THE NORTH CENTRAL CONFERENCE:

BASKETBALL DOMINANCE

by

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**BASKETBALL.** The word is almost synonymous with the word Hoosier. It is a major source of excitement for people from age 2 to 102! It is appealing to people at all levels, but especially high school. Over the years some of the best and most successful teams have come from the North Central Conference. This has become even more true in recent years. The important question pertaining to this is "Why has the NCC become so dominant over the years?"

But if one questions the power of the NCC, then one needs only to look at the state record books. Records of all sorts point to the success of the conference. In recent memory, most everyone can remember the continual appearance of NCC teams in the final four in the last two decades. Only three times since 1970 have there been no NCC teams in the final four. The conference more than made up for that when, in 1985, they had three of the four teams in the finals. That is the most ever from the same conference. The records go much further, too.

NCC teams hold the following state tournament records: most regional titles won, most semi-state titles won, most state titles won, most consecutive sectional titles, most consecutive regional titles, most consecutive semi-state titles, and most consecutive state titles. The top five teams for most times in the final 16 are all NCC teams. The top teams for most times in the final eight are NCC teams. The top three for most times in the final four are NCC teams. And, the top three teams for most
times in the final game are, you guessed it, from the NCC.

It is not just the teams that have fared well, but individuals from the conference have also done well. The NCC boasts of 17 mental attitude award winners, and 18 Mr. Basketball winners. Individuals have also fared well in the categories of highest four game totals, most points in one game, and most points in a final game, all in the "Sweet 16".

But the NCC is not just dominant during the state tournament. The teams are frequently at the top of the weekly coaches and sportswriters polls during the season. This was best illustrated in the 87-88 season when three of the top five teams were consistently NCC teams, and Richmond and Muncie Central occupied the #1 slot the entire season. Also the NCC displayed its dominance every weekend during the winter, when home games are played in five of the top seven state's largest gyms. New Castle even boasts of "The world's largest and finest high school gymnasium."

With all of the aforementioned NCC records in mind, it is easy to see that the NCC really is the dominant conference in the state. But the question that still remains is, "Why?" To answer this, a survey was initiated that would try to develop an answer from within. Attempts were made to contact the coach, a fan, and a media representative from each North Central Conference school. They all were asked, "Why has basketball been dominant in your city?", and "Why do you think the NCC has been so dominant through the years?". These questions were open ended in an
attempt to allow the respondent to go in any direction with the question. What follows are the responses from those surveys.

COACHES

Anderson coach Norm Held has been with the Indians for a number of years. He is seen by many as one of the best coaches in the conference. Year after year his teams are ones that must be reckoned with, and have made their mark in the state finals in the 1980's. When asked why he thought basketball has been so big in Anderson, his first response was, tradition. He noted that the hopes from generation to generation have been passed through the community. He also feels that, to many, basketball in Anderson is a way of life. Also, the pride of being a fan has kept up the enthusiasm. Probably more important, he says, is the entertainment value of the games on the weekend. As he puts it, "It is the place to be!"

As for the dominance of the conference, he contributes that to tradition again. Held notes that basketball has "been king in many of those areas as long as anyone can remember." He also notes that most of the cities in the conference are heavy in industry, which provides a good deal of blue-collar support. Coach Held's comments are very similar to the rest of those surveyed and will be apparent in the responses that follow.

The coach of Kokomo is Basil Mawbey. He has only been there four years, but comes there with a championship under his belt from the 1983 state championship with Connersville. He has
already made his presence felt in the conference, with the year-
long stay in the top five of the polls last season. When asked
about basketball's prominence in his community, he responded that
it is really coming around since the two major schools in the
city merged. But he also attributed the importance of basketball
through the years to the fan support. Although there was a
drought when the schools split, there was enough to keep its
prominence high.

Concerning the conference's power through the years, he
pointed to the fact that most of the conference cities are large
ones. Add to that, he notes, that most of these cities have only
one school, and they have a good base to draw their players.
Coach Mawbey, agreed with coach Held that the entertainment value
of the game in these cities has kept the fan support high.

In Lafayette, the coach is James Hammel. His school is rich
in heritage in basketball in many years past. He was able to
bring sectional and regional titles to the school this past year.
He felt that basketball was so dominant in the community because
for many it was a way of life. Tradition and heritage were also
key factors to basketball's importance. Adding to this was the
fact that their kids played ball all year long.

As for the conference, he again said that tradition was a
key to what made the conference superior through the years.
Also, kids in these areas know what is expected of them when
basketball season rolls around and try to live up to those
expectations. Fan support is another reason. Along these same
lines, coach Hammel felt that larger size gyms contribute to the success of the conference teams.

As for Logansport, the situation there is much different. They have not seen much success in basketball through the years. The current coach, Phil Hershberger, notes that because of the schools size, their athletes can not specialize in just basketball like many of the athletes in other schools can. Also, he says the administration has not put the emphasis on this sport like other schools have.

Because he is a member of the NCC, he does however have some opinions on why the conference over all has been so successful. First, most of the schools are quite large. They are also rich in tradition. Great name coaches, excluding himself he says, just make the conference even more powerful. With the gym sizes and the competition within the conference, the entertainment value of the games keep the fans coming.

Dan Gunn is the coach at Marion. He just completed his first year there as head coach, following the footsteps of the legendary, Bill Green. Coach Gunn is quite familiar with the area, however, because Marion is where he spent his days as a high school player. From a coaches perspective, he realizes that basketball is so big in Marion because of the success it has had in the past. He also feels the Police Athletic League has added to the success of the program. Community support and their emphasis on the sport have also aided the program.

As for the dominance of the conference, he attributes this
to the fact that these are industrial communities. In them you will find hard workers whose kids were not pampered and were not afraid to work. Conference success is also derived from the tradition and the fact that most of the schools are very similar. The teams must play each other too, which makes the competition among themselves even greater, thus the need to achieve more.

Muncie Central. No school has won more state titles than the Bearcats. Three of their titles have come under their current coach, Bill Harrell. The school won its eighth title just last season. According to the coach, a lot of their success can be attributed to the tradition. People feel the need to be a part of the program, which adds that much more importance to their winning.

The reason for the conferences' dominance, according to coach Harrell, is partly due to the large gyms the schools play in. Also, fans like the styles of play in the conference. Thus he is putting a lot of emphasis on the support of the fans.

In New Castle, the coach is Sam Alford. He has many sectional and regional titles with the schools, to go along with his coaching of a Mr. Basketball, his son, Steve Alford. The coach feels that the reason basketball is so big in New Castle, is the heritage associated with the program. He also feels that it is a good quality program that helps draw support.

The conference is dominant, he feels, partly because of the size of the cities. The fact that many of the cities have great feeder programs have also helped tremendously. These programs
include community leagues like the YMCA and Boys Club.

George Griffith is the coach of Richmond High School. He has guided many teams to sectional, regional and semi-state titles. However, a state title has eluded him as Richmond is the only NCC team not to have a state championship in their history. He reasons that Richmond's overall success has come from their tradition. He also feels that recent success has come from the number of students in the school, and even more recently the addition of their new gym, The Tiernan Center.

Concerning the dominance of the conference, he suggests that this is accomplished because all NCC teams have their own sectional and most have their own regional. The fact that there are only one or two schools in cities that large have helped considerably.
MEDIA

In Anderson, Dave Allen, of WHBU, has followed the Indians through their seasons. He feels that local dominance of basketball can be attributed to the fact the players there play all year round. In addition, the school has good programs throughout the grade levels. Tradition plays a key role too. For the fans, games at The Wigwam are the place to be on the weekends during basketball season. Fans boast of having season tickets for over 40 years, and have even been known to write those tickets into their will.

For the conference itself, Dave Allen feels that regardless of whether the conference was a part of those cities or not, most of these places would still be major basketball centers. A big reason is that the cities do not offer entertainment that can surpass that of basketball.

For a view from the media of Kokomo, Dave Kitchell, from the Kokomo Tribune, has followed the Wildkats. He accounts for the communities love of basketball by noting that the people fell in love with it from day one. Since then the community commitment has been a major factor in the schools success. Also aiding in the prominence of basketball in Kokomo is the fact that the Wildkats play in the best conference, he adds. The school has also been able to draw good players and coaches throughout the years.

Replying to the question of why is the NCC so dominant, Dave Kitchell notes that the NCC is the only conference that has three
different avenues to get to the state finals. Also the conference has attracted the best coaches. The facilities add to their successes, too. Additionally, the fact that most of the teams play tougher schedules and they host sectional and regional games make the conference even better.

In Logansport, Milt Hess of WSAL, notes that Logansport High School is not representative of the rest of the schools in the conference. The Berries are actually opposite of the rest schools because emphasis is not put on basketball. He notes that there is no real support from the fans. Also the athletic director is not very aggressive.

He does agree, however, that the conference is quite dominant in the state. He attributes this to the fact that the schools are large and rich with tradition. Because they all have to play each other, they are able to get even stronger.

Morrie Mannies is the voice of the Muncie Central Bearcats with WLBC. He accounts for Muncie's success by noting the rich tradition and early successes before the sixties. Good coaches through the years have also been a major factor, along with the players playing all year round.

As for the conference, superior play is a result of the schools being in larger cities. He again noted that most of the schools were also rich in basketball tradition and received tremendous amounts of community support. Probably more important, however is the exposure the schools get because of their location in relation to the major media markets.
According to Tim George, of WCTW in New Castle, the Trojans have been able to maintain emphasis on basketball because of the tradition, especially that of Mr. Basketball. The fact that the school has the largest high school gymnasium in the world adds to the continual support. Because the conference is so powerful, the teams are a good draw, he adds.

Tim George reasons that the NCC is so successful because the schools are so big and can draw off a large number of students. He also feels that since most programs have already established themselves, it is easier for them to continue with their fine play. Because the coaches are so good and have experience in their corner, he again feels that this is a major factor. Like many others, he too, states that the sectionals and regionals they host play a key role.
FANS

Bill Hecht has been an Indian fan for a number of years. He points to the support of the faithful fans as a major factor in the prominence of basketball in Anderson. Additionally, the emphasis has been put on the sport and the rivalry that has been traditional with the other conference schools.

The conference success, he feels, comes from the fact that most of the schools come from good size cities. Add to that, that most of the cities only have one high school, and the potential for success is even greater. These cities, though big, do not offer a great deal of entertainment that can compare to thrill of a NCC basketball game.

Kokomo fan Mike Roberts has been a part of the community all his life and from that view he has seen the players and fans as the keys to maintaining basketball’s importance in the community. Tradition has been another key to the importance of the city’s passion.

As for the conference, Mike Roberts attributes its success to the caliber of play that is seen week in and week out in the NCC games. He also feels that the conference is home to the better coaches in the state.

In Lafayette, Dick Robinson owns a sporting goods store which has allowed him to get a good view of what is really going on in his basketball community. He feels that support for basketball has fallen off in recent years because of the lack of support or spirit from the student body. He also feels that many
of the people in the community take the program for granted. However, he does state that some sense of tradition still exists to sort of save the program.

On the other hand, Dick Robinson does feel that the success and support is still there for a number of NCC schools. Their success stems largely from the fact that they are larger schools and have a rich tradition. The schools also put an emphasis on basketball and have a good nucleus on which to build successful programs.

Bill Platt, a fan from Logansport, echoes much of the same things that the coach and the media representative said. He recognizes that basketball ranks third among the sports there and doesn't receive much support.

He does, however, recognize the conference's success and attributes this to the large size of the schools and the fact that there is only one high school in most of the cities. Another big part of the success is the feeder systems that help build the players at a young age.

According to Kerry Clevenger of Marion, prominence of basketball there has developed through the fan support. It has also come from the general "HOOSIER HYSTERIA" felt by all. Again, tradition plays a major role in the continuing success of the Marion teams. As for the conference, he attributes its success to the size of the schools involved.

In Muncie, Ann Tyler has only been a Bearcat for six years, but has been able to acquire much information on the history of
the team. Muncie Central's success over the years has come from tradition and history of the program. She also notes that basketball has a big following because the amount of quality entertainment is low in Muncie. More importantly, however, is the fact that the fans have a true respect for the players and all that they accomplish through their hard work.

She sees the conferences successes coming from the fact that the schools are quite large. It is also made up of predominantly good teams and the competitions among themselves makes them even better, she notes.

For John Lee, from New Castle, basketball has gotten so big because that is all there is. It has become a source of community pride over the years. Also, he says that New Castle has been able to keep just enough excellent players coming through the system to continue fan support and the hope of winning.

John Lee sees the conferences dominance coming from the realization that the schools are big and most have better coaches. More importantly, he states, is that because the teams have great histories in basketball, they are bound to be winners; in essence, success breeds success. Also contributing to the conference's dominance is the superior gym sizes and the athletes living up to what is expected of them.
SUMMARY

Looking back over the responses from those surveyed, it is easy to see some remarks appear over and over. Though Logansport people were able to recognize their differences with the rest of the conference, they too were able to reason why the conference was so successful.

The major reason given by practically everyone, was that the schools were very large and were part of a one high school system. Tradition also seemed to be very important. It is almost as if the NCC got off on the right foot when the game was introduced and have just followed through ever since their early success. Coaches, fan support, and gym size were also important in helping to secure dominance by the NCC.

What does the future hold? The answer is probably more of what history already holds in its' record books. Of course schools go through their lean times, when the success and accolades are not there for a few years, but whenever one team seems to fall from the spotlight for a while, another team will take their place. Thus, the roots of "HOOSIER HYSTERIA" run deep and firmly secure themselves in the grounds of the North Central Conference.