

2020 FALL NEWSLETTER



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MOVED!

304 Main Street



Did You Know?

Knights of the Roundball

by Bob Cupp

The uncertainty surrounding high school sports during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic stands in sharp contrast to the golden age of Irwin High School basketball, when life was so much simpler.

During the 12-year period between 1947 and 1958, the tiny school, playing Class B basketball, won:

- **11 Section Championships (including ties)**
- **6 Westmoreland County Tournament Championships**
- **5 WPIAL Championships**
- **5 Western Region Championships**
- **4 State Championships**



Wow!

Those incredible accomplishments began in 1947, when Irwin won its initial state basketball championship in the first year of the new school's existence. But how could that be possible? Irwin High School existed long before 1947.

In 1915, after discussing the possibility of a merger for several years, the Irwin and North Huntingdon school districts decided to erect a joint high school. A 30-year agreement was signed and the name "Norwin," consisting of three letters from each school district's name, was selected for the new district. The two separate school boards jointly purchased 12 acres of land, parts of which were located in each district. In the fall of 1916, Norwin High School opened its doors for the first time.



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In July, 1946, the Irwin School Board withdrew their students, completing the 30-year agreement. The North Huntingdon and Irwin School Districts then operated separately for the next 12 years. It was during this era that the Irwin boys' basketball program was one of the most successful in Pennsylvania scholastic roundball history.



The first-year basketball team (1946-47) was led by Coach Don Rose, who coached at Norwin the three previous seasons. Rose was a very busy man, coaching the varsity, junior varsity and junior high teams at the same time. John Abraham was the only Irwin player with any previous varsity experience, playing for Norwin in his sophomore year.

The team brought fame to the new school by winning the Pennsylvania Class B State Championship with a record of 30 wins and one defeat.

1948 TEAM

Irwin's 1947-48 Basketball Team won a second consecutive Pennsylvania State Class B Championship. Left to Right - Standing: Thomas Butler, Dean George, Richard Schade, Robert Cervi, John Abraham

Seated: Robert McGuire, William Goras, Richard Beter, Ronald Mowery, Dean Neiman

PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM BUTLER

The only blemish came against rival Pitcarin in section play. Wampum was their victim in the WPIAL final, and they beat the Weatherly Wreckers on Pitt Stadium's court for the state championship.

In those days, before jointures were common, there were many more school districts than there are today, but only the section winners went to the playoffs. There were only two classifications; large schools participated in Class A, small schools in Class B. The Westmoreland County Tournament was a prestigious event with coveted championship trophies in both classifications.

The 1947-48 team got off to a slow start, losing two early games to Duquesne, the previous year's state Class A champions, and Wilkesburg, but Rose's squad came back strong to win the next 26 games and another state championship. Irwin became the first team in the district to have its games broadcast over the radio.

FIRST TEAM TO BROADCAST

Irwin became the first team in the district to have its games broadcast over the radio. This playoff game was covered by McKeesport station WMCK. Irwin principal, Jack Clawson (wearing a hat), observed the game from the broadcast table.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM BUTLER



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The Knights beat Robinson Twp. for the WPIAL championship without starting center, 6' 5" Dick Schade, who missed that game and the state playoffs due to appendicitis. Irwin was almost deserted on the day of the state championship game when 700 loyal fans traveled to Lancaster to watch their team beat Bridgeport 49-34.



Three Irwin players were named to the Associated Press Class B All-State Scholastic Team. Forward John Abraham, noted for his excellent floor work and uncanny shooting ability from any angle, was named to the first team. Forward Bob Cervi and guard Tom Butler placed on the second team. That was quite an accomplishment for a small school with a graduating class of 35 boys and girls.

COACH DON ROSE WITH VARSITY
SECOND ROW: Maynard Kemerer, Arthur Youngstead, Paul Simpson, George Lewis, Carl Dean Davis. **FIRST ROW:** Edward Jennings, Nick Gelis, Jack Clarke, Coach Don Rose, Nobi Ackermans, Albert Vixiola.

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Losing all but one starter from the 1948 championship team presented a steep challenge to Coach Rose for the 1948-49 season. With an overall record of 19-8, the Knights finished second in Section XVI, losing twice to Section Champs, Derry. However, they got revenge in the county tournament championship game, beating Derry 47-44.

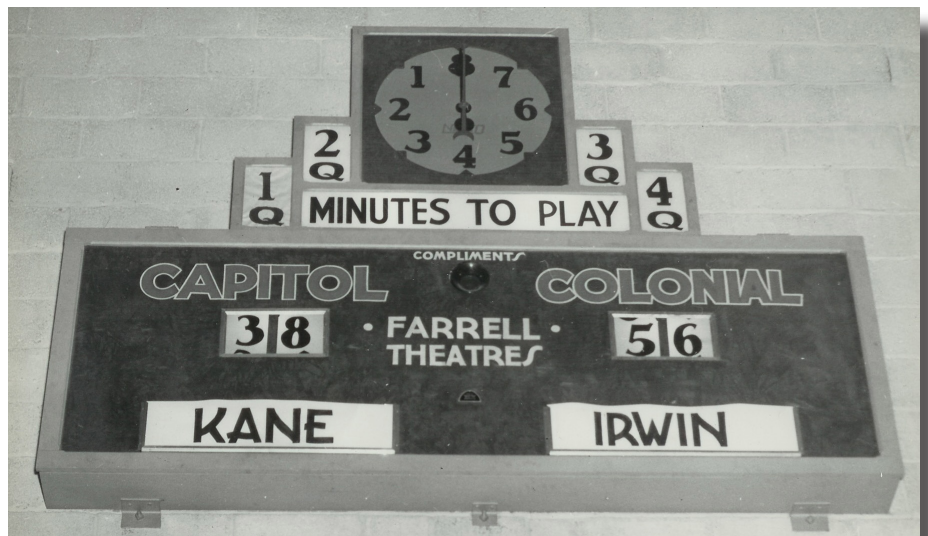
With a record of 34-1, the 1949-50 squad had a tremendous fan following. Even after the Knights lost a heartbreaker to Kutztown (47-48) in the state championship game, the town honored their team as "champs." The "Black Knights," as they'd been dubbed by a local newspaper, went undefeated in section play and won the western region championship, as well as the county championship.

NO TIME LEFT

Irwin defeated the Kane Wolves at Farrell High School for the 1948 Western Region Championship. This was a familiar scene at Irwin basketball games - no time left on the clock with Irwin outscoring their opponent by a wide margin.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM BUTLER

Coach Rose left Irwin to coach at North Huntingdon High prior to the 1950-51 season. He was replaced by Lyman Stough who had been a star basketball player for Norwin. Under the direction of their new coach, the Knights won the Section XVII championship with a 10-0



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record, losing to Avalon in the WPIAL final.

When Stough was called into military service in 1951, Joe McMunn moved up from the Junior High coaching position to lead the varsity. The 1951-52 pre-season rankings predicted a low finish in Section XV for the Knights, but Coach McMunn guided the "Whiz Kids," as the team was known, to a 21-5 record and their third consecutive section title, as well as another county championship.

After losing all five starters from the previous year, in 1953, Irwin won its third state championship, beating Ashley 73-51 at the Pitt Field House. With a record of 33-1, the team's only blemish was an early season exhibition loss to Greensburg. Coach McMunn was credited with taking an inexperienced group of players and molding them into a smooth, well-balanced team.

PITT STADIUM

Irwin won the 1948 WPIAL championship game against the Robinson Twp. Ramblers 53-38 at the Pitt Pavilion beneath Pitt Stadium. The Knights played several WPIAL and state playoff games on the Pitt Stadium court before the Pitt Field House was built.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM BUTLER

Lyman Stough returned from the service in time for the 1953-54 season, guiding the Knights to their fourth state championship. Two early season exhibition losses to Greensburg and Avalon dampened their fans' expectations, but the "Terrors of the Turnpike," as they were then known, came back strong to finish at 26-2, beating Mt. Penn at Allentown 61-55 in the state championship game.

This was generally considered Irwin's most talented team, with a rare combination of size, experience and skill. Chuck Hursh was named 1st Team, State (AP), 1st Team and Outstanding Player, Section; Don Good – 1st Team,



BLASTING THE SIREN

Opposing fans were always amazed by the size and enthusiasm of the Irwin cheering section. The Irwin firemen were among the team's strongest supporters. They were famous for blasting their sirens when the Knights came onto the court. Irwin Mayor, Charlie Eichelberger (wearing a hat), and fireman, Tom Perkins, are each holding a siren in the front row.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM BUTLER



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State (UP); Colin Norberg – 2nd Team, State (AP); Lloyd Simpson – Honorable Mention, State and 1st Team, Section. The 1954-55 team won another section title, losing only one section game to Export, 55-56. The Knights defeated Washington Twp. in the WPIAL playoffs before falling to a strong East Bethlehem team in the semi-finals at the Pitt Field House. Lloyd Simpson became the all-time Irwin high scorer with 1,110 total points.

The Knights compiled a 21-6 record during the 1955-56 season, winning their ninth section title and another county championship. They played Derry four times that year, splitting two section games, winning a section playoff and the championship game of the county tournament.

During the 1956-57 season, section losses to Perry and West Newton resulted in a three-way tie for Section XVII honors. The Knights lost by two points to Perry in a section playoff game after falling behind by 20 in the third quarter. After being eliminated, Irwin entered the county tournament, beating South Huntingdon, Laurel Valley and Bell-Avon to win the crown.

Being too small to have a football team, Irwin was known as a basketball town. Opposing fans were always amazed by the size and enthusiasm of the Irwin cheering section. The Irwin firemen always supported their team. They brought a siren to every game, blasting it when the team ran onto the floor before the game and again at half-time.

Tom Butler, who played on the 1947 and 1948 championship teams, had warm memories of those golden years. “The people of Irwin treated us like heroes,” Butler recalled. We were invited to banquets sponsored by local civic organizations and parades were held in our honor. The first year, we were given watches; the next year we got suitcases. One year, we received a \$50 gift certificate to buy a new suit at Berk’s Men’s Store in Irwin. Everyone had something for us. Irwin has always had great people!”

In 1957-58, with Lyman Stough still at the helm, the Knights again finished in a tie for the Section XVII title; they defeated Perryopolis in a playoff. After losing their next game in the WPIAL playoffs, they defeated Export in the county tournament before losing to Bell-Avon, 49-57.

That would prove to be Irwin’s final game; their incredible 12-year run was over. On July 1, 1958, the North Huntingdon and Irwin School Districts formed a new jointure. Two years later, the school systems permanently



BLACK KNIGHTS HISTORY
Irwin basketball history is on display at Norwin High School. The trophies, photos, memorabilia, and center court from the old Irwin gym's hardwood floor will help preserve the legacy of the “Knights of the Roundball.”

A few of the players from that era met there in 2007 to review the history they helped to create. Left to Right: Lewis Allshouse, Tom Butler, Bob Cervi, Lloyd Simpson
BOB CUPP PHOTO

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merged. The students of both districts overwhelmingly voted to retain the “Knights” nickname.

The team’s nickname isn’t the only reminder of the “Knights of the Roundball.” In a hallway near the Norwin Sr. High gym, there’s a display case full of championship trophies, photos and basketball memorabilia. Above the trophy case, there’s a real piece of Irwin history – the center court section of the hardwood floor from Irwin High. It was “rescued” during the demolition of what had become Sixth Street School by former Norwin basketball coach, Tom Shrump, and a squad of past Irwin Knights players.

With an overall record of 286 wins and 52 losses, Irwin High School won an astonishing 85% of their games. That fantastic performance was fueled by an incomparable Irwin basketball tradition. A home court record of 119-13 certainly made that old hardwood floor and 12 years of roundball memories well worth saving.

Although many of these players have passed away, their legacy will last forever!

“Homes for the Holidays”



The Norwin Historical Society is celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Holiday House Tour this year!

Due to the extraordinary challenges of COVID-19, we are planning to host a **VIRTUAL TOUR.**

Viewings will be available online through a link (and password) directly from our website, Saturday, December 5 - Sunday, December 6.

This event has been enjoyed by the people of the Norwin community for decades and is a much anticipated kick-off to the holidays year after year. We rely heavily on the tour as our main source of income for the organization.

We hope you will consider this opportunity to participate in order to view these beautiful homes from the comfort of your home.

Go to our website’s “Events” tab for more information. Presale access to the virtual tour link will be discounted!

Virtual Tour!





THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATION!

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The objectives of the Norwin Historical Society have remained unchanged from our founding in 1994. We continue to preserve our local history, promote the history of the Norwin Community and embrace the opportunity to educate the Norwin Community about the people, places and events that comprise the history of Irwin, North Irwin, and North Huntingdon Township.

The Norwin Historical Society:

1. Archives and preserves documents, books, photographs and other memorabilia donated to its collection by those who value the history of the area
2. Sponsors an annual "Homes for the Holidays" tour in December,
3. Cares for the grounds of the historic Brush Creek Associate Reformed Church Cemetery,
4. Honors our nation's war dead on the Sunday immediately before Memorial Day with a military Honor Guard,
5. Assists researchers with genealogy and past local historic events information,
6. Provides speakers to local organizations as requested (including our local and out-of-area schools), and
7. Participates in Irwin Main Street activities, countywide organizational forums, and hosts "Antiques on Main".

Your support allows the Society to continue its valuable work in preserving the history of our community.

Please Check One: ☐ \$10 ☐ \$25 ☐ Other _____

Please make your check payable to: Norwin Historical Society
and mail to: PO Box 623
 Irwin, PA 15642

- Are you interested in helping us as a volunteer? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- We're open during most Irwin downtown events. Stop and visit us while you're enjoying the activities!
- We welcome your questions and comments, directed to our website or to the address below.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

NORWIN

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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2020 FALL NEWSLETTER



TO:

*Your gift to the
Norwin Historical Society
helps to preserve our history!*