees; American Institute of Business, Des Moines, with 10; American Institute of Commerce, Davenport, with nine, and Commercial Extension, Omaha, with eight. Two out-of-state girls, Barbara Sipes and Rita Horky, have made All-America four and five times respectively for Iowa Wesleyan. Sipes was the leading scorer of the United States team that defeated Russia to win the 1958 world's title in Brazil.

By 1963, Iowa Wesleyan had become so well

known that in Sweden, the Scandinavian Air Lines' travel poster of world places to visit located a girl basketball player in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.

The school has had numerous internationalists. In 1953, Janet Thompson and Dorothy Welp played on the United States team that won the first world's title in Santiago, Chile. In 1954, Wesleyan defeated the Mexican national team. Barbara Sipes played in 1955 as the United States won the Pan-American title in Mexico City. In 1958, Sipes and Sandy Fiete played in Russia. Rita Horky and Glenda Nicholson were on the Pan-Am champions in 1959, with Horky the leading scorer. In 1960, Wesleyan met the Russian national team in Denver and Seattle, and in 1961, Horky and Judy Hodson played with the United States team on a tour of Russia and Sweden. The Russian team was guests of Iowa Wesleyan in 1962.

In 1963, Lori Williams was on the United States team that won the Pan-Am championship at Sao Paulo, Brazil, and in 1964, Peg Petersen played on the team that placed fourth in the Lima, Peru, world tourney. In 1965, Wesleyan coach Olan Ruble was on the staff of the United States team that played nine games in France, Russia, and Germany.

Betty Clark of American Institute of Commerce was on the 1963 world champions, and Norma Schwarz of Sioux City Machinery on the 1963

Pan-Am team. Deanna Grindle of Strahan toured South America in 1966 with the American team, and the 1967 Pan-Am squad included Captain Carole Phillips Aspedon of Hamburg as well as Betty Gaule.

Deanna Grindle, a 1963 All-American, has been America's finest free thrower, having won the national title four times, in 1959, 1963, 1964 and 1965. In 1955, Clea Reinsch of Gilbert and Sherri Heath of Exira tied for the national title. Mary Beem of Holly Springs-Hornick was the 1958 national champion, and in 1962, Judy Hodson tied for the title, but lost in a run-off. In the year 1962 Philis Bothwell of Pisgah scored 59 points in a national meet game to break the record formerly held by Norma Schoulte.

National tournaments have been All-America routes for 43 native Iowans, beginning with Myrtle Fisher of Plover in 1935. Jo Langerman of Hampton was honored in 1936, Monica Ward of Maloy and Dorothy Wirts of Iowa Falls in 1941. Jeanette Haas of Rhodes, in 1943, was the first to be named twice. Mary Link of Farrar, and Florence Woodman of Stuart were the initial 3-time honorees, with Link later making All-America a fourth time. Fourteen girls have been picked at least twice.

Three players, Frances Stansberry of Farson, Norma Schoulte, and Jan Armstrong made All-America during their senior year in high school.

An indication of the wealth of Iowa talent: 25 of the 43 All-Americans never made the first All-State team.

Southwest Iowa has produced 12 All-Americans with the northwest and northeast having 11 each, and southeast Iowa 9. All-Americans have come from the very corners of the state—from Hamburg (Carole Phillips) in the southwest to Monona (Norma Schoulte) in the northeast, and from Rock Valley (Alice Van Dyke) in the northwest to Donnellson (Judy Hodson) in the southeast.

Three towns have produced two All-Americans: Olin with Helen Joura and Margaret Macomber; Kamrar with Elizabeth Brinkema and Dorothy Welp; and Maynard with Glenda Nicholson and Diane Schlegel.

As to All-State teams, 27 girls since 1950 have made the first team twice, but only two, Sandy Fiete and Jeanette Olson have been selected thrice.

A signal distinction has been election to the Girls' Basketball Hall of Fame, which was begun in 1961, with selection among those who have completed high school play by at least five years. The span of playing among the 61 selectees goes from 1926 when Irene Silka of Maynard and Helen McLeran of Audubon played to 1962 when JoAnne Heitman of Van Horne was the state's best guard. Three honorees, including Mabel Kline (Hampton), 1927, have come from the

1920's, 16 from the 1930's, 18 from the 1940's, 19 from the 1950's, and five from the 1960's.

Selectees come back to the state tournament for the televised ceremony from all parts of the United States. The 1965 group came from San Diego and Seaside, California; West Palm Beach, Florida; Denver; Philadelphia; and Brookfield, Wisconsin, as well as Iowa. Most of the 61 have been homemakers, often with large families, but there have been many teachers, a manufacturing executive, a banker, a chemist, a dentist, a nun, a comptroller, and a queen of the Flying Farmers of America.

These are the best players of over four decades during which Iowa competition has been strong. So strong that of the 19 champion teams since 1950, only seven have been unbeaten—Garnavillo (1954), West Central, Maynard (1958), Gladbrook (1960), Valley, Elgin (1961), West Monona (1964), South Hamilton (1965) and Mediapolis (1967). The 1968 Union-Whitten team lost its only game ahead of the sectional meet when Coach Paul Eckerman's team played Gilbert, beaten 90-44 previously, with no regulars.

No review of Iowa girls' basketball would be complete without acknowledgement to the editors of the Girls' Union Yearbook. It was begun in the 1944-45 season by Rod Chisholm and produced through 1964 by the well-known and able free-lance writers, Henry and Vera Bradshaw.

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