

# Growing Up Basketball

You start in the rafters of the gymnasium - 30 - 35 rows from the floor — when you are in the fifth grade. By the time you are a senior in high school, you're in the first or second row sitting behind the cheerleaders, Barb Bollinger, Jane Meyer and Janet Weithoff, just to name a few.

I'm talking "small town" Indiana basketball in the 1950's - home of the Seymour Owls. The gymnasium was on West Sixth Street behind Shields High School. The gym seated approximately 3,000 in a town of 10,000 at that time. The subject is Hoosier Hysteria.

My first remembrance is Stanley "Bode" Hill and his "fancy-dan" dribbling that put the crowd into a frenzy. Another is Danny Thomas and his incredible vertical leap and devastating hook shot and John Judd, a dynamic 5 foot 9 inch guard, hitting a 40-foot shot at the buzzer.

Advance to 1962, my senior year, and the Southport game when Larry Shade "willed" the Owls to victory by his fine play in the closing minutes of a close South Central Conference battle. Southport will lose only two games that season.

The 1962 Seymour Owls is the first team to get to the final game of the semi-states, losing to Evansville Bosse - the state champions the next weekend. After winning the afternoon game at the semi-states, the Seymour Owls are one of eight teams left still competing out of 800!

Back to the '50's . Once, when the electricity went off during a game, officials brought cars to the Sixth Street exit doors and lit up the floor with the headlights.

During Lent, we went to the 6:30 pm early worship service at Immanuel Lutheran Church on Walnut Street in order to be able to attend that evening's sectional games at the high school. Most Lutheran moms would require that!

But, best of all, I remember the dime dill pickle from the concession stand. The excitement of the crunch when nothing else will do. However, no one I knew was ever able to finish one of those giant dills off.

Or taking the empty paper pop cups, turning them over on the concrete floor, and smashing the foot down hard in order to get the proper "bang" to echo throughout the gym. This was done after the game when the gym was mostly cleared out.

P.S. My daily "habit" regarding basketball was this: After coming home from school, I would enjoy dunking 3 butter cookies in milk. That would be my snack. Changing into a pair of old jeans and sneakers, and taking my basketball down to Chris Schnett's house for a pick up game. This routine was good for the entire school year - even during most of the winter.

P.P.S. During my 8th grade year at age 14, I was a starting forward for the Seymour Boy's Club 7th & 8th grade "All-Star Team". I do not remember how many games we played; but eventually our team arrived at the Boy's Club in Terra Haute, Indiana to play for the state of Indiana Boy's Club championship.

The reason we were so good - we had a 6 foot 5 inch center. All Frank Stevenson would have to do was show his birth certificate to all coaches of the opposing teams. All that our team members had to do was lob the basketball up to him and he would score. Nobody else on any team was that tall!!!

Years later, I found out that this Boy's Club gym where we won the state championship - was the very gym that Larry Bird kept in shape after he left Indiana University and then joined the Indiana State University team in Terra Haute. Larry's team would go undefeated 33-0 in games during the 1978-1979 season but would lose to Magic Johnson and Michigan State University in the 1979 final championship game of March Madness. Magic vs. Bird became legendary battles in the NBA through the 1980's and is credited with "saving" the NBA — becoming the sports craze it is today. (I would encourage you to watch Larry Bird basketball highlights on the Internet You-Tube. They are amazing!)