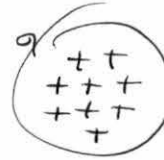


CARTER CITY BASKETBALL



Presented to
Dr. Stuart Sprague
Morehead State University

James R. Morgan
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INTRODUCTION

It was my intention to write the history of the Carter High School Wildcats' basketball team in its entirety from its inception in 1935 until the high school was closed in 1969. It soon became apparent that the idea was too ambitious. This paper will concentrate on the "glory years" of Carter City Wildcat basketball, from the 1951-52 season through the 1954 season. It was in those years that the little high school in northern Carter County rose to challenge perennial powers Ashland, Olive Hill, Boyd County, and Clark County. Some of those players have grandchildren living in the area, and the heritage of those great games and an intense pride in their recollection are alive and well. It is time someone told the Carter City story. Hopefully, this paper will provide the basics, and further details and recollections will be inspired by this framework.

My reasons for writing about a small high school's basketball team bear mentioning. First, Appalachian history is to some extent a history of small isolated communities. Forty to sixty years ago, transportation was, of course, not as developed. Consolidation had

not yet taken place. There were many one-room grade schools, and amuch larger number of high schools than we have today. This was the era of the truly neighborhood school. Whatever happened in a community, like Carter City, usually happened at the school. The local communities developed fierce pride and competitive spirit which was given an outlet through basketball teams, the only sport played by most of the smaller schools. Basketball provided an avenue through which the boys from the rural farming areas could compete with, and often best, their town neighbors. It was an era, too, when television was just becoming popular, and the local ballteam was one of the few means of entertainment in rural Appalachia. A glimpse of Appalachia, specifically northeastern Kentucky, 40 to 50 years ago, provides the background for some specifics on how one of our favorite sports was played then, and what it meant in a community to play on the high school team.

Section I covers the 1935-1949 years, which set the stage for the Coach Harold Holbrook era of 1951-54. Section II will tell of the 1951-54 years which is the main focus and interest of the paper. Section III provides a brief overview of the 1955-69 years.

The first Carter City basketball team was formed in the 1935-36 season, according to the best recollection of Jack Fultz, former Olive Hill High School player and coach. The Ashland Daily Independent, in its survey of district tournament teams for 1934-35, makes no mention of a Carter team. However, the March 7, 1936 edition states that Denton defeated Carter in the first round of the 55th district, 37-19. Players for Carter were Holbrook, C. McGlone, D. McGlone, Ramey, Davis, and Fultz, all names still common in the Carter City area.

The March 4, 1939 edition of the paper (A.D.I.) reports that Carter was defeated by Hitchins 28-20 in a game played at Olive Hill. In 1939, Carter was in the 63rd district.

In the 1940 district tournament, Carter was defeated by Breckinridge Training School of Morehead 41-30. The article (A.D.I.) stated that Breck led 30-12 at halftime, and that the second team played practically all of the second half. Players for Carter were listed as Sutherland, McGlone, Ratcliff, Marshall, Parker, Kiser, and Burton.

In March 1946, Carter was defeated by Grayson 37-30 in "unexpectedly easy fashion" (A.D.I.). Players

listed for Carter: Sutherland, Warnock, Burnett, and Worthington.

The March 8, 1947 A.D.I. reported a Carter victory over Tollsboro, 35-28. The same edition reported that Carter was defeated by Hitchins 43-19 in the semi-finals of the 63rd district. Players for Carter: Gibson, Underwood, Richardson, Burton, Harris, Kiser, and Wright.

Research revealed no box score for the 1948 district tournament, but in a pre-district report, the A.D.I. reported the 16th region standings. Records for 23 teams were given, with four schools not reporting. Carter's record was four wins, 21 losses (2 Mar, 1948).

Vanceburg beat Carter in the 63rd district tournament, 57-39. No box score was included (2 Mar 1949, A.D.I.).

To summarize the early years of Carter's basketball team, there appears to be little success. The research for these years is of the district tournaments only, but there were few victories and most losses were lopsided. Harold Holbrook, Carter player in the late 30's and early 40's, and Carter coach from 1951-54, mentioned that Carter played its games on an outside court until the present school building with gymnasium was built in 1939. Another notable item is that there were so many more high

schools then -- there were 27 teams in the 16th region in 1948. Additionally, as evidenced by the low scores, a slower style of ball was played in those years.

The 1949 loss to Vanceburg in the district tournament was Carter's last game for two years. According to John Carl Ramey, manager at Carter from 1951-54, Carter's high school was closed from the fall of 1949 until the fall of 1951 due to low enrollment. Apparently, though, the seed of interest in a basketball team had been planted in the community. When the school was re-opened in 1951, it was with a new coach and a much more competitive team.

SECTION II 1951-54 THE HOLBROOK YEARS

The three years beginning in the fall of 1951 and ending in the spring of 1954 were the "winningest" three years in Carter's basketball history. Coached by Harold Holbrook, former player, who also served as the school's principal, the team reached its pinnacle by finishing second to the Ashland Tomcats in the 1954 regional tournament. Although it had only 94 students in 1953-54, Carter had a three-year record of 86-20 during Holbrook's three years as coach. According to both Holbrook and Bruce McGlone, Carter player who graduated in 1953, Carter played a modern, fast-breaking style of ball. Scores were higher than a few years earlier. For example, Carter beat Salt Lick 71-56 in 1951-52, and Tollsboro 65-45. In the 53-54 season, Carter broke the 100 point mark by defeating Morehead 104-61. They scored 90 in defeating South Portsmouth and scored in the 80's at least five times.

Conversely, one of Carter's chief rivals, Olive Hill, played a more deliberate, disciplined ball-control game favored by Coach Jack Fultz (Ramey). Lower scores indicate this style of play. Carter defeated Olive Hill 42-38 and lost 53-56 in two of their lowest scoring games of the year. Both styles were successful, as Olive Hill was able to beat Carter several times during this era.

Bruce McGlone relates that Carter played both zone and man-to-man. Holbrook said that his team's style of play was similar to today's style. A notable difference was in individual offensive plays, as players shot more of a push shot and a hook shot. The modern jump shot was just coming into favor in the early 50's.

When the 1951-52 season began, Coach Holbrook brought several players with him from Grayson. These were Carter residents who attended school and played ball in Grayson during the two years that the high school was closed at Carter. In a preview of the season, the paper (13 Nov 1951 A.D.I.) reported that all five of the Carter starters had played for Grayson the previous year. These players were seniors Roy Sutherland and Bobby Joe Floyd, juniors Russell Pennington and Bruce McGlone, and sophomore James Kiser. The article goes on to predict that "with tall Kiser working for rebounds, and the smooth style Holbrook taught McGlone during the two years at Prichard, the general trend of thought here is that Carter City will be a strong team."

Carter began the season with several victories: Olive Hill was beaten 50-36 (21 Nov 1951 A.D.I.), Grayson fell 50-23 (26 Nov 1951 A.D.I.), Sandy Hook was defeated 37-33 at Sandy Hook (3 Dec 1953 A.D.I.), and

Carter beat a strong Hitchins team 43-42 at Carter (6 Dec 1951 A.D.I.). Leading scorers in the early part of the season were James Kiser and Bruce McGlone.

After the Christmas break, Carter again went on a winning streak, defeating Tollsboro 65-45 (6 Jan 1952 A.D.I.), South Portsmouth 60-54 (10 Jan 1952 A.D.I.), and Salt Lick 74-51 as Kiser scored 24 and "colorful redhead" Bruce McGlone scored 23 (11 Jan 1952 A.D.I.). The streak ended when Olive Hill beat Carter 40-37 in what the paper called "the hardest fought game played at Olive Hill this year" (14 Jan 1952 A.D.I.). The Carter Wildcats bounced back to beat Ashland's Holy Family team 70-50 to run its E.K.C. record to 10-3 (21 Jan 1952 A.D.I.).

In these years, the E.K.C. tournament was played the last week of January through the first week of February. The league had a pair of sectional tourneys from which the first and second place teams met in a four-team tourney playoff. The results of 1952's E.K.C. tourney were reported in these terms: "Hitchins rallied to eliminate Carter 45-43 before the largest crowd ever to see a game at Grayson" (25 Jan 1952 A.D.I.).

As the teams neared district tournament time, the Carter Wildcats lost a rematch with the Holy Family team 52-47 (9 Feb 1952 A.D.I.). Later, The Carter five

beat Boyd County 61-59 as Kiser scored 20 points (24 Feb 1952 A.D.I.). In the final regular season game, South Portsmouth beat the Wildcats 58-57 at South Portsmouth to run the Wildcats' record to 23-9 entering district tournament play (6 Mar A.D.I.).

Carter fell in the first round of the district tournament, to Vanceburg 56-55 despite 20 points from Bruce McGlone (7 Mar 1952 A.D.I.). A promise of future success could be seen in the All-Eastern Kentucky Conference team chosen by The Ashland Daily Independent in its March 3, 1952 edition, as sophomore James Kiser and junior Bruce McGlone were named to the 10-player squad. Carter finished the season at 23-10 and graduated only two seniors, Roy Sutherland and Bobby Joe Floyd.

Carter returned three starters and five other lettermen in 1952-53. The team got off to a great start by beating Blaine 96-36, with Kiser scoring 20 points (16 Nov 1952 A.D.I.). They then defeated Sandy Hook 63-46 (24 Nov 1952 A.D.I.), Tollsboro 65-49, Salt Lick 74-54, and South Portsmouth 83-32 before losing to Vanceburg 63-53. The Wildcats bounced back to defeat Boyd County 80-75 behind James Kiser's 30 points and Bruce McGlone's 21 points (The Wildcat Yearbook, 1953).

Carter defeated Holy Family after Christmas break 84-59 as Kiser led the way with 30 points (3 Jan 1953

A.D.I.). As the E.K.C. Sectional Tournament approached, Boyd County, Carter, and Olive Hill were tied for the E.K.C. lead with 9-3 conference marks. (27 Jan 1952 A.D.I.). The Carter Wildcats went into the tournament on a roll, beating South Portsmouth, Hitchins, and Vanceburg in succession, to enter the tournament as one of the favorites (The Wildcat Yearbook 1953).

Carter beat Grayson in the first round E.K.C. 73-34 (30 Jan 1953 A.D.I.), but was eliminated from the tournament by losing to Olive Hill 63-52 (31 Jan 1953 A.D.I.).

The regular season had a happier ending, as Carter defeated Grayson 85-50, clinching the regular season E.K.C. championship. Grayson ended its season without a victory (2 Mar 1953 A.D.I.).

In the post season, Carter opened its district by defeating Grayson 73-47 (6 Mar 1953 A.D.I.). In the semi-finals, Vanceburg, as in the 1952 season, knocked Carter out of the tournament with a score of 67-65 (7 Mar 1953 A.D.I.).

The February 22, 1953 Louisville Courier-Journal article "Hoopin' It Up" by Johnny Carrico pegged Carter as one of the darkhorse title contenders for the 16th region crown. However, as noted, the Wildcats never got out of the district.

The first two seasons under Harold Holbrook produced many wins, but the Wildcats were still looking to make their first regional tournament appearance. Although the Carter squad lost an important player in forward Bruce McGlone, the majority of the team remained, including star player James Kiser, to challenge for the title in 1953-54

Carter began the 1953-54 season by running out to a 15-1 mark, losing only to Sandy Hook, 54-53, in the first 16 games (The Wildcat Yearbook, 1954). The Wildcats appeared headed for their second straight E.K.C. championship before being defeated by Olive Hill 56-53 (6 Jan 1954 A.D.I.). The Cats clinched second place by beating Grayson 85-55 (15 Feb 1954 A.D.I.). Olive Hill clinched the regular season championship by beating Holy Family the same night.

In the E.K.C. tournament, Carter was favored "by virtue of the best record in the region" (27 Jan 1954 A.D.I.). The Wildcats got by Sandy Hook in the semi-finals of the sectional, but lost to Olive Hill in the finals (31 Jan 1954 A.D.I.). Since both the winner and the runner-up advanced to the E.K.C. tourney playoffs, Carter was given a second chance for the elusive tournament title. In the semi-finals, Carter defeated Greenup 49-42 to earn another shot at Olive Hill. The results remained the same, however, as Olive

Hill whipped Carter for the third time that season, 55-42 (7 Feb 1954 A.D.I.).

It was payback time in the 63rd district tournament as Carter beat Vanceburg 81-66. Vanceburg had knocked Carter out of the tournament the two previous years (5 Mar 1954 A.D.I.). In the district semi-finals, Carter met an Olive Hill team that had defeated them three times. The fourth time proved to be the charm as Carter knocked the Comets from post-season play 45-32 (6 Mar 1954 A.D.I.). The Carter City Wildcats won their first district championship by defeating Hitchins 51-38.

In the regional tournament, Carter met Mt. Sterling in the first round. Using a full-court press, Carter jumped to a 24-14 first quarter lead and never was behind in beating the Mt. Sterling team 62-52 (12 Mar 1954 A.D.I.). In the semi-finals, the Wildcats defeated Sharpsburg 63-53 behind James Kiser's 20 points. The paper described Kiser as "one of the highest scorers in Kentucky basketball history" (13 Mar 1954 A.D.I.). In the region final, Carter met the Ashland Tomcats, a team which had dominated regional play for years. The Wildcats offered stubborn resistance, but Ashland used a fast-break offense to produce a 75-58 Tomcat victory, but Carter, "a team with 34

wins behind them, was a worthy opponent that fought gamely every step of the way and was not out of the running until the last two minutes of the game" (14 Mar 1954 A.D.I.).

This loss to Ashland was the last game Harold Holbrook coached at Carter. It was also the last game for James Kiser, who went on to captain Eastern Kentucky College's (EKU) basketball team. Jack Fultz, Olive Hill coach during this period, described Kiser as "a great player. He had a jump shot (left-handed) and worked the boards real well." Coach Fultz described the Comets' loss to Carter in the district as a game in which Carter's trademark 2-3 zone bottled up his star, Phillip Stone, and his other players got afraid to shoot. Fultz described his team as getting "tournament jitters," but gave Coach Holbrook credit for defending Stone well.

George Wolfford, longtime writer for The Ashland Daily Independent, described how Eastern Kentucky College (EKU) got involved in recruiting James Kiser:

During the winter of 1953-54, I was a sophomore at Eastern Kentucky State College (now University). I am not an athlete, but mixed with the crowd as a member of KYMA Eastern KY MAroons), the pep club of the school.

I kept my eye on home-county basketball, and went to as many high school games as I did college, I guess. I believed that James Kiser had the qualities needed to make the grade as a college player at EKSC's level.

Our coach was the notorious-famous Paul McBrayer, who is still around down in Anderson County, past 90 I expect. He was a red-faced Irishman who commanded respect, and I was afraid of him.

It took some guts on my part to go to his office to make my recommendation. I sat outside, started to leave once or twice (I was 18 years old). When I finally got in and told him what was on my mind, he treated me most graciously and told me that Milt Fraley of Sandy Hook had told him similar things just days before. Milt was the father of Harold, who played for Eastern.

Based on those recommendations, he authorized two assistants to go up to scout Jim out. I agreed to guide them to Carter City, and in so doing picked out the team I thought Carter could beat by the highest score. You can look up the schedule and score, because I don't know what it was, but it was a home game with Blaine.

We drove up there by way of U.S. 60 and Ky. 2, and parked in front of the school to await the ball game. We got there early, but sat and sat, maybe an hour and a half, and no one showed up. I went to a house across the road and asked if there wasn't a ball game scheduled that day and the person who answered said "Yes, but the boys from Blaine had to come and play in the daytime because they have to be home in time to milk."

James Kiser went on to a career as teacher, coach, and school administrator in Estill County. His son, Brian, is a member of the University of Louisville's basketball team as a 6'7" forward.

Carter High School continued to have winning teams throughout the 50's. They were coached from 54-55 through 56-57 by Glenn Sparks, father of current Carter County Schools Superintendent, Cita Sparks Dyer, and later by Ralph "Buster" Cartee. Some of their star players of the later 50's were Rex English, Deward Parker, Tex English, and Paul Webb. Tex English's daughter, Brenda, was recently a member of the Morehead State University's Lady Eagles' basketball team. Although the Wildcats made regional trips in 1957 and again in 1958 as district runner-ups, they never again reached the height they aspired to under Coach Holbrook in 1954 (14 Mar 1958 A.D.I.).

In the 1960's, the talent ran out (Jack Fultz interview). The Wildcats went one entire season without a win (1964-65). In that season, Breckinridge player, Danny Cornett, scored 87 points against the outmanned Carter squad. The high school was closed to juniors and seniors after the 1967-68 school year. Freshmen and sophomores played in 1968-69. They did not have a win, but several of those players played key roles for Olive Hill and for Prichard the next year, and for East and West Carter when these new schools opened in 1971 (Ron Morgan interview).

Today, Carter is an elementary school housing pre-school through fifth grade students. This is the first year since 1935-36 that the school has no basketball team. Enrollment is below 100; local families fear consolidation will send young students to Olive Hill and to Prichard Elementary in Grayson. There are still people who remember 41 years ago this past March when Carter was an example of a small school that went toe-to-toe with the biggest and best, and almost earned a trip to the Sweet Sixteen.

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