

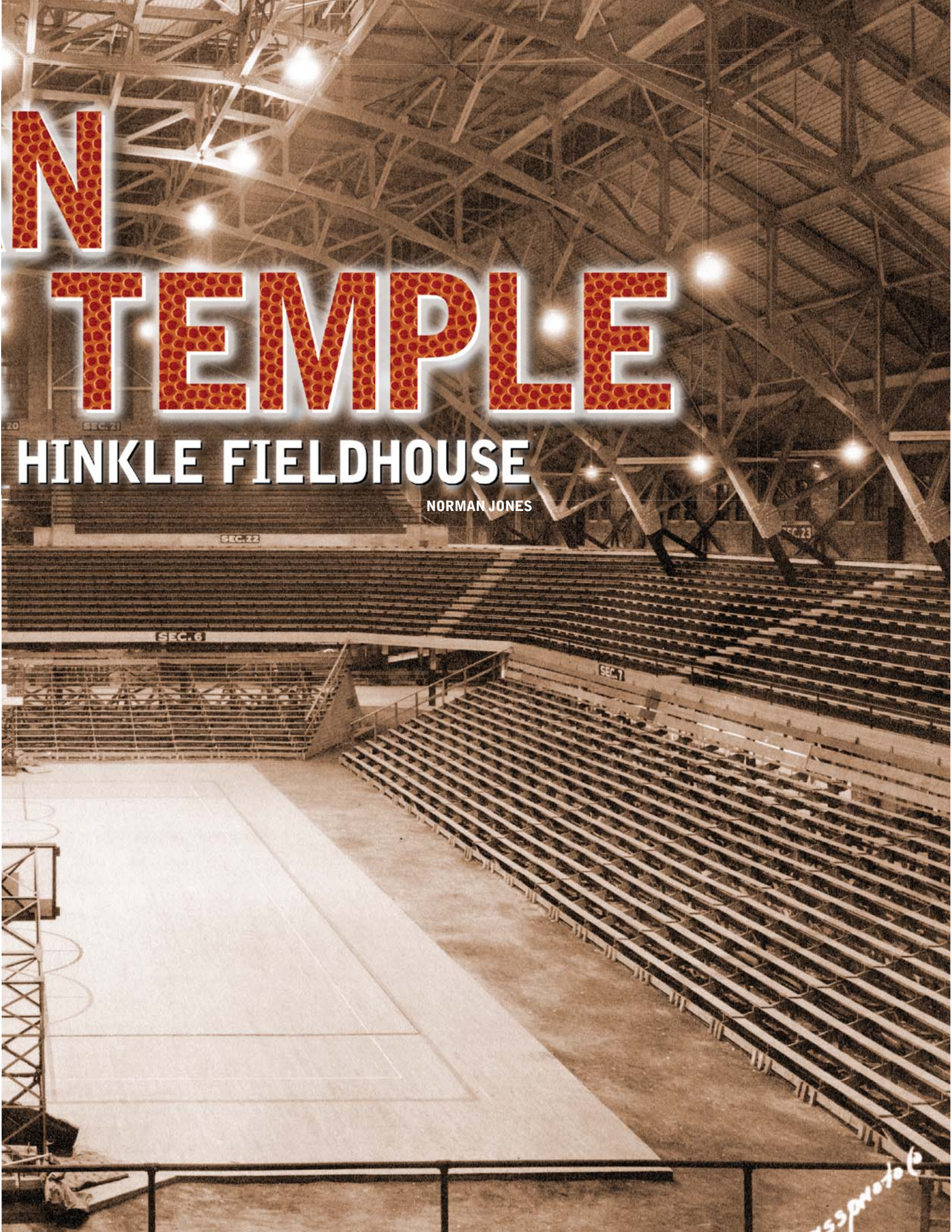
INDIANA

BUTLER UNIVERSITY'S

N TEMPLE

HINKLE FIELDHOUSE

NORMAN JONES



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Writing about events and incidents that helped Indiana become what it is today would be woefully incomplete without mentioning the great structures built years ago. In those buildings many historic events took place, and since Indiana is known as “the basketball state,” one structure stands out as perhaps contributing most to what has become known as Hoosier Hysteria—Hinkle Fieldhouse on the campus of Butler University in Indianapolis.

For nearly nine decades the Fieldhouse has been home to an eclectic set of activities, everything from a six-day bicycle race, track-and-field events, tennis matches, presidential speeches, religious crusades, ice-skating exhibitions, equestrian events, a three-ring circus, and a two-day piano festival. It is basketball, however, that has been a constant since the facility opened in 1928 and for which the Fieldhouse is best known today.

Some background is essential. Most Hoosiers know that Doctor James Naismith invented basketball in 1891 in Springfield, Massachusetts. Legend has it that one of his assistants, Reverend Nicholas C. McCay, came to Crawfordsville, Indiana, in the winter of 1893–94 and began teaching the game, which soon

caught on like wildfire. (Recent scholarship has unearthed newspaper accounts of basketball games being played in Indiana as early as 1892 in Evansville and April 1893 in Indianapolis.) The first state high school basketball tournament, won by Crawfordsville, was held in 1911 at Indiana University. From that time forward the enthusiasm of fans and town officials escalated, resulting in the building of large gymnasiums so as many people as possible could attend games.

The Franklin Wonder Five won three straight state championships from 1920 to 1922, and in 1921 the finals were moved to the Indianapo-

lis Coliseum, where standing-room-only crowds of more than 7,000 watched. This helped to garner national publicity as communities began to take great pride in their school teams. The games became social events and tickets were often difficult to obtain. Talk of building larger gyms took place among city fathers around the state. From 1923 to 1935, larger schools began to win the state championship and naturally crowds grew ever larger. There were 15,000 fans at the Indianapolis Exposition Building, known as the Cow Barn, when Marion High School, led by six-foot, seven-inch Charles “Stretch” Murphy won the state title over Martinsville in 1926.



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Above and Below: Two views of the Butler Fieldhouse under construction. The innovative brick-and-structural-steel design by architect Fermor Spencer Cannon, with an arched-truss system to support the roof, gave spectators an unobstructed view of the floor. Cannon also designed a ramp system to get people to upper-level seating.



Sophomore John Wooden played for Martinsville at that time. It surprised few that year when Marion fan enthusiasm brought about the construction of the Marion Memorial Coliseum that seated 5,500 spectators.

Officials at Butler University, deciding that interest in high school basketball would continue to escalate, and that the sport might even become popular at the college and professional levels, began construction on the Butler Fieldhouse, which had a seating capacity of approximately 15,000, in the fall of 1927. At about the same time as the Butler Fieldhouse arose, officials in Muncie, Indiana, also recognized the increased interest in high school basketball, and the 6,500-seat Muncie Fieldhouse appeared. These cathedral-like facilities sparked even more interest in basketball, and the high school state tournament finals were moved to the spacious Butler Fieldhouse.

Wooden's Martinsville team won the state championship at the Cow Barn in 1927 by beating Muncie Central. A year later, in the first state finals ever played in the Butler Fieldhouse, Muncie Central returned the favor, defeating Martinsville and Wooden. Two years later, in March 1930, the Fieldhouse's first sellout crowd



Cars jam the parking lot at the Fieldhouse, circa 1930. For many years the Fieldhouse had the distinction of being the largest structure under one roof in the state and the nation's largest basketball arena.

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entered in the state tournament. Butler Fieldhouse was now considered one of the premier places in the country to hold games. College and professional teams began to take note of Indiana's great places to play, especially Butler Fieldhouse.

From 1928 to 1942, the high school

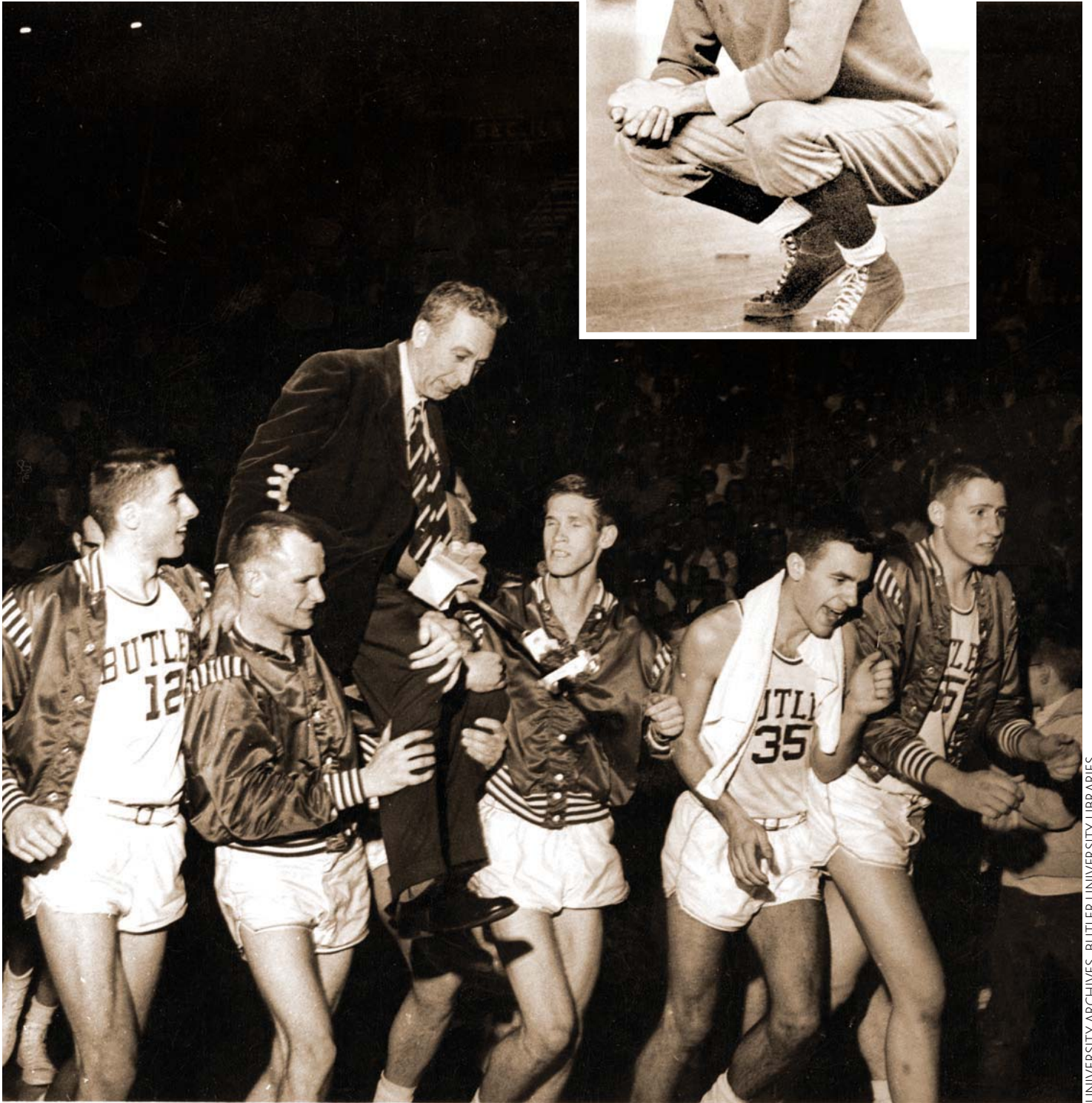
Coliseum). In 1946 the games returned to Butler Fieldhouse and continued there through 1971. In 1972 the games were moved back to Indiana University and from there to various Indianapolis locations such as the Market Square Arena, the Hoosier Dome (later the RCA Dome), and Consec (now Bankers Life) Fieldhouse.

In November 1965 Butler's board of trustees voted to rechristen Butler Fieldhouse as Hinkle Fieldhouse in honor of Paul D. "Tony" Hinkle, the legendary coach of the Butler Bulldogs. Hinkle came to Butler as an assistant basketball coach in 1921. After becoming head basketball coach at Butler in 1926, Hinkle embarked on a career that made him a legend not only in Indiana, but also in college sports. One writer noted that, "It is startling to think that Hinkle served from 1934 to

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watched as the Washington Hatchets beat returning finalist Muncie Central. A nationwide consensus concluded that Indiana had, indeed, become obsessed with basketball. By 1938 there were 787 teams

state final games were played at Butler Fieldhouse, however, during World War II the armed forces used the building and games were not played there from 1943 to 1945 (they were held at the Indianapolis



Top, Inset: Tony Hinkle as he appeared in the 1932 Butler University Drift yearbook. Above: Butler players carry Hinkle off the court on their shoulders following the coach's 400th victory on January 31, 1959. Butler defeated Saint Joseph by a score of 86-76.

1970 as the head coach of the three major sports—basketball, baseball and football.” He raked the baseball field, once ran concessions, and served as the university’s athletic director, but still found time to post a record of 572–403 in basketball, 325–305 in baseball and 171–100 in football.

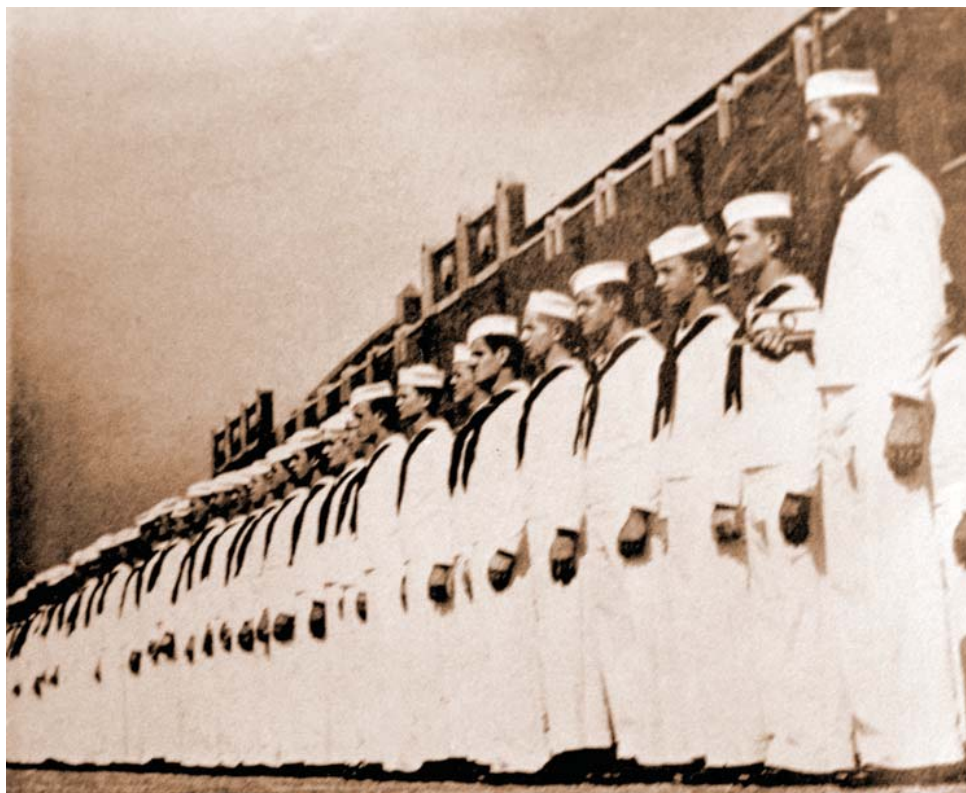
Active on the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s rules committee, Hinkle is often given credit for changing the basketball to the brighter, orange-tinted color seen today. He is enshrined in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame and the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame.

Hinkle opened Butler Fieldhouse on March 7, 1928, with a historic win over the University of Notre Dame by a 21–13 score in overtime in front of 12,000 fans. College basketball was now gaining stature and Butler Fieldhouse was becoming known as a basketball Mecca. Hinkle’s business acumen has to be given credit for solidifying Indiana as the basketball state and for building up the reputation of Butler Fieldhouse. It did not hurt that historic high school state final games took place at Bulter Fieldhouse right after the games returned to that now-famous court. In 1946 “Jumping Johnny” Wilson from Anderson High School set a state finals record by becoming the first to score thirty points in a title game. In 1947 an upset-minded Shelbyville High School team led by Bill Garrett and Emerson Johnson beat unde-

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feated Terre Haute Garfield, led by Clyde Lovellette, in the final game and helped establish the ever emerging Butler Fieldhouse floor mystique before 14,983 fans.

In 1950 the first ever state final games to be televised statewide were broadcast from Butler Fieldhouse, something that



During World War II the Fieldhouse became barracks for the U.S. Navy Signal School and the U.S. Army Air Corps. Approximately 800 sailors arrived in June 1942 to train as signalmen, and in March 1943, 700 air cadets moved in. They shared the facility for two months before the signalmen graduated.

occurred every year through 1971. The exposure was so widespread that Indianapolis and Butler University, with the help of Coach Hinkle, attracted many teams to the Fieldhouse, including a new professional

league. In 1949 the newly named National Basketball Association granted Indianapolis a franchise to be named the Indianapolis Olympians. The team was so named because city leaders in Indianapolis had offered contracts to the entire starting five of the University of Kentucky team, who had

played for the U.S. team that won the gold medal at the 1948 Olympics in London. In an agreement with Butler University, the Olympians were given use of Butler Fieldhouse. The team created quite a stir around Indianapolis as it sold out nearly every game and even made the playoffs. At that time, Indiana had three teams playing in the NBA. The Anderson Duffy Packers and the Fort Wayne Zollner Pistons also appeared at Butler Fieldhouse from time to time, but Anderson could not support a team and folded. The Olympians became a victim of a betting scandal involving their star players while they were in college and the team withdrew from the NBA.

The years from 1953 through 1956 may well have been the most exciting in Indiana basketball history and Butler



Top: When built, the Fieldhouse had its basketball court oriented east and west to take advantage of the natural light coming from the end windows. In 1933 the court was oriented to face north and south. Above, Left: In February 1947 the Fieldhouse hosted a six-day bicycle race, which ran each day for eleven hours and forty-five minutes, ending at 2:15 a.m. This allowed for school activities, including a basketball game, to run as scheduled. Above: Several U.S. presidents have spoken at the Fieldhouse, including Herbert Hoover, Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton.

Fieldhouse contributed a great deal to what many refer to as the golden era of Indiana basketball. Indiana University had won the NCAA tournament in 1940, and so again in 1953, bringing more attention to the state's love of the game. Hinkle, a master at marketing the Fieldhouse, took advantage of Indiana's growing reputation for basketball, and made some money in the process. During the 1953–54 season, Hinkle scheduled a game against small Rio Grande College out of Ohio. That team featured a player who was setting the basketball world ablaze—Bevo Francis. Francis stood six feet, nine inches tall and could shoot from anywhere on the court, proving his aptitude by scoring 116 points in one game. He had averaged 50.1 points per game the season before and was getting plenty of publicity, not the least of which was an appearance on the then-popular Ed Sullivan television show. Rio Grande was like a traveling roadshow and was drawing big crowds around the country. Francis put on quite a show as he set a Butler Fieldhouse record by scoring forty-eight points as Rio Grande beat a good Butler team 81–68. As he left the floor, Francis received a standing ovation from the approximately 12,000 fans gathered at the Fieldhouse.

Just a few weeks after the Francis spectacle, the Fieldhouse played host to one of the most famous games in Indiana basketball history, as Bobby Plump made



To open National Music Week in May 1936, Sigma Alpha Iota, the national professional music sorority, sponsored a grand-piano recital. The Fieldhouse hosted 125 pianos on which 825 pianists played a variety of songs and accompanied the combined choirs of Butler and the Arthur Jordan Conservatory of Music.

basketball palace. Oscar Robertson, who many believe is the best player to come out of Indiana, led his all-black Crispus Attucks Tigers to back-to-back state titles in 1955 and 1956. The last was an undefeated season and the team played many games at the Fieldhouse. One famous incident involving the Fieldhouse took place during Robertson's sophomore year. Attucks was scheduled to play rival Indianapolis Tech at the Fieldhouse and the game turned out to be what has to be one of the most

players to the court. Federal Bureau of Investigation agents also roamed around the Fieldhouse taking notes. More than 10,000 fans showed up—a record at that time for a regular season high school game in Indianapolis. Understandably, the young players were nervous and the shooting percentages on the famous floor were not pretty as Attucks won 43–38.

During his tenure at Butler, Hinkle also scheduled what was called the Hoosier Classic, a two-day event that included Butler, IU, Notre Dame, and Purdue University. The games drew great crowds as they were usually played during a holiday break from school. Ever generous with the gate receipts, Hinkle divided any profits with the other schools. The first Classic was held in 1948 and in its first three years approximately 75,000 people showed up at the Fieldhouse.

The lure of the majestic Fieldhouse even helped Hinkle land an exhibition game that still resonates with those who were there. Bill Russell, soon to be a legend with the Boston Celtics, had just complet-

Gambling on basketball was big around Indianapolis in those days, causing interest in the game to reach such a fever pitch that five players were threatened.

his famous shot winning the 1954 state title for Milan High School over Muncie Central, serving as inspiration for the 1986 film *Hoosiers* (scenes for the movie were filmed at the Fieldhouse). Other games at the Fieldhouse solidified its place as a

publicized in Hoosier basketball history. Gambling on basketball was big around Indianapolis in those days, causing interest in the game to reach such a fever pitch that five players were threatened. Police guarded the dressing rooms and even escorted

ed his college career that included leading his University of San Francisco team to NCAA championships. Russell was named to lead the U.S. Olympic basketball team in the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne, Australia. The team was traveling the country and playing games to ready itself for the Olympics. Hinkle persuaded the team to play at Butler Fieldhouse against the national Amateur Athletic Union championship team, the Phillips 66ers. The Fieldhouse was packed and Russell and teammate K. C. Jones led the Olympians to victory. Weeks later, the Olympic team won the gold medal. Russell had signed with the Celtics, but was late joining them for the NBA season because he wanted to play in the Olympics.

In 1939 management at the *Indianapolis Star* decided the newspaper would begin naming an Indiana All-Star team made up of the ten best senior high school players in the state. The first player to be named would be known as Mr. Basketball and wear jersey Number 1. After a lopsided

victory against the Indiana state champs in 1939, the All-Stars began playing the best high school players from Kentucky in the summer after every basketball season. Of course, the games were to be played at Butler Fieldhouse, with proceeds to be donated to the blind. Eventually the game between Indiana and Kentucky became

Hinkle served as Butler's head basketball coach from 1926 until his retirement following the 1969–70 season (he also served several years as Butler's athletic director).

a two-game series with one game in each state and raised a substantial sum for a good cause and continues to this day.

Hinkle served as Butler's head basketball coach from 1926 until his retirement following the 1969–70 season (he also served several years as Butler's athletic director). The Logansport, Indiana, native developed a disciplined system of teaching basketball and won the national basketball championship in 1929 (via voting, not through

a tournament). An All-American basketball player in 1920 at the University of Chicago, he later served as president of the National Association of Basketball Coaches and chairman of the NCAA Basketball Rules Committee, and was inducted into the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics Hall of Fame, the In-

diana Basketball Hall of Fame, the Indiana Football Hall of Fame, and the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. In retirement, Hinkle teamed with Tom Carnegie on basketball broadcasts and never tired of coming to the facility named in his honor. Hinkle continued to give his all to Butler, working as a special assistant to the president for community affairs, a post he held until his death in 1992.

Hinkle might be surprised at the changes to his beloved Fieldhouse. The



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Left: Basketball legend Oscar Robertson helps cut down the nets at the Fieldhouse in March 1956 after his Crispus Attucks High School team won the state championship over Jefferson High School of Lafayette. Above: A circa 1990 view of the Fieldhouse after a \$1.5 million renovation that improved its reception area and offices and reduced seating capacity to approximately 11,000.



BUTLER UNIVERSITY, PHOTO BY BRENT SMITH

The Butler Bulldogs battle the University of Chicago in a 2014 exhibition game that highlighted the completion of a \$36 million renovation project that included installation of a new scoreboard with video-playback capability.

Butler Bulldogs, both the men's and women's teams, continue to play their home games at the facility, both of them now part of the Big East Conference after years playing in such organizations as the Missouri Valley Conference, Mid-America Conference, Indiana Collegiate Conference, Horizon League, and Atlantic 10. The Fieldhouse underwent a \$36 million renovation during the summer of 2014 that included interior improvements for accessibility, concessions, and seating, as well as installing a new scoreboard. Exterior work to the Fieldhouse included replacing windowpanes with new energy-ef-

ficient glass and tuck-pointing 282,000 of the venerable facility's bricks.

In spite of the changes to the Fieldhouse over the years, any fan who takes a stroll through the stands, looks up into the rafters, and gazes out on the floor will remember classic games from the past. Most field houses and gymnasiums, as they age, get torn down and new ones replace them, but in Indiana many have been kept alive. Marion, for example, has at least partially preserved Memorial Coliseum and the Muncie Bearcats still play in the Muncie Fieldhouse. Declared a National Historic Landmark in 1987, Hinkle Fieldhouse

stands as a monument to the philosophy that preserving such famous structures is worthwhile. Such a philosophy is part of the culture that made Indiana *the* basketball state.

Norman Jones is a Ball State graduate. He writes often for the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame's magazine and has published four books. This is his second article for Traces. He wrote about Richmond, Indiana, football star Tim Brown in the magazine's spring 2010 issue. Portions of this article are reprinted with permission of the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame. •

FOR FURTHER READING

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