

The background of the entire cover is a close-up, textured view of a basketball's orange surface with its characteristic pebbled pattern. A large, semi-transparent, light-colored number '15' is centered in the background, spanning most of the vertical height of the cover. Overlaid on this is the title 'A PERFECT MATCH' in a large, bold, white, sans-serif font. The word 'A' is positioned at the top, 'PERFECT' is in the middle, and 'MATCH' is at the bottom of the title block.

A PERFECT MATCH

INDIANA AND BASKETBALL

J. RONALD NEWLIN



WITH THREE SECONDS TO GO IN THE BIGGEST GAME OF HIS LIFE, THE YOUNG COACH FROM ZIONSVILLE, INDIANA, CALLED HIS LAST TIME-OUT.

As his charges approached the bench, the enormous crowd, which receded into the dark corners of a vast building not designed for basketball, fell into a muted rumble of exhausted anticipation. Most of them were cheering for the local team, an undersized squad from a small, private school that had improbably earned its way into a game of historic proportions. Throughout the game, using a tenacious defense and a patient, opportunistic offense, they had stayed within striking distance of their heavily favored opponent, a blue-blood traditional power from the East Coast.

free-throw line, accepted the ball from the referee, and eyed what could be the clinching shot, as the crowd reached a final crescendo.

The opponent shot, and missed. A lanky sophomore forward from Brownsburg corralled the rebound for the local team and immediately turned to dribble up the floor. The members of the opposing team raced back, in front of or alongside him—an impromptu tactic more of obstruction than classic defense.

As the ball handler approached mid-court, another member of the local team, a junior center from Connersville, saw an opponent racing toward him with his eyes on the dribbler. Instantly executing a familiar basketball tactic called “setting a pick” on an unfamiliar place on the floor, he set himself to absorb the impact of the onrushing defender. The bodies collided and sprawled and for a split second, a fraction of the final second of the game, the ball handler had an unobstructed view of the basket,

thought, in hope or fear, “Oh, my God. That’s going *in!*”

The ball hit the backboard and caromed back true toward the rim—a touch too strong. No good. The crowd roared and groaned, and players from both teams erupted from their benches, some embracing, others collapsing to the floor. Goliath had survived, but by the smallest of margins.

Most Indiana basketball fans will recognize that vignette as the final seconds of the 2010 national championship game between Duke University and Butler University, played in Indianapolis’s Lucas Oil Stadium; the young coach was Brad Stevens and the sophomore and junior players, respectively, were Gordon Hayward and Matt Howard. Over the course of two hours and in its frenzied final seconds, that contest was the epitome of the nonstop action, the urgency, and the drama that has made basketball one of the world’s favorite spectator sports. It was also, on a national scale, one of the top sports stories of the year. Had Hayward’s half-court shot gone in, it might have been the single most memorable moment in all of sports. That night ESPN.com’s Pat Forde wrote, “I thought we had attained basketball nirvana—the greatest game-winning shot in basketball history to climax the greatest story in basketball history. And, what the heck, give us the greatest ending in athletic history.”

But change a couple of place names here and there, and it just as easily could have described earlier contests in Indiana’s basketball legacy. It could have been describing the final seconds of a college-division national championship game featuring what is now the University of Evansville in the 1960s or Indiana State Teacher’s College in the 1940s—before



Previous Page: Butler University’s Gordon Hayward gets off a failed last-second shot in the 2010 National Collegiate Athletic Association championship game against Duke University. *Above:* The Wiley High School basketball team, Terre Haute, Indiana, 1931.

Yet it appeared that the local team’s best chance for a victory had passed a few seconds earlier with a missed shot. The game was now down to desperate measures—the faint hope of a foul, a missed free throw, and a score from the length of the floor, with three seconds remaining.

The teams reassembled on the floor. The opposing player stepped to the

fifty feet away. Mid-dribble, he launched the ball toward the goal, in a motion that was astoundingly closer to a controlled shot than to a running heave.

Hearts caught in every throat, and every eye followed the trajectory of the ball as the horn sounded and the game ended. In the split second that it descended toward the basket, thousands of people



Above: The Mount Comfort High School basketball team scrimmages in 1926. The man in the suit is J. B. Good, who served as the team's coach and the school's principal. Right: The Hartford City High School's basketball team played without a coach or permanent home for years. This 1917 photograph is of the school's junior squad, winner of an interclass tournament that year.



or after the Sycamores' young head coach, John Wooden, took a job with the University of California, Los Angeles. For that matter, it almost could have described a game featuring Indiana State's drive to the national championship game as an under-rated Division I program in 1979, behind Larry Bird.

Or it could have been about Butler itself, in any one of a number of games in the 1920s, when its Hall of Fame coach Pat Page and his young protégé, Tony Hinkle, led the Bulldogs to championships in two national tournaments sponsored by the Amateur Athletic Union, and the north-side Indianapolis campus hosted frequent games against powerhouses of that era such as Pittsburgh and Long Island. The only reason that it could not have described a Purdue University game in that era is because Purdue, coached by Ward "Piggy" Lambert and featuring such homegrown talent as Wooden, was almost never an underdog. Go back far enough, and that

moment could have been from the first decade of the twentieth century, when Wabash College consistently triumphed over touring teams from Harvard and Yale.

Change the schools from colleges to high schools, and that all-or-nothing moment describes the end of countless

driveways, the shot executed by thousands of prospective Indiana legends, some of whom did indeed go on to earn that title.

Basketball has been called a uniquely American game, and it is certainly unique in the clarity of its origins. Unlike other sports that evolved gradually out of earlier

CHANGE THE SCHOOLS FROM COLLEGES TO HIGH SCHOOLS, AND THAT ALL-OR-NOTHING MOMENT DESCRIBES THE END OF COUNTLESS DAVID-VS.-GOLIATH GAMES IN THE EPIC INDIANA HIGH SCHOOL STATE TOURNAMENT, INCLUDING THE ONE IMMORTALIZED IN THE MOVIE *HOOSIERS*.

David-vs.-Goliath games in the epic Indiana High School Athletic Association's state tournament, including the one immortalized in the movie *Hoosiers*.

It also played out several million times in games in Indiana barnyards and

forms of competition somewhere in the mists of time, we know exactly when and where this game began. Doctor James Naismith, a Canadian-born instructor at Springfield College's school for Young Men's Christian Association directors, sat

down in December 1891 and composed a set of rules for an indoor game to keep his students' interest during the winter months. We know the date of the first demonstration of the game, the names of the players, and where most of them went after graduation to spread their new gospel.

The popular narrative is that one of Springfield's students, Doctor Nicholas McCay, brought basketball to his job running the YMCA in Crawfordsville, sharing

it with his charges and with his peers in nearby Lafayette. By March of 1894, the Crawfordsville and Lafayette YMCAs staged an intercity game that was covered by the local media, and basketball as a spectator sport was born in Indiana.

Basketball did not immediately sweep Indiana like a lake-effect blizzard. There are a couple of instances where early adopters, such as the Indianapolis YMCA and Shortridge High School, established programs with ripple-effect impact, but for the most part sports pages, college campuses, and early meetings of the Indiana High School Athletic Association, which was founded in 1904, continued to focus on football, baseball, and track and field. When a state high school basketball tournament was established and grew throughout the decade of the 1910s, the first seven champions were

from within thirty miles of Crawfordsville—evidence in part that it took the game more than a couple of decades to capture a statewide following.

But capture a following it certainly did. The notion that Indiana and basketball were made for each other was firmly established by 1925, when Naismith attended a state tournament final at the Indiana State Fairgrounds and supposedly declared that basketball, while invented in Massachusetts, “Really had its origin in Indiana, which remains today the center of the sport.” (This quote is widely attributed to a speech that Naismith gave at a return visit to Indiana for a YMCA banquet in 1936.)

The mythology surrounding Indiana basketball has only grown, aided by an expanding national sports media. The myth of Indiana basketball has developed along several lines. One is that Indiana loves and supports basketball unlike any other state or region. Another is that Indiana



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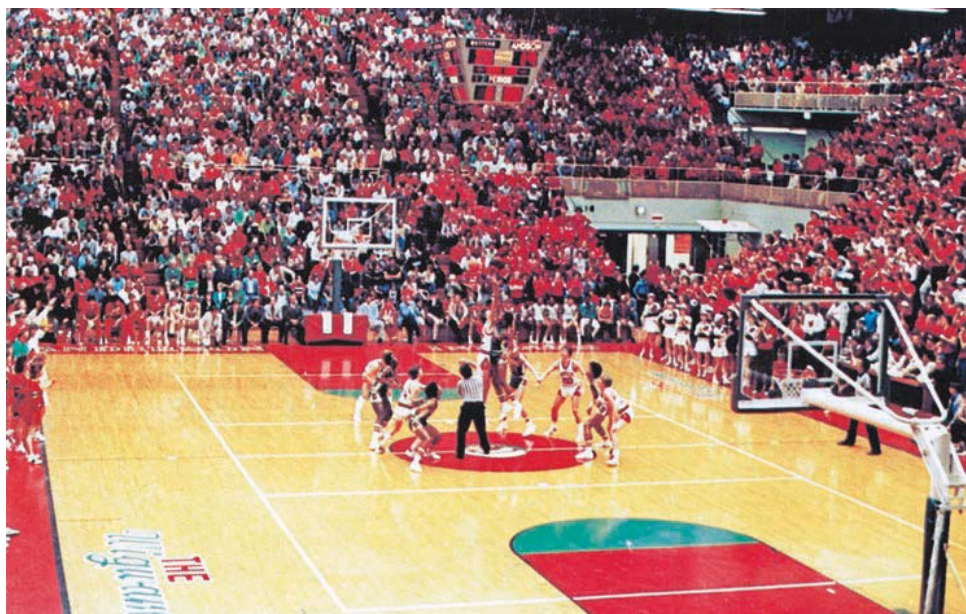


Top: Ladywood School for Girls students in Indianapolis practice outdoors, 1927. Above: Women's participation in sports has changed in Indiana since this 1913 team took to the court. The passage of Title IX legislation in 1972 helped start to level the playing field for women's sports.

excels at basketball more than any other state or region. And another is that basketball defines the state in some sense, in the same way in which Jacques Barzun wrote of the United States in the 1950s, “Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball.”

The notion that Indiana has a special relationship with basketball can be easily measured and documented. One need look no further than the number of enormous high school basketball gyms in the state. As of 2013, twelve of the fifteen high school gyms in America seating more than 7,000 fans were in Indiana—and that does not include the venerable 8,900-seat Wigwam in Anderson, which was still standing but no longer in use by 2014. Most of these field houses were built in the twenty years following World War II, when the boys’ high school state tournament was at its numeric peak. In reality they were the last wave in a series of building booms that demonstrated the unique importance of *high school* basketball to Indiana’s culture.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, many of the largest high schools in the state were equipped with open, high-ceilinged gymnasiums that were perfect for playing basketball but not designed for accommodating large crowds of spectators. Smaller schools played their games



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Completed in 1961, the Wigwam, the home of the Anderson High School basketball team and the second-largest gymnasium in Indiana, also hosted games involving the Indiana Alley Cats of the Continental Basketball Association and the Anderson Packers of the National Basketball Association.

only a playing court but also room for paying customers.

Therefore, the first structures built as venues for watching basketball arose not in the cities, but in the smallest of towns. The Grant County Historical Society maintains that Swayzee built the first “fan-friendly” gym in 1912. Wingate, in Montgomery

the school a stand-alone gym that for all intents and purposes was a barn.

The success of the open-to-all-comers high school state tournament, however, changed such picturesque projects by the 1920s. By the mid-1920s, participation in the tournament had grown to more than seven hundred schools, and in 1925 the IHSAA had established a model that has lasted, with minor variations, for nine decades: sixty-four sectional sites, feeding into sixteen regional sites, with (at that time) all sixteen regional champions coming to Indianapolis for a three-day state finals tournament.

Schools were incentivized to build arenas that could hold hundreds of paying customers before the state tournament expanded; the opportunity to host a round of the tournament just trebled that incentive. In 1922 Frankfort opened Howard Hall, which seated 3,500 fans. In short order, Martinsville and Anderson built gyms seating more than 5,000; in 1926 Vincennes

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outdoors, as in the case of Freelandville in Knox County, or found other spaces in town such as barns, warehouses, roller rinks, and theaters that could hold not

County, won two state championships in 1913 and 1914 while practicing outside and playing “home” games at nearby New Richmond. The community then built



Clockwise from Left: A girls' team from the Terre Haute area with its coach, 1941; Beverly Bridges collects an autograph from Crispus Attucks High School basketball players Albert Maxey, Stanford Patton, and Bill Brown; Brown takes a shot during Attucks's 1956 championship game victory over Jefferson High School of Lafayette; and Eddie Arnold (left) and H. Hollywood (right) receive honors from Debbie Hough at the 1974 Lockefield Gardens Dustbowl Basketball Tournament in Indianapolis. Arnold received recognition for fifteen years of participating in the tournament and Hollywood received the tournament's most valuable player award.



opened its coliseum seating 6,000; and in 1928 Muncie dedicated a 7,500-seat field house. Each of these facilities, and dozens of others, were designed in part to provide a home-court advantage for at least one round of the state tournament. More than ninety years later, they remain the largest gyms in most states in America.

Indiana's high school state tournament peaked in terms of ticket sales in the late 1950s, when a second round of new gymnasiums allowed the total number of session sales to exceed 1.6 million. Those numbers began to dwindle through the 1960s, but only because school consolidations were causing fewer teams to be playing in fewer games. The state finals continued to sell out, even after moving to the 17,000-seat Assembly Hall in Bloomington and then to Market Square Arena in Indianapolis in the 1970s. In 1990 the finals were held in Indianapolis's professional football stadium, and more than

40,000 tickets were sold to a final four capped by Bedford–North Lawrence's Damon Bailey scoring the game's final twelve points in a 61–60 championship-game thriller over Concord, an established power that had recently graduated future Na-

to abandon the one-class tournament in 1997. But by that time Indiana's fascination with basketball had had generations to spread to other levels.

By the dawn of the television era, Hoosiers loved their college basketball,

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tional Basketball Association star Shawn Kemp.

That 1990 game was an anomaly; competing interests and dwindling attendance were among the factors that caused the IHSAA to make the controversial decision

too. For two decades before the advent of cable television and ESPN in the late 1970s, local stations' broadcasts of Purdue, Indiana, and Notre Dame games became appointment television. Before cable sports networks began paying college basketball



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IHS, FLANNER HOUSE COLLECTION, M 513



IHS, WILLIAM PALMER COLLECTION, P 206



IHS, MARTIN PHOTO SHOP COLLECTION, P 129

Clockwise from Bottom, Left: Shortridge High School cheerleaders are in tears after their team loses to Attucks in a sectional game, 1956; Oscar Robertson attempts a shot against Jefferson High School in his final high school basketball game (he scored thirty-nine points); a pickup game in Indianapolis, circa 1960; a circa 1925 Hoosier basketball player displays the proper shooting form for his era.

teams to play in every available time slot, small-town Indiana had settled into a routine. All activities needed to be scheduled on Monday or Tuesday evenings, because Wednesday night was church night and Thursday night was Big Ten night.

The final evidence of Indiana's embrace of basketball at all levels may be the curious history of professional basketball in the state. Professional basketball was the last of the major team sports to develop in a recognizable modern form in America, lagging behind even hockey. All through the Great Depression and World War II, the model for professional basketball was

barnstorming exhibition games between ever-changing teams that may or may not have featured recognizable stars; and Indiana had no lack of such teams.

The modern NBA was created prior to the 1949–50 season. It was a merger between two leagues with different business models—the Basketball Association of America, based in the larger eastern media markets, and the somewhat older National Professional Basketball League, which, like the early National Football League, had grown up in Great Lakes factory towns such as Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and the Quad Cities (Davenport and Bettendorf,

Iowa, and Rock Island, Moline, and East Moline, Illinois).

The original NBA featured seventeen teams, three of which—the Anderson Packers, Indianapolis Olympians, and Fort Wayne Zollner Pistons—were supported by local ticket buyers and advertisers in Indiana. The Packers lasted only one season and the Olympians three. The Pistons thrived to the point that they were eventually lured to Detroit, where they won multiple championships a few decades later.

A decade later, the established NBA was challenged by a new league set up in secondary markets, the American Basketball

Association. The league with the red-white-and-blue basketball and the three-point shot was an aesthetic success, if not a universal financial success. An Indianapolis franchise called the Indiana Pacers became



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the flagship franchise of the league, winning three championships and routinely attracting large and raucous crowds to its games in the fairgrounds coliseum.

The league was successful enough to start winning bidding wars with the NBA for talented players, including the Pacers' success attracting local talent George McGinnis after playing one year at IU. The league was not as successful, though, as the eight-team American Football League had been at forcing a full merger with the National Football League. In 1975 the Pacers were one of only four franchises from that league to be admitted into the NBA, becoming Indiana's first major-league franchise since the Pistons had left for Detroit. After a few rocky years, the team has fielded a series of contending squads since the mid-1990s.

The notion that Indiana excels at basketball more than any other state is more

contentious. Probably no other state can match a top three of homegrown talent to rival the resumes of Wooden, Bird, and Oscar Robertson (to say nothing of the Indiana-alone resume of Ohio-born Bob Knight); but outliers are not definitive. A better argument can be made from the fact that, as of 2014, Indiana had produced, per capita, more NBA players than any other state.

It is the actual nature of the game and its rules that explain why it took root in Indiana at the start of the twentieth century when spectator sports in general were a new and growing phenomenon. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century spectator sports were becoming established as an institution across the eastern United States, including Indiana. It was not yet certain that basketball and not some other sport would be the game that flourished in this state.

By the 1920s Indiana led the nation in 5,000-seat basketball arenas for the same reason that it also led the nation in Carnegie libraries—both were a function of a rural state's relatively dense population and gradual urbanization in an era when new technologies and new economic realities were changing American society. It only made sense that the state would embrace spectator sports as increases in leisure time, mass communications, and easier travel made them possible. But why was *basketball* the sport that Indiana adopted?

And is there an Indiana character? The image of a Hoosier as the embodiment of Jeffersonian-Jacksonian ideals—independent, self-reliant, self-made descendants of pioneers, but also conservative and resistant to change, is an enduring one.

James Madison's landmark 1986 state history, *The Indiana Way*, concludes with a chapter called "Hoosiers Past and Present" that tries to identify an Indiana character. By the late nineteenth century, Madison wrote, "East Coast savants created a robust stereotype of an illiterate rustic, a



IHS, WILLIAM PALMER COLLECTION, P. 206

Top: Kentucky State University players attempt to stop a shot from their opponent from Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis during a 1985 game. *Above:* Robertson is mobbed by Attucks cheerleaders congratulating him on helping his team win the 1956 Indiana high school basketball championship. During the last four games of the tournament, Robertson scored 106 points.

stereotype they used to contrast Hoosier with Yankee.” And this was before the rivalry between New York and Indiana’s professional basketball teams of the 1990s developed as a national “Hicks vs. Knicks” storyline. Such a stereotype also played, no doubt, into an image of beloved underdogs, which is not unique to Indiana but certainly plays into the state’s continuing self-identity.

In 1986 the movie *Hoosiers* was released—a film affectionately written and directed by Indiana natives in the 1980s and set in the early 1950s, in a rural community that revolved around its basketball team and its history. Shooter,

the town drunk played by Dennis Hopper who Coach Dale (Gene Hackman) offers a chance at redemption, constantly relives his own missed shot from a sectional game, decades before. The players themselves had a sense of history (“Let’s win this one for all the little schools that never had a chance to get here.”) Thirty years after its release, the movie is considered an American classic, and it still depicts an image of Indiana stretching back nine decades.

The early twentieth-century Indiana in which these stereotypes are rooted—and in which basketball took root—was rural but not rustic. It was the center of the nascent American automobile industry. The Indi-

anapolis Motor Speedway, home of another great American sporting tradition, the Indianapolis 500, which held its first race two months after the first state high school basketball tournament in 1911, was built as a testing ground for that industry. The success of Indiana authors such as James Whitcomb Riley, Lew Wallace, Booth Tarkington, Meredith Nicholson, and Theodore Dreiser led to editorial posturing that Indiana had supplanted Boston as the literary center of America. Indiana’s political importance as a swing state led to *Hoosiers* being nominated as presidential or vice presidential candidates in eight of fourteen national elections before and after the turn of the century.

Fans and students cheer on the Attucks basketball team during a game in 1958. The expressions on their faces show the intensity of Hoosier Hysteria.



What was it about the nature of the game of basketball that reflected or reinforced such character traits, to the extent that it became a state sport? Certainly, the fact that basketball quickly developed as a sport requiring five-man teams meant that any school (or club or business) could field a team, no matter how small. It was also less expensive to outfit a team than football or baseball. Before the race to build gymnasiums began, it required only uniforms and a ball. It was even a team sport that girls could play and which fans could appreciate watching girls play. Although Indiana did not start a state tournament for girls high school basketball until 1976, and then only after a long hiatus that began in the Great Depression, competitive interscholastic girls basketball dates to the first decade of the twentieth century as well.

The fact that basketball was an indoor, winter sport fit perfectly within the rhythms of an agricultural economy, where young men were in the fields in the

fall and spring, but where the excuse for a community gathering helped fill the social calendars of a long winter.

Even more important, perhaps, it is a team sport that rewards individual effort. For a state that embraced the mythology of the rugged pioneer and the self-made man, the image of the farm boy (or later, farm girl) or gym rat practicing jump shots and ball-handling through countless hours of solitary practice—at one of those ubiquitous barnyard or driveway goals—is an indelible part of the Indiana landscape.

In actual practice, basketball strikes a complex balance between individual excellence and excellent teamwork. Partly because there are only five players in the game at a time, instead of nine or eleven, the relative impact of each individual is magnified, especially on such a compact playing surface. One great player can make a good team a championship contender, in a way that not even an elite quarterback in football or a triple-crown hitter or an ace

pitcher in baseball (certainly over the course of a full season) can match. At the highest level, the history of the NBA over recent decades suggests that the correlation between having the best player (Bird, Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan, or LeBron James) correlates with being the winningest team more than in any other major American sport.

On the other hand, the rules of basketball allow and require each player to contribute equal-

ly. Each may have different roles, but all are expected to be able to defend, rebound, dribble, pass, and score. There are no proletarian linemen who are denied access to the ball, no pitchers and catchers (or goalies) given special equipment and dispensations. Indiana fans have a special affinity for the well-balanced team where every player plays every role, dating back from the recent successes of “The Butler Way,” through Branch McCracken’s earliest “Hurryin’ Hoosiers,” and no doubt before.

Because sports in general tend to be a meritocracy, where talent and results trump birthright and entrenched interests, there were events in Indiana’s social history that happened on basketball courts that would not have occurred in board rooms or at ballot boxes. Indiana’s history of progress toward racial equality is a complicated one, even in basketball. The state was infamous in the 1920s for the extent to which the Ku Klux Klan had infiltrated various levels of government, and in the 1920s most of the state’s larger cities established segregated high schools. These schools often became sources of community pride in the years before integration, but separate was not equal. Indiana’s segregated high schools (and its parochial ones) were not admitted to the high school state tournament until 1942.

But in smaller communities where there was not critical mass for a segregated school, basketball was an enterprise where some black players were able to demonstrate their worth. In 1930 a junior named Dave DeJernett led Washington High School to a state championship over a similarly-integrated Muncie Central team led by Jack Mann. DeJernett was recognized as the first African American to win a state championship on an integrated team in the United States. In a grisly though unrelated counterpoint, a few weeks after the game, the last public lynching in Indiana took place. Integrat-



IHS, MARTIN PHOTO SHOP COLLECTION, P. 129

Tip off for a game involving Garfield High School in Terre Haute in 1945. Such battles were commonplace when players from opposing teams each had control of the ball, but since the early 1980s the alternating-possession rule has limited the jump ball to one per game.



IHS, INDIANAPOLIS RECORDER COLLECTION, P. 303

Left: The basketball court at the Penna Gymnasium, Vigo County, Indiana, September 1926. Right: Players and coaches from Indianapolis Washington High School celebrate winning the 1969 Indiana high school basketball tournament. Washington defeated Gary Tolleson High School 79–76 to finish its undefeated season.

ed teams such as Washington and Muncie were not welcome in many places in Indiana.

In 1939 the long-standing rivalry of the Indiana-Kentucky High School All-Star game was initiated, and the panel of sportswriters that selected Indiana's team named Franklin High School's African American star and future Cincinnati Reds player George Crowe as Indiana's first "Mr. Basketball." But a decade and a half later,

in part, with hastening the integration of Indianapolis public schools that feared never winning another sectional. In 1947 Shelbyville's Bill Garrett became the first African American athlete to play basketball in the Big Ten at Indiana University. But not every aspiring black athlete in the late 1940s and the 1950s found such doors open.

As recently as the early 2000s, it was deemed remarkable that the head coaches

but sports have provided a venue where more is possible.

The extent to which these features of basketball truly reflect an Indiana approach to sports and to life, versus whether Indiana fans and commentators have projected that approach onto the game, is open to debate. Certainly for a culture that claims to value individual effort and "self-made-ness" over innate talent, soccer and even baseball are sports that lend themselves more to success on the part of average-sized athletes that are willing to work hard to master skills. Measuring such correlations would be difficult to do, and beyond the scope of this article. Regardless, by the second decade of the twentieth century, basketball was Indiana's game. It has remained so ever since.

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CERTAINLY, FOR A CULTURE THAT CLAIMS TO VALUE INDIVIDUAL EFFORT AND "SELF-MADE-NESS" OVER INNATE TALENT, SOCCER AND EVEN BASEBALL ARE SPORTS THAT LEND THEMSELVES MORE TO SUCCESS ON THE PART OF AVERAGE-SIZED ATHLETES THAT ARE WILLING TO WORK HARD TO MASTER SKILLS.

Crowe's older brother, Ray, was coaching an Indianapolis Crispus Attucks team that was still segregated and still had no home gym. The dominance of Ray Crowe's championship teams built around Robertson and a host of other future college and professional stars is credited,

of four of Indiana's flagship sports franchises—the Indiana Pacers' Isiah Thomas, the Indianapolis Colts' Tony Dungy, IU basketball's Mike Davis, and Notre Dame football's Tyrone Willingham—were African American. The road to racial equality has been rocky in Indiana, as in America,