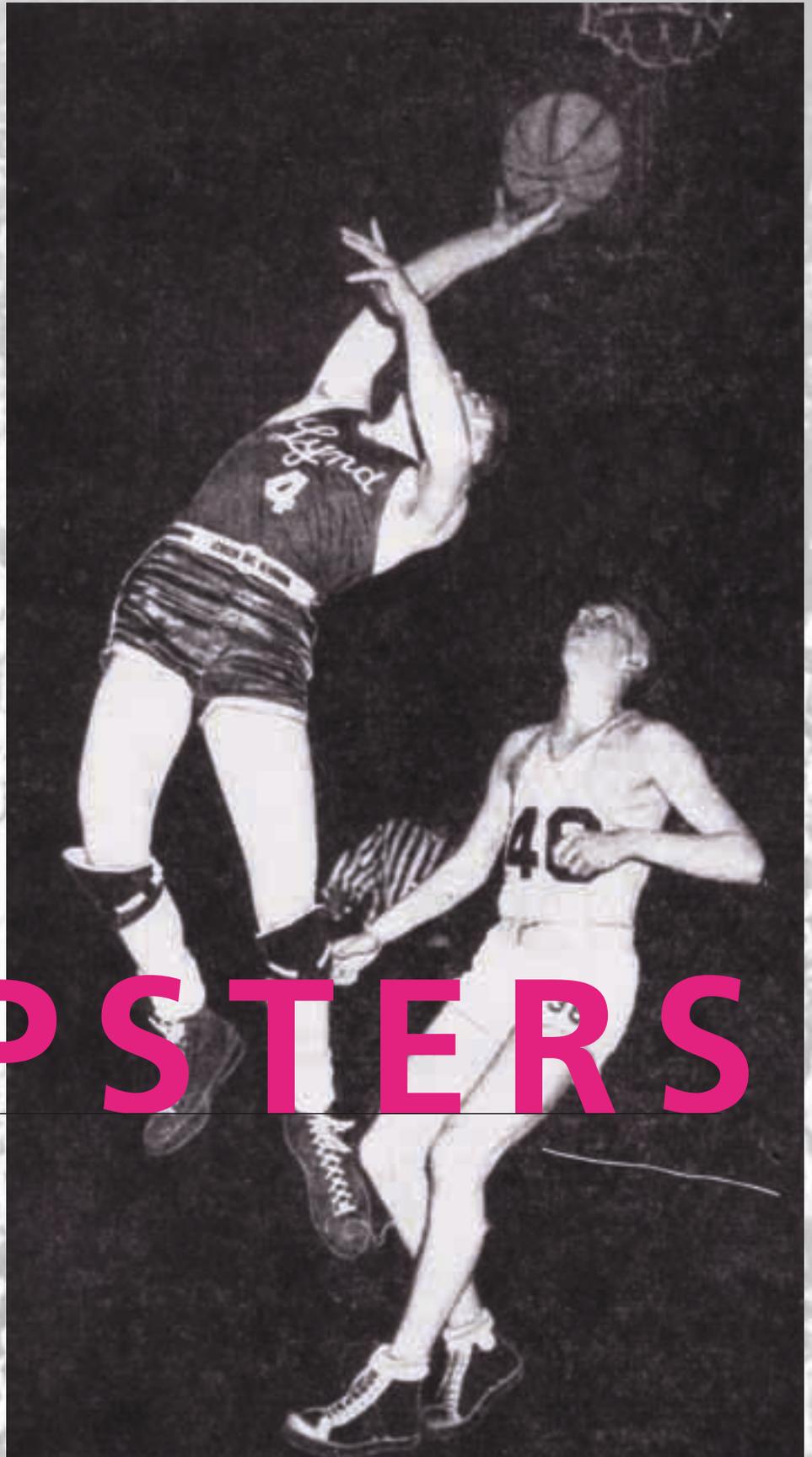
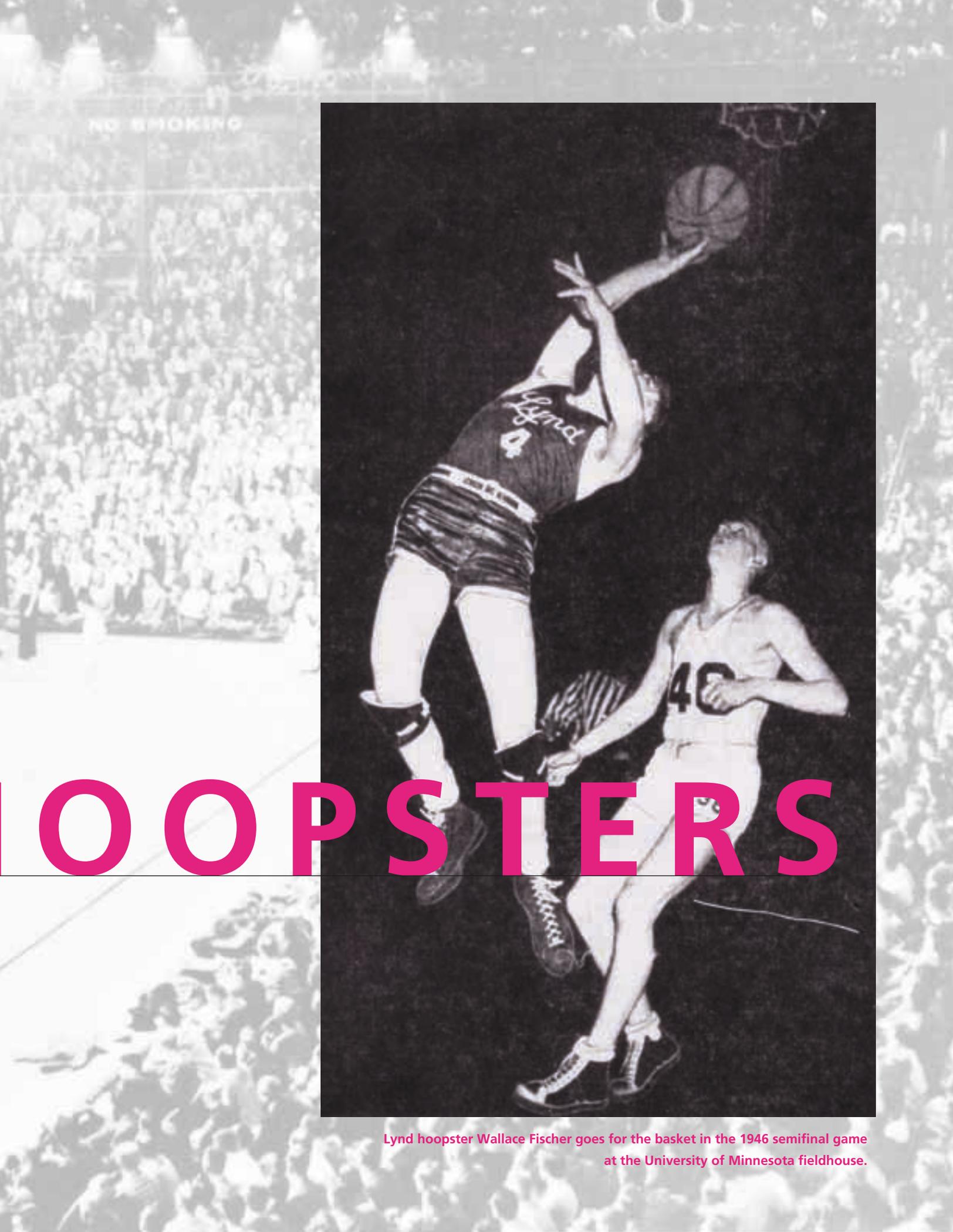


HAYLOFT H

*Legendary Lynd and the State
High School Basketball Tournament*

STEVEN R. HOFFBECK



HOOPSTERS

Lynd hoopster Wallace Fischer goes for the basket in the 1946 semifinal game at the University of Minnesota fieldhouse.

COUNTLESS YOUNGSTERS HAVE

dreamed of playing in the Minnesota High School Basketball Tournament since it began in 1913. Farm children have spent free time shooting basketballs into hoops attached to hayloft walls and playing innumerable pick-up games with brothers, sisters, cousins, and neighbors. Their goal: to win their way into the state tournament and become part of what was once the greatest of all Minnesota high-school sports events.

Few ever made it that far, of course, for sports dreams rarely translate into reality. Moreover, farm boys first had to compete against “town kids” for places in a school’s starting lineup, and if they made the squad, the small-town team needed to defeat the big-town teams in their district and region for the right to advance to the state tourney. While the realities of competition squelched most visions of success, hoop dreams came true in 1946 when 10 farm boys from Lynd, a town of 218 people near Marshall, made it not only to the state tournament but to the championship game. Along the way these farm boys created a legend, becoming what one paper called “the most talked-about basketball team in the state,” a team that even gained mention in *Time* magazine.¹

Known as the team that practiced in a hayloft, Lynd’s Panthers surprised every regular-season opponent with their close teamwork, brisk passing, and lightning fast break, suppos-



edly perfected in a barn outside of town. Rumor had it that the boys from Lynd had gotten their speed by chasing jackrabbits across the prairie since boyhood.²

The story of Lynd’s accomplishments was memorable, even if the team finished its best year as first runner-up. High-school miracles such as the championship season of Milan (enrollment 161)—immortalized in *Hoosiers* (1986), the movie about the unlikely winners of Indiana’s 1954 tournament—are rare indeed. The legend of Lynd nevertheless tells something about the patterns of life in Minnesota in the 1940s and subsequent decades and about the importance of the state basketball tournament in small-town culture and life.³

The state tournament in 1946 reflected the growing popularity of schoolboy basketball in Minnesota and throughout the Midwest. After the grim years of the Great Depression and World War II, Minnesotans readily turned their attention to happier events, attending weddings instead of funerals, reading newspaper birth announcements

rather than death notices, and supporting town basketball teams rather than war-bond drives. Nationally, high schools sponsored basketball teams more often than any other sport, even baseball. In Minnesota the 1946 tournament initiated a new era in state high-school basketball featuring higher-scoring games, faster up-and-down-the-court action, and record-breaking attendance. Rule changes in the late 1930s such as elimination of the center jump after each field goal had already modernized the game. Average winning-team scores in state championship games rose from 35.7 in 1934–44 to 53.3 in 1945–55.⁴

The aura around the state tournament also grew as radio broadcasts of the games expanded

Steven R. Hoffbeck, assistant professor of history at Minot State University, is writing a history of hay-making in Minnesota. This article has been supported in part by a grant from the research department of the Minnesota Historical Society with funds provided by the State of Minnesota. The author acknowledges research assistance from Pat Clark, Duane Londgren, John Hoffbeck, Jim Malosky, and Dr. Art Lee.

¹ *Redwood Gazette*, Mar. 19, 1946, p. 8; *Time*, Apr. 1, 1946, p. 65.

² James Musburger (1948 Bemidji state-tournament team), Bemidji, conversation with author, July 16, 1996; *Redwood Gazette*, Mar. 12, 1946, p. 1; *Marshall Messenger*, Mar. 28, 1946, p. 2.

³ John F. Rooney Jr. and Richard Pillsbury, *Atlas of American Sport* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 47.

⁴ *Time*, Apr. 1, 1946, p. 65; Minnesota State High School League, *Seventy-first Annual Minnesota High School State Basketball Tournament, Mar. 24, 25, 26, 1983* (St. Paul: MSHSL, 1983), 4; Rooney and Pillsbury, *Atlas of American Sport*, 43.

their popularity through the 1930s and 1940s. Small-town fans could enjoy “away” games play-by-play. Salesmen easily sold radio advertising for basketball games to local merchants. State-wide coverage of the boys’ tournament followed in the wake of the popularity of WCCO radio broadcasts of University of Minnesota football games in the school’s late-1930s glory years.⁵

Minnesota towns took pride in their basketball teams, and in many small towns basketball games were not only the best show in town but the only one. Games provided entertainment, and local citizens responded with deep loyalty to the teams, taking pride if their school boasted a large gymnasium. Basketball provided relief from winter’s dreariness, and the final tournament in March gave Minnesotans a fun diversion during an often snowy month.

In the tradition of Indiana, Minnesota held a one-class tournament in which all towns in the state, whether their schools had 2,500 students or 200, competed against each other. An unheralded small-town team just might upset a heavily favored big-city squad, making the victory even sweeter. (In contrast, heavily rural North Dakota had a two-class tournament, awarding one crown for large schools, another for small schools.)⁶

The basketball tournament peaked as Minnesota’s preeminent sporting event from 1946 to the early 1960s, when demographic and cultural trends began eroding its elite status. Then the growth of Twin Cities suburbs, the arrival of professional baseball and football, and the triumph of metropolitan over outstate Minnesota permanently changed the sporting scene in the North Star State. With the advent of girls’ varsity sports in the 1970s, boys’ programs no longer had even the exclusive local spotlight. These changes were still beyond the horizon in 1946, however, and in that year Lynd basked in the glory of what was then Minnesota’s premiere sporting tournament.

THE LEGEND OF LYND BEGAN ON the John J. Clark family farm in the winter of 1940. Seventh-grader Patrick D. (Pat) Clark had a hoop in the barn hayloft, where he practiced shooting between barn chores and field work.

⁵ Charles F. Sarjeant, *The First Forty: The Story of WCCO Radio* (Minneapolis: T.S. Denison & Co., 1964), 51, 69, 90.

⁶ Merrill Schalow, *A History of North Dakota High School Basketball* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1988), 4, 28, 48; *USA Today*, Mar. 20, 1997, p. C2.

The neighboring Fischer brothers, W. Casper and J. Wallace, who lived a quarter-mile down the road, also had a basket in their barn’s hayloft. The boys walked or bicycled between the farmsteads to help sweep aside loose hay for a small court in each barn. From that time on, Clark recalled, they played “a lot of basketball in barns” because it was what they loved to do most after chores were done. Pat’s older brother James R. Clark took part until he joined the navy in 1943. With two other brothers, John P. (Jack) and Joseph R. (Joe), and two younger Fischer boys, Robert D. and Charles J., the eight

Pat Clark’s barn and hayloft hoop near Lynd, 1997



could have a “pretty good game” together. The hayloft also served as a safe haven for Pat and the other boys from news about Pearl Harbor, Hitler, and D-Day; it was a place where Pat might forget his fears for his brother away at war.⁷

Lynd High School’s basketball coach Chester A. (Chet) Bisel first took note of Pat Clark’s talent when he and two other seventh-grade boys made the all-district junior-high team in 1941. The boys were very athletic, swift of foot, and good shots, and Lynd captured two District 9 junior-high championships in 1942 and 1943. Clark excelled in the latter, scoring 30 points in three games. Neighbor Casper Fischer’s hayloft practice also paid off with 24 points in the tourney. Another teammate, Duane D. Londgren, showed promise with 18 points. Coach Bisel then came up with a five-year plan using Clark, Fischer, and Londgren as his nucleus. He gave the team extra coaching and encouragement, opening the school gymnasium during the summer so the boys could play together on a better floor than the one in the Clark hayloft. Looking to the future, Bisel anticipated great things for the Lynd team the year that the youngsters became high-school seniors.⁸

The coach’s hunch was correct. As sophomores on the B squad, the boys were undefeated. In 1945 Clark and the A-squad team had a good junior year, but neighboring Tracy won the district title. That spring at a meeting with his team, Bisel predicted that the 1945–46 season would be their year of glory. He deliberately scheduled games with bigger schools that played on large gymnasium floors, so that his boys, used to Lynd’s cramped gym, would be comfortable at tournament time.⁹

Coach Bisel organized regular-season team practices to fit with farm work because all but one of his players had to help with evening chores. He put the team through its paces for only 30 minutes a day in the school gymnasium during lunch hour and scheduled few after-

school practices because the boys had to ride home on buses to feed livestock and milk the cows. Only occasionally did he call them back into town for evening practice. Instead the boys practiced at home. When chores were done, the Fischers practiced basketball in their hayloft illuminated by bare light bulbs. Clark and Londgren (who had moved to a farm his senior year) did the same. Teammate Ronald Peterson worked out with his father on their hayloft court, while cows chewed their cuds in the stalls below.¹⁰

Because the 1944–45 basketball season occurred during World War II, gasoline was rationed, and Lynd’s school board did not provide busing to sports events. As a result the team traveled to its away games in cars, Coach Bisel taking as many as possible in his big Chrysler. Parents would drive, too, or give their gas coupons to Bisel so he could get to the games and bring the boys home from practices.¹¹

Bisel was an unusual coach because almost everything he knew about basketball came from reading books. Although he held a teaching degree from St. Cloud State Teachers College, he never played there. The basketball books he liked best were written by Purdue University’s famed coach Ward “Piggy” Lambert. Lambert’s “How to Play Firewagon Basketball” and *Practical Basketball* stressed a fast-break offense featuring long passes and speed. Lambert preached that his fast-break plan was “the ideal system, if the coach has the necessary material.” Bisel was convinced he had the right players to make it work.¹²

Bisel taught his team to throw down-court passes to designated spots where a streaking teammate would arrive to catch the ball. Without dribbling, the player would fire the ball to another teammate who either took the shot or passed to an open man for a better shot. Lynd’s fast-breaking approach worked because Bisel had developed solid basketball fundamentals in his team—namely, passing, ball-handling, and

⁷ Pat Clark to author, Sept. 11, 1996, Feb. 13, 1997; Wallace Fischer, Marshall, conversation with author, Oct. 2, 1997; WCCO radio broadcast of Lynd-Stillwater game, Mar. 22, 1946, tape recording, Pat Clark Collection, Lynd.

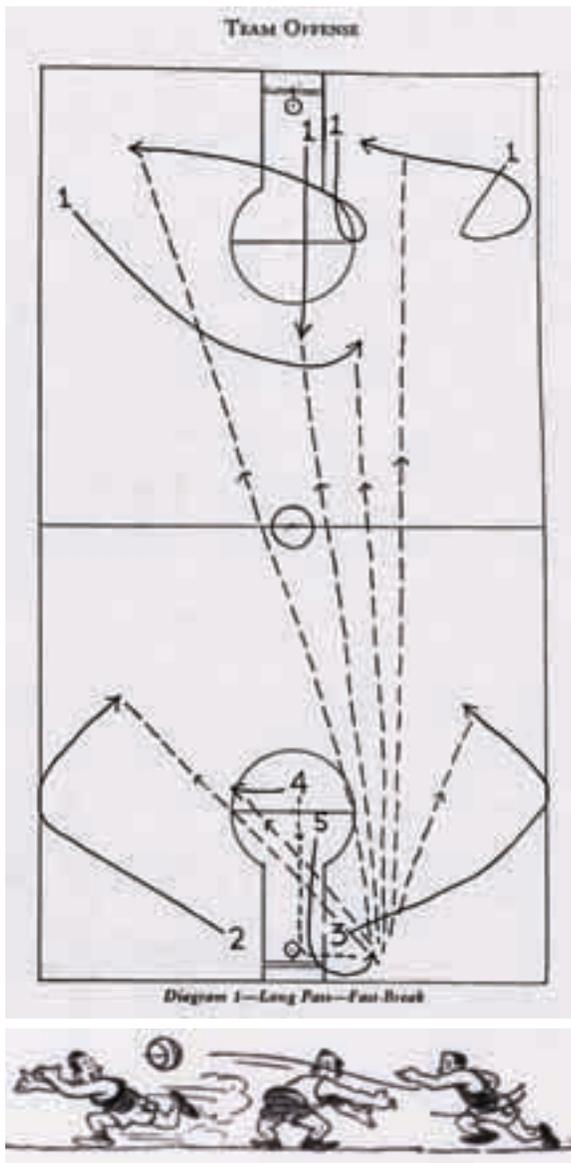
⁸ *Marshall Messenger*, Mar. 21, 1946, sec.3, p. 1, 14, Mar. 28, 1946, p. 6; tournament program, *Sixth Annual Junior High School Tournament* (Ivanhoe: Ivanhoe Public Schools, 1943), 2, 4; *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, undated clipping, Pat Clark scrapbook, Lynd (hereafter, scrapbook).

⁹ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 25, 1981, p. 23; Clark to author, Oct. 17, 1996, Feb. 13, 1997.

¹⁰ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 18, 1946, p. 21; *Marshall Messenger*, Mar. 21, 1946, sec.3, p. 1, 14.

¹¹ Clark to author, Feb. 13, 1997.

¹² Ward L. Lambert, *Practical Basketball* (Chicago: Athletic Journal Publishing Co., 1932), preface, 130–45; *Marshall Messenger*, Mar. 28, 1946, p. 6; *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 6.



Ward "Piggy" Lambert's diagram of the long pass—fast break and a *Minneapolis Tribune* cartoonist's graphic comment, March 19, 1946

shooting. When the Lynd team ran down the floor it was "zing-zing-zing—three or more passes and they [were] down peppering the basket," observed one newspaper account. For defense, the team played a pesky man-to-man, trying to

steal the ball and make quick baskets.¹³

Bisel's game was brilliant in conception and in action. Guards usually played defense under the basket against the opponent's forwards, and Lynd's guards, Clark and Peterson, were exceptional at rebounding and stealing. When opponents attempted a shot, Bisel had his center, Londgren, and one of the guards try to control any rebounds. When Lynd got a rebound, the quick forwards and the opposite-side guard ran down-court to receive a long pass at a predetermined point, often catching opponents short-handed. This usually created a three-on-two situation where several quick passes led to an easy lay-up. Lynd's players passed and ran, of course, but, as Casper Fischer said, "We never dribbled, Bisel wouldn't allow that" because it slowed down the fast break.¹⁴

While Lynd's key players were not tall, each had strong skills. At 5 feet, 11 inches, Londgren was "not too fast," according to his coach, but "a dead shot." Forwards Casper Fischer and Tom Sharratt (a junior) each stood only 5 feet, 8 inches tall and weighed less than 150 pounds. Sharratt, however, was speedy, and Fischer was a scrapper and ball-handler who dazzled crowds with his behind-the-back passes.¹⁵

Ron Peterson, an even 6 feet, was a leaper who always handled the center jump-ball duties and then shifted to the guard position. His teammates could tell Ron was "on his game" during warm-ups when his hands extended far above the rim as he gathered rebounds.¹⁶

Guard Pat Clark, 5 feet, 11 inches tall, was the glue that held the team together. His passing and play-making made the team hum, and, according to one newspaper writer, he knew "exactly where to pass without so much as a look" because the boys had played together for so long.¹⁷

The team's ethnic backgrounds reflected southwestern Minnesota in the 1940s. Clark was Irish, Peterson was Norwegian, the Fischers were German, and Londgren and Sharratt were Swedish. The all-American kids wore their short hair neatly parted on the side or in crew cuts. Newspaper photographers tried to turn the handsome Londgren into a star, but Bisel

¹³ *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 6; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 8; *Minneapolis Daily Times*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 16, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Minneapolis Daily Times*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 16; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 25, 1981, p. 23; Clark to author, Oct. 17, 1996.

¹⁵ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 9.

¹⁶ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 25, 1981, p. 23.

¹⁷ *Marshall Messenger*, Mar. 21, 1946, sec. 3, p. 13; *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, undated clipping, scrapbook.

made sure his players stayed focused on the games by mandating a “no dates” rule during the season, a concept he got out of his basketball books.¹⁸

IN THE 1945–46 REGULAR SEASON, Lynd’s speedsters won every game. Among the area’s bigger schools with good teams, Canby fell 48 to 25, and defending district-champion Tracy lost 43 to 30. Pipestone came the closest to pulling out a win but succumbed 40 to 35. Even Marshall, one of southwestern Minne-

tiny Russell by a startling 87 to 12.¹⁹

After defeating over-matched Minneota and gallant Ivanhoe, Lynd advanced to the District 9 title game in March 1946. Marshall met Lynd again in the championship match, where Bisel’s fast-break approach was no longer a surprise. Marshall nearly won by controlling and slowing the pace of the game but fell 34 to 33.²⁰

Although Lynd had won the District 9 title once before—in 1938—the 1946 team harbored higher hopes. The boys set out to win their first Region III crown, which included Districts 9,



Lynd’s game-winning team (l. to r.): Wallace Fischer, Ramsey Johnson, Del Londgren, Duane Londgren, Ronald Peterson, Tom Harstad, Pat Clark, Casper Fischer, Don Hammer, and Tom Sharratt

sota’s largest schools, could not handle swift Lynd, falling 41 to 24. The team’s fast-break style worked even better on large courts with more maneuvering room than in crackerbox-sized gyms. Small schools like Tyler, Echo, Balaton, and Wood Lake failed to withstand Lynd’s furious pace, and the Panthers pasted

10, 11, and 12. Each district had about 12 schools, and the champions had considerable reputations as basketball powers. District 12’s Hutchinson, Lynd’s opponent in the first regional game in the big gymnasium in Redwood Falls, posed a stiff challenge. Considered the odds-on regional favorite, Hutchinson’s tall team had played in the state tournament the previous season. Lynd, behind at half-time and still trailing after three periods, narrowly managed to tie Hutchinson 45-all and then slip to a win, 49 to 47, in what the *Minneapolis Tribune*

¹⁸ Clark to author, Feb. 13, 1997; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 25, 1981, p. 20; Lambert, *Practical Basketball*, 226.

¹⁹ Souvenir Program, Dist. 9 Basketball Tournament, Mar. 6–9, 1946, p. 8, scrapbook; Clark to author, Oct. 17, 1996.

²⁰ *Redwood Gazette*, Mar. 12, 1946, p. 1.

²¹ *Marshall Messenger*, Mar. 21, 1946, p. 13; *Redwood Gazette*, Mar. 19, 1946, p. 8; *Minneapolis Tribune*, undated clipping, scrapbook.

termed a “bombshell” in Region III.²¹

The regional championship game against District 11’s Montevideo proved easier. With Londgren scoring 18 points, Lynd won its entry ticket to the state tournament with a rousing 53-to-36 victory.²²

Although everyone in Lynd wanted to attend the state tournament, scheduled to be played in Minneapolis’s University of Minnesota Field House (renamed Williams Arena in 1949), not everyone could go. Eighteen local people volunteered to stay home to do chores and keep the community functioning. Postmaster A. H. Roloff and barber Ole Larson agreed to take turns running the telephone switchboard, where the few calls that came through were reports on the team. Lynd’s nine business buildings—a pool hall, grocery store, post office, elevator, lumberyard, gas station, cafe, garage, and produce company—were reportedly empty through the tournament running from Thursday, March 21, through Saturday, March 23.²³

Four of Lynd’s five starting players had never been to the Twin Cities. They made good copy for the big-city press, which reported the boys’ reactions to tall buildings, trolley cars, and the St. Paul Hotel’s elevators. (Indeed, for many spectators making their first or a rare visit to “the Cities,” the experience of seeing Dinkeytown and the Foshay Tower and driving in traffic made lasting memories.) While the experience proved unnerving for many small-town teams, the Lynd squad seemed firmly grounded and determined to do its best.²⁴

Being the smallest school ever to make the state tournament and the only undefeated high-school team in the state, Lynd’s “barnyard basketeurs” quickly became the media’s—and the fans’—sentimental favorite. Twin Cities newspaper reporters and photographers flocked to the village, producing what may have been more pretournament coverage than ever before in tourney history. The David-and-Goliath aspect of Lynd’s participation promised to make the team what one reporter called the tournament’s “biggest single drawing card.” Because little Lynd had no school band, Redwood Falls High School sent its musicians on Lynd’s behalf.²⁵

²² *Marshall Messenger*, Mar. 21, 1946, p. 13.

²³ *Time*, Apr. 1, 1946, p. 65; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 21.

²⁴ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 20, 1946, p. 9.

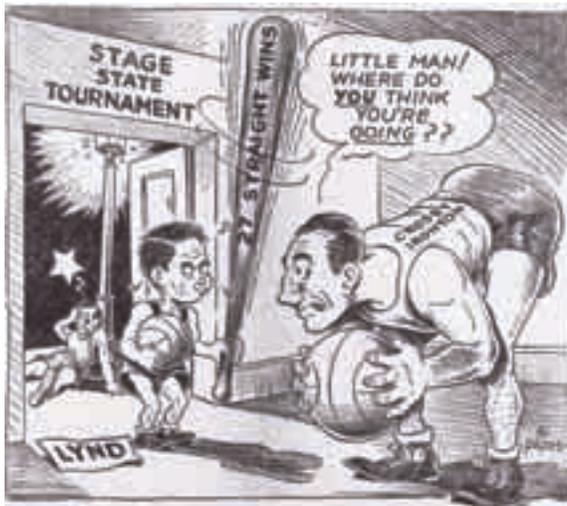
²⁵ *Marshall Messenger*, undated clipping, scrapbook; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 11, Mar. 25, 1946, n.p., scrapbook; *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 6, and undated clipping, scrapbook.



Big-city newspapers covered the Lynd boys at home: drying dishes, taking a call with the help of an operator, and checking the oven with mom.

CROSBY-IRONTON WAS FAVORED

in the March 21 first-round game against Lynd. In fact, C-I was expected to vie for the championship because it had played in both the 1944 and 1945 state tournaments. Teams such as C-I from Minnesota's Iron Range had a reputation for giving their best efforts, their players reputedly having been fed "scrap iron washed down with penetrating oil." In addition, C-I was the only squad whose speed could match Lynd's. Unfortunately for C-I, however, it had to take on Lynd without its regular center, Floyd Peters,



Editorial comment on Lynd challenging Crosby-Ironton, from the March 21 *St. Paul Pioneer Press*

who was sidelined with the mumps.²⁶

Reporting on the Thursday match, George Edmond, sports writer for the *St. Paul Dispatch*, labeled it "the greatest game ever played" in the state tournament. Its tempo was so fast that Crosby-Ironton's team had to take three time-outs in the first period alone to catch its breath. As they sat resting, Lynd's players were reportedly "standing there waiting to run some more." Young sports writer Sid Hartman wrote that University of Minnesota basketball coach Dave

MacMillan said Lynd had "the best fast break" that he had "ever seen a high school team use." Writer Tom Briere declared that no team—high school or college—had ever shown such a "whirling-dervish fast-breaking attack" on the fieldhouse floor. Keeping its fast break sizzling, Lynd often sent three cagers down-court at full tilt, yet Bisel made only one substitution in the entire contest, proving, as Londgren said after the 58-to-47 win, "We never get tired."²⁷

Jim Malosky, Crosby-Ironton's outstanding guard and an all-state football fullback, could not believe what the farm boys from Lynd had done to his team. Malosky had thought that they would "peter out in the second half" but found them running faster at the end than at the start of the match. He said that if the farm boys could play that well, he would "get a cow and start milking," too.²⁸

On Friday night, March 22, in the tournament's semifinal round, Lynd found itself matched against Stillwater. Stillwater by now had plenty of warning to prepare for Lynd and its fast-break dashes, and Coach Bisel saw his team play rather poorly at the start. The WCCO radio announcer commented that Lynd played like an "ordinary team" against Stillwater, but this was enough, as Lynd's "sheer speed" triumphed 45 to 39.²⁹

In Saturday night's championship game, Lynd's phenoms played the Austin Packers. Austin had come into the tournament with the best offense of any state entrant, averaging 54.4 points per game, and had a tight defense that had given them an average victory margin of 24.4 points per contest. Austin also featured height, good coaching, and plenty of talent.³⁰

Sports writer Jim Byrne wrote that the final round was a matter of "cold facts versus sentiment," mighty Austin being the clear pretournament favorite. The school had a strong tourney tradition of 13 prior appearances, including the years 1941, 1942, and 1943. It also had a distinct height advantage, with its 6 foot, 5.5 inch center, Dick Ravenhorst, and a 6 foot, 3 inch forward, Harper Richardson. Austin's team was considered big for the time, averaging 6 feet, 1.3 inch-

²⁶ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 8; *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 30.

²⁷ *St. Paul Dispatch*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 28; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 16, 18; *Minneapolis Daily Times*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 16; *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 30.

²⁸ *Minneapolis Tribune*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 18; *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 30; Jim Malosky, Duluth, telephone interview with author, Feb. 3, 1997.

²⁹ Unidentified clipping, scrapbook; *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 6; WCCO radio broadcast of Lynd-Stillwater game, Mar. 22, 1946.

³⁰ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 18, 1946, p. 22; *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 22, 1946, p. 30.



Most of Lynd's 218 citizens cheered the town to victory.

es in height, while Lynd's squad stood just 5 feet, 10.4 inches on average. Austin's coach, Ove Berven, credited his school's basketball success to a strong coaching program that began in the city's six elementary schools.³¹

Lynd's unbeaten giant-killers, however, were the people's choice. This made the match-up, in the words of a *Pioneer Press* writer, a "dream game."³²

Before the game, Coach Berven told reporters that his team would "play it slow" against Lynd and would not run with them. Bisel told sports writer Sid Hartman that he "had no hopes of beating that big Austin team."

Lynd's victory over the strong Stillwater squad on Friday had left his team ailing: Peterson injured his back; Casper Fischer had a bruised elbow; and Clark suffered from a head cold with recurrent nose bleeds. All three required treatment by university trainers.³³

A record crowd of 16,091 spectators somehow squeezed into the fieldhouse for the final contest. Others had to be turned away from the turnstiles. Some of the disappointed viewers reportedly "cursed the slow development of television" but listened to Bill Gibson broadcasting the game on WCCO radio.³⁴

Saturday's championship game brought to a

³¹ State High School League, *Seventy-first Annual . . . Tournament*, 5; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Mar. 19 and 25, 1946, n.p., scrapbook; *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 21, 1946, p. 32; Malosky telephone interview.

³² *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 6; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 8.

³³ *Minneapolis Daily Times*, Mar. 23, 1946, p. 8.

³⁴ *Marshall Messenger*, Mar. 28, 1946, p. 4.



Coach Chet Bisel on shoulders of jubilant Lynd cagers

disappointing end Lynd's magnificent run for the state title. The taller Austin team controlled the rebounds under both baskets, thus closing the throttle on Lynd's fast breaks. Unable to win rebounds and lacking their usual shooting touch, Lynd was doomed. By one account, powerful Austin took an easy win over the "dog-tired and ice-cold little team" by a score of 63 to 31. Bisel said later that his team probably could have beaten Austin only if they had "taken them by surprise" in the first game of the tournament. Austin's Coach Berven praised the Lynd team to a sports writer, admitting that his squad had to play "its best game of the season" in order to defeat the "farmer boys who came to

the big city."³⁵

Acknowledging the Lynd players' skills, tournament officials voted places on the All-State team to Londgren for his shooting and Clark for his leadership and ball-handling. Clark's brother in the navy, James, made it home for the tournament and told him that all-state status was "not bad for an Irishman." It was surely a great honor for a boy who had honed his basketball skills in a barn.³⁶

After the game, a proud Coach Bisel observed, "We probably won't ever get to the state again in a million years." He was right; although Lynd fielded a basketball team for another three decades, it never made it back to

³⁵ *Marshall Messenger*, Mar. 28, 1946, p. 1; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Mar. 25, 1946, n.p., scrapbook.

³⁶ Joe Clark to Pat Clark, postcard, Mar. 1946, scrapbook.

³⁷ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 25, 1946, p. 21; State High School League, *Seventy-first Annual . . . Tournament*, 29; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 25, 1981, p. 20. After 1979, Lynd's ninth through twelfth graders attended Marshall High School. Chet Bisel moved to Butterfield in 1950, where he coached for six more years before becoming superintendent; Clark to author, Sept. 11, 1996.

the tournament.³⁷

Having made it to state, however, every small-town and outstate team including Lynd received a rousing homecoming celebration, win or lose. Lynd held a community-planned party to honor Coach Bisel and the team that had won so many honors. Austin's champions returned home by train, where 2,000 townspeople and a marching band greeted them with a spontaneous celebration. Local organizations such as the Rotary Club and Kiwanis treated the Austin team to luncheons later in the week. In succeeding decades teams were typically escorted by police cars and fire trucks to a reception at the high-school gymnasium or cafeteria. Invariably, the boys were called upon to speak to the crowds, at which point they bashfully mumbled a few vague "thank yous" to fans, parents, and coaches. Some schools treated both team and townspeople to a meal, such as Franklin's 1965 potluck lunch or Edgerton's 1960 barbecued-beef feed. These state tournament homecomings extended the excitement of the pageant with a "spectacle" of grateful community homage.³⁸

With Lynd's victory, Williams Arena became the focal point of state high-school basketball culture. After an early decade in Northfield, five years at Kenwood Armory in Minneapolis, and a few odd sessions in the 1930s and 1940s at the Minneapolis and St. Paul Auditoriums, the tournament settled in 1945 into "the Barn," as the vast, neither elegant nor stylish university court was called. There it remained until the 1970s. The 1946 Lynd squad was but one rural team to play in the spacious fieldhouse, but the farm boys' accomplishments surely contributed to the frequently heard remark: "Boy, you sure could put a lot of hay in here!"³⁹

THE TREMENDOUS POSTWAR
popularity of the state basketball tournament insured the game's dominance of high-school

sports, as an entire generation of children became basketball-playing teens before their proud parents' eyes. Rural baby boomers played ball in consolidated high schools with large gymnasiums built, in part, with federal dollars, while increasingly large numbers of Minnesota children grew up in metropolitan areas. Urban schools won many basketball titles because they had large populations to draw upon and their hoopsters had more time than country boys to practice basketball skills. In the 1950s, Twin Cities-area schools took 6 out of 10 tournaments.⁴⁰

The 1960s brought the ascent of suburban schools—Wayzata, St. Louis Park, Minnetonka, and Edina won the state championship 6 out of 10 times after 1959. Edina, considered the wealthiest school in the suburban Lake Conference, won the crown three years in a row from 1966 to 1968.⁴¹

In response, outstate schools pushed for two separate tournaments. They reasoned, according to one newspaper account, that even if a small-school team miraculously made it to finals, it usually "didn't have the size to cope with the Lake Conference" or other Twin Cities teams and would fall in the first round of the tourney. The petitioners finally got their wish in 1971.⁴²

The new two-tournament format may have leveled the courts for small and large schools, but no longer could a town like Lynd in 1946, Esko in 1955, or Franklin in 1965 capture the state's attention. Nor could a small town become legendary the way the Iron Range's Gilbert did in 1951 or Edgerton in 1960, the latter defeating both mighty Richfield and Austin (still coached by Ove Berven) to become the smallest town ever to win Minnesota's state championship.⁴³

Beginning in 1971, the smaller schools of nonmetropolitan Minnesota vied in their Class A tournament with eight regional champi-

³⁸ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 25, 1946, p. 21; *Redwood Gazette*, Mar. 30, 1965, p. 6; John Hoffbeck (1985 Morgan state-tournament participant), Cincinnati, to author, Feb. 21, 1997; *Edgerton Enterprise*, Apr. 7, 1960, p. 7, Mar. 30, 1961, p. 6.

³⁹ The hay quote has been repeated many times about various large arenas by midwestern high-school coaches, for example, by Don Dravis of Staples, Minn., and Douglas Wagner of Burlington, No. Dak., speaking about the North Dakota state tournament in Bismarck's auditorium.

⁴⁰ Ralph Hickock, *The Encyclopedia of North American Sports History* (New York: Facts On File, 1992), 199; Minnesota State High School League, *Seventieth Annual Minnesota High School State Basketball Tournament*, Mar. 25, 26, 27, 1982 (St. Paul: MSHSL, 1982), 4.

⁴¹ State High School League, *Seventieth Annual . . . Tournament*, 4.

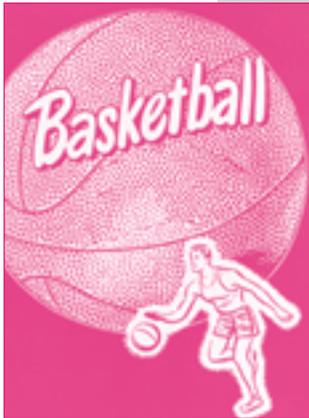
⁴² "Franklin Loses to Minnetonka, 76-54," *Redwood Gazette*, Mar. 25, 1965, p. 1.

⁴³ *Edgerton Enterprise*, Mar. 31, 1960, p. 4; State High School League, *Seventieth Annual . . . Tournament*, 4.

CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES 1913–1970

YEAR	CHAMPIONS	RUNNER-UP	SCORE
1913	Fosston	Mountain Lake	29–27
1914	Stillwater	Winona	30–4
1915	Red Wing	Mountain Lake	30–18
1916	Virginia	Mechanic Arts, St. Paul	20–9
1917	Rochester	Mountain Lake	19–8
1918	Waseca	Central, Duluth	24–18
1919	Albert Lea	New Ulm	37–8
1920	Red Wing	Mankato	21–10
1921	Central, Minneapolis	New Ulm	19–15
1922	Red Wing	Madison	34–27
1923	Aurora	Austin	24–14
1924	Two Harbors	South, Minneapolis	21–12
1925	Mechanic Arts, St. Paul	Buffalo	20–8
1926	Gaylord	Gilbert	13–9
1927	South, Minneapolis	Excelsior	32–13
1928	Moorhead	Edison, Minneapolis	29–16
1929	Moorhead	Red Wing	20–16*
1930	Mechanic Arts, St. Paul	Moorhead	23–13
1931	Glencoe	Buffalo	22–14
1932	Thief River Falls	Chisholm	21–15
1933	Red Wing	North, Minneapolis	16–13
1934	Chisholm	Mechanic Arts, St. Paul	29–27
1935	Austin	Glencoe	26–24*
1936	Bemidji	Wadena	26–20
1937	Edison, Minneapolis	Virginia	37–24
1938	Thief River Falls	North, Minneapolis	31–29
1939	Mountain Lake	Marshall, Minneapolis	37–31
1940	Breckenridge	Red Wing	43–40
1941	Buhl	Red Wing	31–29
1942	Buhl	Marshall	30–29
1943	Washington, St. Paul	Alexandria	52–33
1944	Patrick Henry, Minneapolis	Crosby–Ironton	51–42
1945	Patrick Henry, Minneapolis	Ely	66–35
1946	Austin	Lynd	63–31
1947	Denfeld, Duluth	Crosby–Ironton	46–44
1948	Bemidji	Hopkins	38–29
1949	Humboldt, St. Paul	Mankato	47–35
1950	Central, Duluth	Robbinsdale	42–40
1951	Gilbert	Canby	69–52
1952	Hopkins	South St. Paul	42–29
1953	Hopkins	Hibbing	58–47
1954	Brainerd	Bemidji	49–47
1955	Washburn, Minneapolis	Austin	67–58
1956	Roosevelt, Minneapolis	Blue Earth	101–54
1957	Roosevelt, Minneapolis	Red Wing	59–51
1958	Austin	Brainerd	68–63
1959	Wayzata	Carlton	55–41
1960	Edgerton	Austin	72–61
1961	Central, Duluth	Bemidji	51–50
1962	St. Louis Park	South St. Paul	62–57
1963	Marshall	Cloquet	75–74
1964	Luverne	Rochester	72–66
1965	Minnetonka	Faribault	71–60
1966	Edina–Morningside	East, Duluth	82–75*
1967	Edina	Moorhead	72–55
1968	Edina	Moorhead	70–45
1969	John Marshall, Rochester	Central, Duluth	58–42
1970	Sherburn	South St. Paul	78–62

*Overtime game



ons for the small-school crown at the same time that eight regional champs from Class AA competed for the large-school championship. With so many games taking place simultaneously, Williams Arena could no longer be the sole site of the tournament. By the 1980s the championships for both were held in the St. Paul Civic Center Arena, while Williams Arena hosted only first-round games and St. Paul's Macalester College housed the consolation games. Critics in the Twin Cities argued that the Class A tournament could just as well be held in St. Cloud or elsewhere, because small schools could not come close to filling any large metro sports facility.⁴⁴

Simultaneously, other sports began to rival basketball for attention. High-school hockey, popular in northern Minnesota, caught on in the Twin Cities and its suburbs after the war, and by the 1970s the state hockey tournament matched basketball in prestige. Girls' basketball tournaments also became reality after the federal government outlawed gender discrimination in sports through Title IX of the Education Act of 1972.⁴⁵

Other factors contributed to a decline in prestige of boys' basketball. When the Minnesota Twins baseball team and the Minnesota Vikings football team opened their seasons in 1961, the two franchises began creating regional loyalties to the professional squads. By the mid-1960s, when color television and instant replays brought games into Minnesotans' living rooms, many fans became as loyal to pro teams located in suburban Bloomington as they had been to their hometown teams. Television-network programming gave Minnesotans new options in sports entertainment, and once-local loyalties became even weaker as cable television networks grew in the 1980s.⁴⁶

The statewide media played a major role in both the ascent and the decline of the state basketball tournament. Twin Cities newspapers such as the *Minneapolis Star*, *Minneapolis Tribune*, and *St. Paul Pioneer Press* gave marvelous coverage to state-tournament teams and made the event a main feature of Minnesota's sports

scene. WCCO radio in particular helped build the popularity of the University of Minnesota's football and basketball programs and the state high-school boys' tournament from the 1920s into the 1950s. WCCO personalities such as Sid Hartman, Woody Harrier, and Ray Christensen created and maintained interest in high-school basketball and other sports during the 1960s and subsequent decades through their "Prep Parade" programs, which featured an all-star team of the week of 12 athletes from around the state. WCCO radio also established a sports network of cooperating local stations, so that after the Twins arrived in Minnesota, local stations could broadcast the professional games.⁴⁷

Television, which helped professional sports grow in the 1960s, also built up high-school basketball. Twin Cities station WTCN created a network of outstate TV stations that bought the right to broadcast games locally. This statewide coverage of the boys' basketball tournament contributed to its popularity before 1971, but after the two-class system began, attendance declined, partly because fans could stay home

1940s portable Philco radio



⁴⁴ State High School League, *Seventieth Annual . . . Tournament*, 16–17; Hoffbeck to author.

⁴⁵ Allen Guttman, *A Whole New Ball Game: An Interpretation of American Sports* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 154–57; Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Spectators* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 340–42.

⁴⁶ Benjamin G. Rader, *In Its Own Image: How Television Has Transformed Sports* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 4, 5.

⁴⁷ Sarjeant, *The First Forty*, 51, 69, 90; *Edgerton Enterprise*, Mar. 17, 1960, p. 7, Mar. 24, 1960, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Edgerton Enterprise*, Mar. 31, 1960, p. 17, Mar. 23, 1961, n.p., scrapbook.



Newspaperman Sid Hartman (at right), photographed in the 1950s with fellow WCCO radio sportscasters (from left) Dick Enroth, Halsey Hall, and Bernie Bierman

and watch the event on television.⁴⁸

High-school officials have tinkered with the structure of the state tournament in an effort to restore some of its former popularity. For instance, in 1995 large- and small-school regional champions played in the same tournament in a “Sweet Sixteen” format that allowed David-and-Goliath match-ups between outstate and metropolitan teams. This scheme was replaced in 1997 by a four-class tournament that provided access for an increased number of schools, a move that even Indiana, the last state to retain the single-class format, has adopted for the 1997–98 season.⁴⁹

AMID THE SPLINTERING OF LOYALTIES

and the proliferation of professional sports, the boys’ state basketball tournament still means a great deal to those who played or cheered their team to victory. Schoolboy successes like Mark Olberding of Melrose (1972–74), Randy Breuer of Lake City (1978–79), and Kevin McHale of Hibbing (1975–76) went on to careers in the

National Basketball Association. Towns like Staples, previously overshadowed by Brainerd and Crosby-Ironton, produced numerous state entrants in the 1980s and 1990s. Even Morgan, which had never won a district or region championship, made it to the big show in 1985 after pairing its school and sports programs with neighboring Franklin (whose center stood 6 feet, 11 inches). Players remember their accomplishments and treasure their memories.⁵⁰

The boys’ basketball tournament reminds Minnesota of its dual rural-urban identity. Largely rural by geography, the state has been demographically urban since 1950. Never as rural as the Dakotas nor as sophisticated as New York or Chicago, Minnesotans continue to want their “barnyard basketeers” to do well, although most would not want to live in towns like Lynd.

Now-aging observers of the 1946 game between Lynd and Crosby-Ironton still tell willing listeners that it was the greatest game they ever witnessed. Jim Malosky, who later played football at the University of Minnesota with Bud

⁴⁹ *Bemidji Pioneer*, Mar. 27, 1997, p. 7; Alexander Wolff, “The End of the Road,” *Sports Illustrated*, Mar. 17, 1997, p. 26–33.

⁵⁰ State High School League, *Seventieth Annual . . . Tournament*, 4–8, 28; Hoffbeck to author.

Grant and Billy Bye and coached football at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, points to it as an outstanding game in Minnesota sporting lore.⁵¹

As for Lynd's team of destiny, most of the Panthers players became farmers. Clark, Londgren, Wallace Fischer, and Sharratt served in the Korean War. Clark settled down on the home place where his vintage basketball hoop is still nailed securely to the haymow wall. The Fischers became farmers, and Casper later served as a state legislator. Sharratt became a teacher and coach at nearby Milroy. Londgren opened a television and appliance store in Marshall. All remember fondly the glorious tournament of March 1946, when the Hayloft Hoopsters enthralled the entire state.⁵²

⁵¹ Malosky telephone interview.

⁵² *Marshall Messenger*, Feb. 2, 1966, p. 9; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 25, 1981, p. 20.

Trading card for state high-school basketball success Kevin McHale of Hibbing (1975–76), who played with the Boston Celtics before becoming vice-president of basketball operations for the Timberwolves

5-71

KEVIN McHALE
 BORN: 12/18/51, HIBBING, MN
 HEIGHT: 6'10" WEIGHT: 225
 COLLEGE: UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
 DRAFTED: 1ST RD-PICK 3, BOSTON, 1980

PER 48 MINUTES
 POINTS 29.1 REB AST 14.1

Year	Club	G	PTS	FT%	REB	AST	STL	BLK	PTS	REB
1969-70	Bayton	79	1,070	76.0	712	149	36	135	1,965	19.8
1970-71	Bayton	64	1,074	77.6	651	181	28	134	1,940	21.2
1971-72	Bayton	17	654	82.0	122	146	20	172	1,050	30.1
1972-73	Bayton	64	824	79.1	538	175	37	82	1,646	27.6
1973-74	Bayton	78	1,440	81.0	627	172	35	97	1,708	22.5
1974-75	Bayton	62	1,449	80.0	677	172	30	117	2,173	30.9
1975-76	Bayton	56	1,022	82.0	485	128	25	146	1,657	18.4
Pro Totals		644	967	79.0	6,034	1,815	217	1,073	16,761	18.1

Many people pointed to the Celtics' aging front line as a reason that Boston would have a subpar year in 1990-91. But Kevin McHale, along with Larry Bird and Robert Parish, proved spry enough to capture the Atlantic Division title.

Illustrations are from the following sources (all dates are 1946 unless otherwise noted): p. 335, *Minneapolis Tribune*, Mar. 22, p. 18; p. 334–35 and graphics, p. 336, 346, *Minnesota State High School Basketball Tournament program*, 1946, 1956, MHS; p. 337, Pat Clark, Lynd; p. 339 (top), Ward Lambert, *Practical Basketball* (Chicago: Athletic Journal Pub. Co., 1932), 133; p. 340, *Marshall Messenger*, Mar. 28, Lynd sec., p. 1; p. 341, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 18, p. 21; p. 343, *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Mar. 22, p. 36; p. 344, *Minneapolis Daily Times*, Mar. 23, p. 8; p. 347, MHS Collections, photo by Peter Latner; p. 348, Lawrence P. Haeg Jr., *60 Years Strong: The Story of One of America's Great Radio Stations, 1924–1984* (Minneapolis: Viking Press, 1984), 58 (courtesy WCCO); p. 349 (top), author's collection.

Minneapolis Star Journal, March 18, 1946





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