

THE RUSHVILLE LIONS 75-76 BASKETBALL SEASON

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This is the 25th article I have written to commemorate the Rush County Bicentennial in 2022. The 1975-76 Rushville Lions State Finals run has been referenced in a couple of previous articles, but I wanted to further explore some of the events and people that went into that miracle season. My sources were Ken Stanley who was an Assistant Coach under Head Coach Larry Angle, and Kevin Snyder who was a Student Manager/Statistician for the Lions. Considerable information came from an article that Kevin wrote for the local newspaper to honor the Lions 25th anniversary. We also checked some scores and facts from Brian Sheehan's book, Here's To Our Rushville High.....Legend Of The Lions.

Coach Larry Angle had been an assistant to Coach Ken Pennington when Angle was selected Head Coach in 1973. Angle's teams showed steady improvement during his three years....IHSAA Regional Finalist in 1974, IHSAA Semi-State Finalist in 1975, and IHSAA State Finalist in 1976.

The 74-75 team set the stage for the following season. Senior team members included Mark English, Kip Burkett, Doug West, Joe Brooks, Dave Newman, and Greg Hoeing. They were a very talented, dedicated, intelligent group. Several of them were three sport athletes. Their advancement to the final game of the Semi-State came because of a great team win over a Muncie North team led by an outstanding player named Sam Drummer.

Several underclassmen returned for the 75-76 season, and there was great anticipation in the community. Then a new player came on the scene. His father had taken a position at Trane Corporation, and the family moved to Rushville from Speedway. His name was Brad Miley. He was 6'7", broad shouldered, and he played tennis too! Coach Angle brought Brad along slowly at first, but by the time Rushville played Aurora in the IHSAA Regional Brad had transformed into a rebounding machine. He still holds the state record for rebounding in the state finals with 29 for one game and 50 for two games. Miley went on to play basketball at Indiana State with Larry Bird. If you watch any film from the Sycamore's famous team you will see Miley setting pick after pick for Bird.

The 75-76 Lions team was composed of the following players: The Goins brothers, Rick and Dennis, Brian Easley, Myron Shouse, Neville Cullum, Steve Goddard, Joe Redden, Rob Hendrix, Bruce Copple, Joe Beard, Jim Ponsler, Greg Harcourt, and Miley. Several of the bench players would have been starters on any other team.

Angle did a masterful job of keeping everyone involved and focused. Every player had talent, but the key to Rushville's success was Rick Goins. He was tall, smart, and smooth. In my book he was one of the best shooters to ever wear a Lion uniform. He could elevate above the opposition or beat you with his first step. He also had a quiet, calming influence on his teammates. Rick set a one game scoring mark of 45 points versus Shenandoah. Both he and

Brad Miley were selected to the Indiana All Star Team, and Rick went on to play at Miami of Ohio.

Managers for the 75-76 team included: John Patterson, Sr., Trainer, Mike Hammonds, Sr. Manager, Jeff Downs, Joe Rushton, and Kevin Snyder, Statistician. Cheerleaders were: Tracy Pribble, Lesa Bowling, Karen Randall, Cheryl Custer, and Annie Miller.

The coaching staff was well qualified. Head Coach Larry Angle had played at New Salem where he was an outstanding shooter under Coach Dick Dunn. Angle played collegiate basketball at Utah State. Assistant Coach Jerry Banks had been an outstanding player at Brookville and Earlham College. Assistant Coach Ken Stanley had played varsity basketball at both Mays and Rushville. Stanley and Charlie Gratzler coached the freshman teams. Coach Stanley would later on become Rushville's Head Coach for six years. Charlie Gratzler played high school basketball at Needmore. Charlie was one of the scouts for the Lions. Junior High coaches Dick Osting and Bill Swigart also scouted for the team.

What kind of a coach was Larry Angle? Ken Stanley commented, "He was the best!" Angle was good about including the cheerleaders, managers, administrators, and support staff at recognition events, meals, and photo sessions. He also realized "his team" included everyone in the community. During a game he was very animated. He would stomp his foot on the floor to get the players attention like Coach Pennington had done.

There were three wins in the 75-76 State Tournament that stand out in my mind. The first was a win in the Sectional against a tough Greensburg team 59-54. Second was the last second heroics in the Hinkle Semi State vs. Richmond winning 81-78. Third was the great come-from-behind win over East Chicago Washington after having trailed in the first half 33-12, then winning 68-59.

The Lions lost one regular season game to SCC foe Jeffersonville Red Devils. By the time Rushville advanced to the final game of the state, at Market Square Arena, we hoped Jeffersonville would be there too. They were not; the Marion Grants defeated them to reach the final game. We lost the championship game to Marion primarily because of a player named Dave Colescott. He took over the game for Marion, and the Giants prevailed 82-76.

Looking back at the ride home after the final game, Kevin Snyder described it this way: "The bus ride home to Rush County was one to never forget! The shock of the loss clouded our minds for a few minutes after the game; however, our ride home was not nearly as quiet as some losses home during a road trip. To have been to the final game and lost was better than not to have been there at all! As we traveled down Highway 52 we received warm welcomes from every small community despite having just lost the state championship. Upon entering Rush County, fans lined the ends of every county road welcoming us home. The town of Arlington turned out in force with a warm welcome, and the parking lots were loaded with fans in their cars honking and waving. Upon approaching the Rushville city limits, our bus was stopped by the police escort and an officer came on our bus and said, "Boys you will not believe the people waiting for you in town! It is unbelievable, and for security reasons an officer will be riding with

you as we take you through the downtown and up Main Street and on to the gymnasium which is already filled to capacity.””

“It was the greatest ride through Rushville and the slowest I have ever experienced. The thousands, yes thousands of fans, is hard to describe as the streets were filled with PEOPLE, not vehicles, PEOPLE. We were hanging on to our seats and reaching out to shake the hands and wave at the fans who turned out to greet their team! I have never in my lifetime seen more people in town than that evening.”

The most significant byproduct of the Lions success was that it helped give Rush County a unified, common goal. When consolidation became a reality in 1969, many residents were bitter over the loss of their community high schools. The Mays Tigers, New Salem Eagles, Milroy Cardinals, Manilla Owls, and Arlington Wildcats became Rushville Lions. The State Finals journey helped heal some of the wounds that consolidation had created.

The 1975-76 school year was my first of 26 years as RCHS Athletic Director. It was a year of learning on the run. Every game at Memorial Gym became a sellout. Reserved seat tickets were sold at all four gates. On one occasion I.U. Coach Bob Knight notified RCHS he would be at one of our games. I set aside two of the best seats we had left. When he arrived Coach Knight expressed that he and his assistant would just sit any place they could.

By State Finals week we had received about half the number of tickets that we needed from the IHSAA. The decision was made to have a drawing for tickets with season tickets given priority. George Bird made the “drawing barrel” and my five year old daughter Carrie and her friend were blindfolded and drew out the lucky envelopes. Afterward numerous phone calls were made to the other schools to see if they had any tickets left from their quotas.

With the student tickets we made a bad decision. Ticket scalping was a concern, so it was decided that students would be issued a voucher to be turned in for their game ticket at Level 4 of Market Square Arena. The problem was Jeffersonville had done the same thing. When I arrived to hand out the tickets, the students were packed into the area like sardines. On later trips to the State Finals with the girls’ teams we didn’t use student vouchers.

At this writing three members of the 75-76 team are deceased: Neville Cullum, Joe Beard, and Jim Ponsler. Also deceased are Principal Cyral Turner and Assistant Coach Charlie Gratzner (who recently passed).

Kevin Snyder commented, “I remember fondly Cyral Turner’s very active participation in our pep sessions with his rendition of “Let’s Rock!”, and his enthusiasm showed when he announced “School Song....let’s hear the School Song!”

The Lions Final 4 appearance came during the days when the tournament was a one class event. We will never experience that again. The multiple class system we have today is OK, but it really doesn’t compare to the old format.

In 2026 we will mark the 50th anniversary of the 75-76 team. We will also celebrate the 100th anniversary of Memorial Gym. Get ready to celebrate, again!