

HYSTERIA ON THE HARDWOOD:
A NARRATIVE HISTORY OF COMMUNITY, RACE, AND
INDIANA'S "BASKETBRAWL" TRADITION

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This is for the 1963-1964 Muncie Central Bearcats basketball team. It is for all the teams at Muncie Central that year and the following Fall, and for the students at the school. They had their hearts and dreams broken. I hope this thesis answers some of the questions as to what happened. I can only begin to address the why.

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INTRODUCTION

If everyone in America did not know of Indiana's obsession with high school boys basketball, the movie *Hoosiers* memorialized it. Based on the true story of how a small town, all-white team defeated the interracial Muncie Central High School Bearcats, a mighty basketball powerhouse, to win the state tournament, *Hoosiers* glorified Indiana as a state where they call basketball their religion. Muncie Central's shocking defeat in 1954 was not, ultimately, the most significant humiliation in its storied basketball history. In 1964, Muncie Central got the "death penalty" at the hands of the Indiana High School Athletic Association's (IHSAA) new commissioner, Phil N. Eskew, after post-game brawling led to a broader investigation of the program.

The fighting was bad. In the closing moments of the game, a Muncie Central opponent was bloodied by an inbound pass to the face, fans erupted in violence, swarming the floor. A Muncie Central supporter hit a cheerleader for the rival Anderson Indians. Eskew was furious. He said, "No matter where I go in Indiana, I hear about things Muncie Central has done wrong. If Muncie Central wants to play its games and make sure its players and fans behave like ladies and gentlemen, we're glad to have them in the IHSAA. If Muncie Central doesn't, then we can damn well get along without them."¹ Muncie professed to be shocked by Eskew's profanity and prejudgment. The NAACP weighed in, but not to criticize Eskew. Instead, it threatened to sue the Muncie

¹ Associated Press, "Eskew Promises To Investigate Action of Fans: 'Going to Get to the Bottom of It,' Says IHSAA Boss," newspaper unknown, December 31, 1963. Many newspaper articles cited herein were found in the collection of the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, New Castle, Indiana, in a scrapbook of articles about the Muncie Central suspension created by Elsa Barker Eskew (hereafter, HOF). Not all were preserved with identifying information such as the date and the newspaper. Where possible, this was verified. However, some articles could not be traced to their original publication date and source. Dates discussed within the articles, subject matter and context--such as the status of the investigation, for example--allowed the author to place the articles in a timeline with confidence.

Central school board, administrators and coaches for contributing to the delinquency of minors, claiming that Muncie Central knew for years about bad behavior on the team but had done nothing to intervene, a view that many in the larger community came to share.²

Eskew and Muncie Central each separately investigated the incident. Muncie Central suspended two African American players in advance of the hearing before the IHSAA, seemingly a repeat of actions it had taken two years earlier when its program had been under investigation for hazing. In that 1962 incident, Muncie Central preempted sanctions by the IHSAA, but Eskew was not at the helm of the IHSAA that year.³ In 1964, after a closed-door hearing and two days of deliberations, Eskew and the IHSAA Board of Control announced their decision, and the punishment prescribed made front page headlines across the state and beyond.

These events took place at the beginning of the years from “Camelot to Watergate.”⁴ Viet Nam, the civil rights movement, and the sexual revolution took place on the national stage while Muncie and Commissioner Eskew struggled to square their values and traditions with a rapidly changing society. The ideal of athletic achievement by amateurs – high school boys representing their community – tempered prejudice, contradictory sexual mores, and simmering tensions in Muncie. A community trauma that began with a “basketbrawl” (as the sportswriters named it) on the hardwood exposed

² Mickey Porter, “Until 1965: Muncie Central Draws Suspension,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 16, 1964. Community reaction was expressed at school board meetings, City Council meetings, and in numerous letters to the editor published in the *Muncie Star* and the *Muncie Evening Press* during January 1964. See, Warren Collier, “Council Demands Eskew Apologize to Muncie,” *Muncie Evening Press*, January 7, 1964; Letter to the editor, “Irked by Action of City Council,” *Muncie Evening Press*, January 8, 1964; “Council Letter to IHSAA Is Delayed,” *Muncie Evening Press*, January 9, 1964; Bill Brantley, “School Head Under Fire: Board Report on IHSAA Action Stirs Exchange,” *Muncie Star*, January 17, 1964.

³ Dale Glenn, *The History of the Indiana High School Athletic Association* (Greenfield, Ind.: Mitchell-Fleming Printing, Inc., 1976).

⁴ Mark C. Carnes and John A. Garraty, *American Destiny: Narrative of a Nation*, 3d ed. (New York, Pearson Longman, 2008), 810.

some ugly truths underlying the veneer of team, community, and athletics. Other truths were never spoken and remained hidden even from those most intimately impacted by the events of the IHSAA's decision.

This is not the story of a basketball game, but rather what the game hid and what it revealed when the rules were broken. Hoosier Hysteria was--and remains--something that Indiana prided itself on. It was more than just the boys on the floor on Friday night. Indiana's love of high school basketball was a relationship between those young men and the fans, the coaches, the administrators and school boards. It included the rivalries between schools, many of which ran deep and were deeply felt, like that between Muncie Central and Anderson. The Bearcats were more than a boys basketball team. They were a symbol and moderating force for community cohesion. Those boys, whether they knew it or not, were carrying a big burden placed on them by their community, and when adults became invested in their game, the season, the wins, losses, and rivalries, the stakes got pretty high.

Muncie Central found itself on a collision course with Commissioner Eskew, not because it was the only bad actor in a state that loved its basketball, but because there was violence and wrongdoing simmering under the shiny veneer of Hoosier Hysteria, and Eskew had set himself the task of putting an end to it. Eskew believed that participation in sports made players better students and more successful men.⁵ Eskew's vision guided the investigation, and his moral outrage led to the tough discipline imposed--not any

⁵ Eskew, "4 F's" (speech), Anderson, Indiana, February 14, 1966, from the private collection of Philip N. Eskew, Jr. (hereafter, EPC). Girls' sports did not come under the supervision of the IHSAA until 1972. From 1972 through 1976, the final years of Eskew's tenure as commissioner, girls state tourneys in eight sports shifted from sponsorship by the Indiana League of High School Girls Athletic Association to the IHSAA. Eskew celebrated the close of that transitional period with the first girls basketball state tournament. The championship game drew almost 15,000 fans and was televised statewide. Glenn, *History of the IHSAA*, 246-254.

concern about public sentiment or other outside pressures.⁶ But was he right? Did he punish the perpetrators or the victims? The brawl at the Frankfort Holiday Tourney was the catalyst for an action that touched on every part of the problem that Eskew felt he needed to solve. Ultimately, did Eskew’s harsh sanction of Muncie Central save the boys and their community from violent impulses and moral turpitude, thus restoring the ideals of high school athletics and Hoosier Hysteria, or did it ignore truths and ruin dreams?

⁶ Eskew, “Exploiting High School Athletes” (speech), National Athletic Directors Conference, Columbus, Ohio, December 13, 1972, EPC. Eskew recorded his speeches at the urging of his son, Philip N. Eskew, Jr. These tapes have subsequently been preserved on CD-ROM and in electronic files by the author.

CHAPTER I

INDIANA’S “BASKETBRAWL” TRADITION

Indiana’s basketball tradition evokes “nostalgia for the heartland and its traditional values that are perceived as purely American. Basketball in Indiana hearkens back to a bygone era, when values were simple, the work ethic pure, the family central, and the community close-knit.”⁷ This tradition is not troubled by any talk of violence or racism. The written history of Indiana basketball continues this celebratory tradition, glorifying the winning season and the star player.⁸ In that library, however, the state champion Muncie Central Bearcats of 1963 have no footnote to tell the reader that less than one year later, following a bloody brawl at the Frankfort Holiday Tourney, the school would be at the center of a reexamination of what Indiana basketball means and the viability of the tradition.⁹ Race, sex, and politics are not part of the idyllic vision Hoosiers have of their basketball tradition, though each was implicated in the heated days following the brawl at Frankfort.

⁷ Jeffrey Lane, *Under the Boards: The Cultural Revolution in Basketball* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 157.

⁸ See, for example, Bill Stedman, *Ninety Years of Alices* (Vincennes, Ind.: Self-published, 1995); Scott Schuler, *Maroons: A History of Boys Basketball at Mishawaka High School* (Mishawaka, Ind.: Grass Creek Publishing, 2005); Terry Rademacher, *Bordenites, Berries & Braves: A History of Borden High School Boys Varsity Basketball* (Borden, Ind.: Larry Johnson and Terry Rademacher, 1998); Tim Nonte, et al., *A History of Loogootee High School Boys’ Basketball, 1905 to 2008: One Hundred Plus Years of Lions* (Patoka, Ind.: T. Nonte, 2008); Dean W. Hockney, Jimmy Rayl, and Greg Bell, *Kats with a K: The One Hundred Year History of Kokomo High School Boys’ Basketball* (Kokomo, Ind.: Wilson Media Group, 2003); Jeffrey Bossaer, *Attica High School and Boys’ Basketball, Volume 1, March 1992* (Attica, Ind.: Self-published, 1992); Jeff Washburn, *Tales from Indiana High School Basketball* (Champaign: Sports Publishing LLC, 2004); and Dick Denny, *Glory Days: Catching Up with the Legends of Indiana High School Basketball* (Champaign: Sports Publishing LLC, 2006).

⁹ Although the Muncie Central High School yearbook for the Class of 1964 mentions the IHSAA sanction many times, key details of what happened are seemingly expunged and the pictures of the two players at the heart of the investigation are simply omitted. Even today, players and other students who were directly and deeply impacted by these events have limited knowledge and understanding of all that occurred, the timeline of the inquiry, or the exacerbating factors that contributed to the penalty imposed. See, Hartley, Kunkle, Reese, Rankin, and Shepperd interviews, for example.

Certainly in Indiana there were coaches, players, fans, parents, and others who decried unsportsmanlike conduct in competition. Violence in sports is in direct counterpoise to the exalted virtues of athletics. America has deliberately imbued sports participation with morality, the importance of teamwork, physicality, and loyalty. Indeed, school-based athletics were originally encouraged to develop qualities of self-sacrifice, discipline, cooperation, achievement, and social prestige.¹⁰ These are the virtues of sport that Eskew spent his life talking about and which formed the core of his own philosophy. While young athletes are ostensibly encouraged to just “do your best,” coaches, teammates, peers, teachers, administrators, family--and the community--have an expectation and a need for victory.¹¹ Thus, corruption and violence in sports is often overlooked by fans and, it seems, by the regulators. The passions that fuel the desire to win may lead to aggressive coaching, playing, and fan support, but in Indiana, violence and basketball had gone hand in hand almost since its inception.

¹⁰ Sports historian Steven Riess looked at the relationship between urbanization, schools and sports in *City Games: The Evolution of American Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989). Riess contends that high school was a middle class institution, but attendance by the working class increased through the Depression when there were no longer any jobs to distract young people from academic pursuits. Participation in high school athletics was promoted to counteract the rough culture of the urban poor. The moral focus of sports culture is also found in the YMCA movement, a kind of “muscular Christianity.” Ibid., 154, 156. Russ Crawford investigates sport as a binding force deliberately used to strengthen the idea of an “American Way of Life” in his study of sports and propaganda in *The Use of Sports to Promote the American Way of Life During the Cold War: Cultural Propaganda, 1945-1963* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008). Finally, in *SportsWars: Athletes in the Age of Aquarius* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001), David Zang traces the subversion of the idealism of school athletics to social change in the 1960s when, he argues, a “win at any price” mentality was propounded by alumni and administrators on coaches and players, even at the cost of academic achievement by so-called student-athletes. As the Muncie Central incident shows, such sentiments existed well prior to the 1960s.

¹¹ Kathryn Jay argues that while Americans love an underdog--the prevalent theme in *Hoosiers*--they also believe in winning at almost any cost. Kathryn Jay, *More Than Just A Game: Sports in American Life Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

Hysteria for basketball in Indiana was often violent and ugly. It began with the earliest days of the sport.¹² Tough regulators ruled over the IHSAA and Hoosier high school teams, but no one ever sat a program down for conduct violations.¹³ When the brawl at Frankfort hit the front pages of nearly every paper in the state in December 1963, there was a new man in charge. Eskew had spent his life as an athlete, teacher, coach, and official.¹⁴ He talked about sports participation as the cornerstone of developing character in young people. But Eskew loved kids more than he loved sports.¹⁵ When kids were in trouble, when parents, coaches, and fans failed to act in their best interest, this commissioner would take action and teach everyone some painful lessons about values and priorities, sportsmanship and playing by the rules. Muncie Central was a big school with a storied basketball program, but in 1963, rough play and rough fans were not unique to the Bearcats.¹⁶ The Bearcats and their followers simply found themselves on a collision course with the new commissioner who was done with rowdyism and ready to send a message.

¹² For example, during the third IHSAA-sponsored statewide tourney in 1914, Tommy King of Lebanon suffered a broken shoulder after a scuffle under the basket. Glenn, *History of the IHSAA*, 69-70. As early as 1918, Muncie Central and Anderson fans rioted after a hard foul by Muncie's "Speed" Moore left an Anderson player unconscious on the floor. Anderson forfeited the game rather than re-take the floor. Dick and Jackie Stodghill, *Bearcats! Muncie Central Basketball* (Lulu.com: Self-published, 2008), 17-18. The evidence is primarily anecdotal. Spectatorism, including fan violence and the impact of the fan on athletes, is a relatively undeveloped area of sports history, although sociologists have engaged the subject. See, for example, Christopher S. Ludlac, *Fair or Foul: Sports and Criminal Behavior in the United States* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger/ABC-CLIO, 2010) or Margaret Gatz, Michael A. Messner, and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, eds., *Paradoxes of Youth and Sport* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002).

¹³ Glenn, *History of the IHSAA*, passim. Glenn explores the tenure of each of the IHSAA's commissioners from the organization's inception through 1976, and the major conflicts they faced during their years at the helm.

¹⁴ See, Tribute to Phil Eskew by Senator Birch Bayh, *Cong. Rec.*, 94th Con., 2d sess., April 14, 1976, 122, pt. 57; Phil N. Eskew, Silver Medal Award 1970, Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, <http://hoopshall.com/hall/e/phil-n-eskew> (accessed April 4, 2010); Glenn, *History of the IHSAA*, 212.

¹⁵ Eskew, "4 Fs" (speech), EPC.

¹⁶ Stodghill, *Bearcats*, passim.

Phil Eskew was born in Grantsburg, Indiana, on New Year's Day in 1906, son of the Reverend Curtis B. Eskew, a United Brethren minister and telegrapher for the Southern Railroad, and Addie Jones Eskew.¹⁷ Reverend Eskew preached all around the area, never accepting payment. To make it possible for his father to fulfill this vocation, Curtis Jr., known as Bliss, would fill in at the railroad on Sundays. In 1914, the family moved to New Salisbury, just up the road from Corydon, Indiana's first state capitol. At New Salisbury High School, Eskew played basketball, baseball, and ran track.¹⁸

Although they were poor, Eskew and his five brothers and sisters all went on to college.¹⁹ Eskew obtained his undergraduate degree in education at Indiana's Oakland City College in 1929.²⁰ After graduation, he was hired as one of four teachers at Glendale High School. Because he was the only male teacher, he did the janitorial work in addition to his duties coaching basketball, baseball, and track, teaching physical education, and directing the school plays. After a year, he accepted a position at Bloomington High School where he taught history and coached track, golf, and basketball. During this time, he completed a master's degree in education in 1933 at Indiana University, as well as two years of law school.

Eskew met Elsa Merle Barker of Fulton, Indiana, in Bloomington where she was finishing her degree in education and student teaching at the high school. They were

¹⁷ Birth certificate of Eskew, recorded at Milltown, Harrison County, Indiana, Book No. 1902-1906, page 32, EPC.

¹⁸ Phil N. Eskew, interview by George Dingley, April 10, 1973, Wabash, Indiana, Library Oral History project, EPC.

¹⁹ Glenn, *History of the IHSAA*, 212. Glenn interviewed Eskew on July 14, 1975, while writing his dissertation on IHSAA history, which was later published as the book cited here.

²⁰ Eskew interview with Dingley, April 10, 1973, EPC. Myrtle, Bliss, Mary, Larcey and Mildred Eskew attended Oakland City College, too. Bliss went on to law school, practiced for many years and was eventually elected to the bench in Harrison County, Indiana. His son, Curtis, held the same seat decades later. "Judge Eskew dies at 92: Served 12 Years on Bench Here," newspaper unknown, HOF. Each of the three sisters became schoolteachers, and older brother Larcey worked as a telegraph operator until his death at age 42. Email from Philip N. Eskew, Jr. to author, dated March 21, 2010.

married on June 4, 1933. In 1935, Eskew accepted a teaching position in Wabash, Indiana. While there, Eskew volunteered as assistant football coach. He was paid “[n]o money--I just liked kids and loved to work with them.”²¹ He soon became Dean of Boys and then principal of Wabash High School. In 1951, Eskew was hired as Superintendent of Schools for Sullivan County in southwestern Indiana. In 1959, Eskew accepted the same position for the Huntington schools in northeastern Indiana.²² By August 1962, when Eskew was selected as commissioner of the IHSAA, he had spent twenty-three years as a high school basketball, baseball, football, and track official.²³

Eskew was also a humorist and lecturer. He had his first paid speaking engagement at Mentone, Indiana, in 1942, earning ten dollars. Over the years, he spoke over four thousand times to more than a million people in every Indiana county and thirty-six states.²⁴ Speaking supplemented his educator’s income and paid for his three children’s college educations.²⁵ He was sometimes called “the Hoosier Philosopher” for his homespun humor and common sense style.²⁶ Sportswriter Bob Collins said after his

²¹ Eskew interview with Dingley, *ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ In subsequent years, Eskew completed another forty hours of study toward a doctoral degree in education, taking classes at both Indiana and Purdue Universities. Eskew résumé through 1960, EPC. Elsa was an athlete herself. Vernie Bowen, the father of Indiana’s future governor Otis Bowen, was her coach along with Miss Johanna Miller. The Zook twins, Janis and Janet, played forward positions, while Elsa played side center, consistent with the special rules for girls. In 1927, her senior year, Fulton beat Roann 81 to 2. Janet Zook scored 75 of Fulton’s points. Elsa Eskew, *I Remember* (Indianapolis: self-published, 1989), 9-10; see also, Fred D. Cavinder, *More Amazing Tales from Indiana* (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 2003), 108.

²⁴ Phil N. Eskew speech list, EPC. Elsa maintained a typed notebook of Eskew’s speeches, cataloguing them both by county and by number, starting with “1,” a speech for Phi Delta Kappa at the Union Building in Bloomington, on January 15, 1934. The Mentone speech, the first for which he received any remuneration, was his forty-sixth engagement. Elsa recorded the number, date, and title of each speech, how much Eskew was paid and, starting in 1946, a running tally of the total number of people whom Eskew had addressed. The final entry is “Time Out,” speech 4,023, in Sullivan, Indiana, at the Methodist church on September 28, 1986. Within a few years, Eskew’s health issues ended his public life.

²⁵ Elsa Eskew, *I Remember*, 22.

²⁶ Brochure, “Phil N. Eskew: The Hoosier Philosopher,” by Platform Personalities, Will J. McEwen, Mgr., Chautauqua, New York, EPC; Brochure, “If You’re After A Speaker Whose Really on the Ball: Phil N. Eskew,” undated, EPC.

death, “Eskew had a Hoosier twang that could cut down an oak and a mind sharp enough to slice it into firewood.”²⁷ Eskew told his audiences, “A lot of you say, ‘I never want my kids to have to work as hard as I did.’ Well, I do.”²⁸ He had a poor man’s work ethic and the pragmatic faith of a minister’s son. Eskew exhorted young people that willingness to work hard and learn new things, to help others and not step over them, and to take responsibility – these were the cornerstones of a successful life.²⁹

Eskew believed that sports made men out of boys and that participation in athletics brought “4 Fs” to each young man: friends, finesse, fortitude, and fight. To illustrate, he spoke of encouraging a skinny fourteen-year old boy to try out for track during his time at Bloomington High School. That boy was Tommy Deckard, who ran the 5,000 meters for the 1936 Olympic team and became a great friend of Jesse Owens, the outstanding black athlete who defied Hitler by winning gold.³⁰ Eskew talked of Fitzhugh Lyons, who helped to break the Big Ten’s color barrier and became a coach at all-black Crispus Attucks High School in Indianapolis, and how Lyons learned poise and “finesse” through athletics.³¹ He reminded his audience of the fortitude of the Van Arsdale twins, basketball all-stars, who played their best game in 1961, and still lost a state championship in the final minute.³² Finally, he talked of a runner who was injured by a competitor’s cleat at the starting gun, yet ran the entirety of the race--bleeding badly.

²⁷ Bob Collins, *Indianapolis Star*, date unknown, HOF.

²⁸ Eskew, “This Is It” (speech), Richmond, Indiana, February 11, 1964, EPC.

²⁹ Eskew, “You Can Take It With You” (high school commencement address), May 27, 1972, EPC; “How Big Are You?,” Fort Wayne, Indiana, May 12, 1977, EPC.

³⁰“4 Fs” (speech), Anderson, Indiana, February 14, 1966, EPC. Eskew joked at the beginning of this talk that he only agreed to speak after receiving assurances that he could get to Anderson without driving through Muncie.

³¹ Ibid. When Indiana University played Mississippi in 1932, they left Lyons on the bench. Charles H. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 30.

³² “4 Fs” (speech), EPC. Despite losing the championship game, the Van Arsdales were jointly recognized as Mr. Indiana Basketball during their senior year and were also co-recipients of the Trester Award for Mental Attitude in Indiana high school boys basketball.

When asked, “Doesn’t it hurt?” the young runner answered, “Of course it hurts!” But he won his race because he had “fight.” To young athletes, Eskew promised, “You will grow up to be a bigger person because of your participation in athletics.”³³



Fig. 1³⁴

Eskew’s vision of athletics seemed well-suited for the idyllic vision of Indiana basketball as portrayed in the movie *Hoosiers*, which depicts a community where playing basketball is redemptive and strengthens family and social bonds. Some sports historians have taken a more cynical view, contending that high school athletes are not, as depicted

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Corky Lamm, “Phil Eskew: Indiana’s New High School Athletic Assn. Commissioner,” *Indianapolis Star*, date unknown, HOF.

in the film, beloved children of a wholesome community-family that only asks that each give his best, but young people under tremendous pressure to win and sustain community self-worth.³⁵ This dark view of the motivations behind the somewhat antiseptic vision of small town Indiana depicted in *Hoosiers* is harsh, but not without truth. Indeed, one Muncie Central athlete recalls his coach explaining, “At Muncie Central it’s whether you win or lose.”³⁶ Period.

Hoosiers are loathe to admit it, but basketball was not invented in Indiana. Dr. James Naismith, a cleric assigned to the Springfield, Massachusetts YMCA, needed an activity to keep boys occupied during the winter months and constructed a game using peach baskets nailed to the ten foot high balcony railing. After each “basket,” the boys had to climb a ladder to retrieve the ball. In 1893, Reverend Nicholas McKay visited Naismith on his way to Crawfordsville, Indiana, where he was to take over leadership of that community’s YMCA. McKay modified the game, using burlap sacks on iron rims.³⁷ Basketball was well-suited for mostly rural Indiana because many towns could not field a football team, but a few boys could play a game of basketball. One boy could shoot hoops alone for hours. The iconic image of Indiana is a remote farmhouse and barn, a

³⁵ For example, sports historian Ron Briley contends that *Hoosiers* portrays a myth about Indiana’s middle class, and was intended as an antidote to the destabilization of the white middle class by tax cuts and increased deficits that created greater stratification in American society between rich and poor. “Basketball’s Great White Hope and Ronald Reagan’s America: *Hoosiers* (1986),” *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 35, No. 1 (2005): 12-19. In ascribing such sinister motive, Briley overlooks the fact that both director David Anspaugh and screenwriter Angelo Pizzo are native Hoosiers. Pizzo recently contributed an essay for a special Fall 2009/Winter 2010 Visitor’s Guide from the magazine *Indianapolis Monthly* entitled “Why We Love Hoops.” Sociologist Jeffrey Lane, in his book about race and the National Basketball Association, devotes two chapters to exploring what he calls the “throwback aestheticism” of Indiana’s basketball tradition, conflating Indiana’s history on race issues, discussed below, with Bob Knight’s coaching career at Indiana University, to argue that Indiana has a tradition of white paternalism and prefers white basketball heroes. Lane, *Under the Boards*, 147-196.

³⁶ Gregory Howard Williams, *Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black* (New York: Penguin Press, 1996), 224.

³⁷ Phillip M. Hoose, *Hoosiers: The Fabulous Basketball Life of Indiana*, Second Edition. (Indianapolis: Guild Press of Indiana, 1995), 87-88; see also, Herbert F. Schwomeyer, *Hoosier Hysteria: A History of Indiana High School Boys Basketball*, 6th ed. (Greenfield, Ind.: Mitchell-Fleming Printing, 1985), 11.

hoop with no net tacked to the side, and a lone boy in coveralls practicing free throws until it is too dark to see the basket. Indeed, when the boys who played for the 1963-1964 Bearcats team were growing up in Muncie, “Everybody had a goal in their yard or attached to their garage.”³⁸

Within a year of its introduction, basketball spread to every corner of the state. Basketball was made for Indiana, where small towns could always find five boys to “wear the town’s colors.”³⁹ Basketball may only need five boys to make a team, but even in tiny Milan, Indiana, the giant-killer that inspired the movie *Hoosiers*, 58 out of 74 boys in the high school came out for basketball during the early 1950s. “That’s how important it was.”⁴⁰

By 1911, the state had a High School Basketball Tournament.⁴¹ The sport was never a tidy athletic competition pitting freshly-scrubbed farm boys against each other for the purpose of redeeming the youthful hopes of their elders. Brawling was common. Even the movie *Hoosiers* depicts the fist fights and violence permeating the game. Eskew recalled, “It was just dog eat dog. The basketball players were important kids in anybody’s town, and they could go anywhere they wanted. There were married and overaged kids playing kids that hadn’t passed a subject.”⁴² The sport was developed to replace football, and the brutality of the field was carried into the fieldhouse. One writer in 1911 described it as “systematic indoor rough house.”⁴³ The IHSAA, formed in 1903,

³⁸ Dallas Kunkle, interview with author, Muncie, Indiana, October 12, 2011.

³⁹ Angelo Pizzo, “Net Worth” (multiple authors), *Indianapolis Official Visitor Guide*, Fall 2009/Winter 2010, 29. Pizzo wrote the movie *Hoosiers*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Bobby Plump, 26. Plump made the famous final shot that gave the state championship victory to Milan in 1954, defeating basketball powerhouse Muncie Central, inspiring the character of Jimmy Chitwood in *Hoosiers*.

⁴¹ Hoose, *Fabulous Basketball Life*, 90.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 92. Hoose interviewed Eskew for the first edition of *Fabulous Basketball Life of Indiana*.

⁴³ “Basketball,” *Arbutus: The Indiana University Yearbook*, 1911.

had its hands full with reports of violence and vandalism accompanying the intense rivalries that sprang up around the state.

In 1916, the IHSAA hired Arthur L. Trester, a stern Quaker with no tolerance for rule breakers. He governed with an iron fist until 1944. Before Trester, local businessmen routinely gave gifts and money to players and coaches; he stopped that practice whenever he found it out. Boys lost their eligibility as amateurs when caught trying out for professional teams. The practice of recruiting boys to move to a new school district to improve a team's chances was then, and continues to be a focus of IHSAA regulations. Coaches were suspended for fighting, and in 1936 at Andrews High School, fans attacked officials after a game. The assailants were arrested, and the school was fined.⁴⁴ Under Trester's leadership, by 1925, the state championship drew fifteen thousand fans. Dr. Naismith attended that year as Trester's guest. Naismith later crowned Indiana as the true home of the game, writing, "Basketball really had its origin in Indiana, which remains the center of the sport."⁴⁵

If basketball was made for Indiana, Indiana was made for basketball, it seems. Before Henry Ford began to mass produce cars, Indiana was the home of the American automobile industry, rolling out touring cars like the National, the Cole, and the Waverly. Indiana's flat geography and network of roads were made for testing roadsters but also made it easy to get from town to town and thus to compete and grow the game. *Indianapolis News* reporter William Fox, Jr. loved basketball. With his friend, Tony Hinkle, the Butler University coach, Fox would tear across the state in an obsessive quest

⁴⁴ Minutes, IHSAA Board of Control, November 21, 1936, IHSAA headquarters, Indianapolis, Indiana. The building was dedicated to Eskew upon its opening in 1976, the year he retired. For a comprehensive discussion of the Trester years, Glenn's *History of the IHSAA* is an excellent source.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Richard B. Pierce, *Polite Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis, 1920-1970* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 13.

to file a story from each of Indiana's sixteen regional tournaments. They did this in four days, taking turns at the wheel, Hinkle driving while Fox wrote his column "Shootin' 'em and Stoppin' 'em," which was soon required reading for every good Hoosier. Fox coined the term "Hoosier Hysteria" to describe the state's passion for the game.⁴⁶

Basketball was not greeted with the same enthusiasm in Muncie as elsewhere around the state. Roller polo, a form of hockey played on roller skates, was popular in town, and despite a few embarrassing early attempts, including a scoreless loss to Keystone High School in 1901, Muncie did not field a competitive basketball team until the relatively late year of 1906.⁴⁷ Once Muncie got basketball hysteria, however, it was all in. The Bearcats won the state championship in 1928, defeating Martinsville and basketball great John Wooden by a score of 13 to 12 at the Butler Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. Three years later, in 1931, the Bearcats had their second championship over Greencastle with one of the state's first "big men," Jack Mann, also the first African American to play for Muncie Central, contributing 7 of the Bearcats' 31 points.⁴⁸ Muncie was now a powerhouse in Indiana's basketball world. In the 1920s, the Muncie City Council voted down a measure to raise the salary for a local librarian by \$300 a year (to \$1,800) while concurrently approving a \$100,000 bond measure for the purpose of building a bigger gym for the Bearcats.⁴⁹ The Muncie Fieldhouse, home of the Bearcats, had a seating capacity of 7,500 and was the largest high school gym in the country for

⁴⁶ Ibid., 103. Discussion of the early development of basketball in Indiana is also found in Hoose, Glenn, and Schwomeyer.

⁴⁷ Stodghill, *Bearcats*, 13-14.

⁴⁸ Schwomeyer, *Hoosier Hysteria*, 124, 138. Birch Bayh, Sr., father of Senator Birch Bayh, Jr. and grandfather of former Indiana governor and Senator Evan Bayh, officiated the 1931 game.

⁴⁹ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1929), 284 note 16.

over forty years.⁵⁰ People waited years for season tickets and passed them down through the generations in their wills.⁵¹ Attendance at basketball games was more meaningful than attendance at church, and the Fieldhouse became the true house of worship in Muncie. One Muncie church recorded the following in its staff reports:

I have been asked, “Is it right to pray for the Bearcats to win?” by one of you who tells me he no longer believes in prayer because he prayed as hard as he could for the Bearcats and they lost. I believe that prayer should be used only in cases where a moral or spiritual issue is at stake. God *could* favor the weaker team, but that would be unsportsmanlike of God.⁵²

The parishioner was not the first to think that “Indiana basketball is like a spirituality.”⁵³

After the victory in 1930, the Bearcats did not hold the state title again until 1951, when they defeated Evansville Reitz in a close game, 60 to 58. They repeated in 1952, beating Indianapolis Tech in a blowout. Only Frankfort High School could also claim four state championships. After missing the semi-finals in 1953, the Bearcats were back at the Butler Fieldhouse in the final game in 1954, facing tiny Milan High School on its Cinderella run to the championship, which included schooling Crispus Attucks 65 to 52 in the semi-finals.⁵⁴ Milan and the now-famous Bobby Plump defeated Muncie Central by one basket – “Plump’s Last Shot.” That storied game was the basis for *Hoosiers*.

Over the next decade, Crispus Attucks, Indianapolis’s all-black high school and home of Hallie Bryant and Oscar Robertson--then and future giants of basketball--won

⁵⁰ E. Bruce Geelhoed, *Muncie: The Middletown of America* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 68. Indiana is home to fifteen of the sixteen largest high school gymnasiums in the country. See, Hoose, 99. As early as 1927, Indiana’s total seating capacity for basketball was one million seats, or one for every three Hoosiers. William J. Reese, ed., *Hoosier Schools: Past and Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 132.

⁵¹ Williams, *Color Line*, 49.

⁵² Lynd, *Middletown*, 377.

⁵³ Hallie Bryant, “Net Worth” (multiple authors), 27. Bryant played for Indianapolis’s Crispus Attucks High School and was Mr. Indiana Basketball in 1953. Bryant went on to play for Indiana University and then the Harlem Globetrotters.

⁵⁴ Schwomeyer, *Hoosier Hysteria*, 222-227, 234-235; Stodghill, *Bearcats*, 31-33, 111-114.

three state titles, defeating Muncie Central in the semi-finals in 1955 and 1959. Muncie Central made it to the final game against East Chicago Washington in 1960, but did not take home the trophy. However, in 1963, the Bearcats set a new state record by winning a fifth state championship under new coach Dwight “Ike” Tallman.⁵⁵

Ike Tallman should not have been the coach that year, but a series of events conspired to put him at the helm of one of Indiana’s greatest basketball dynasties when he himself was only a few years out of college. Muncie Central High School had over one thousand students in its sophomore class when the school year started in 1961. Students attended in shifts--from seven in the morning until two in the afternoon, eight to three, and nine to four--to decompress the crowded school. In the Fall of 1962, Muncie Southside High School opened, literally on the south side of the railroad tracks. Any student who had started at Central could choose to finish there. Otherwise, the new school was filled from the sophomore class up by students living in the new geographic district.⁵⁶ Coach John Longfellow’s long-time assistant, Bob Heeter, should have inherited the Central Bearcats. Longfellow had history of health issues, but he seemed to be doing well, and Southside needed a coach. It was an opportunity Heeter could not pass up. Heeter took the Southside job, and Longfellow recruited Ike Tallman away from Cambridge City, Indiana, to serve as his new assistant. Unexpectedly, however, Longfellow’s health failed, and “it was too late to do anything.”⁵⁷ Ike Tallman, just twenty-five years old, was in charge of one of the most storied programs in Indiana basketball. After he coached the 1962-1963 Bearcats to a state championship, there was

⁵⁵ Schwomeyer, *Hoosier Hysteria*, 236-255; Stodghill, *Bearcats*, 33-35.

⁵⁶ Kay Rankin and Charlotte Shepperd, interview by this author, Muncie, Indiana, December 29, 2011.

⁵⁷ Kunkle interview; DePauw University Athletic Hall of Fame, “Dwight Tallman,” <http://www.depauw.edu/athletics/traditions/athletic-hall-of-fame/details/47/> (accessed March 10, 2012).

little chance that the athletic director or the school board could justify replacing him with a more experienced coach. Ready or not, Tallman had the job.

Tallman was immature, and in his later years, he would have told you that.⁵⁸ He was a “dominating, explosive coach” who “made Bob Knight look like a pacifist.”⁵⁹ Tallman was a large presence, standing six foot five inches tall and weighing as much as two hundred sixty pounds in his college days, when he played both basketball and football for DePauw University.⁶⁰ He also had a big heart, rescuing one player who was sleeping in Muncie’s Tuhey Park, taking him home for a time until the young man’s family situation resolved, and allowing the younger brother of another to attend the team dinners after discovering that the family was struggling to put food on the table at home.

Dallas Kunkle, who played for Tallman for three years as a Bearcat and became a lifelong friend, said, “He did not back down from anybody and would defend his kids.” But, Tallman “was a kid” himself and would never have had a reason to deal with school boards or athletic directors except to get a job.⁶¹ As the 1963-1964 season started, this driven, powerful, but inexperienced young man was coaching the number two ranked team in the nation. Only Power Memorial Academy in New York City carried greater expectations, and Power Memorial had a player that year named Lew Alcindor.⁶²

⁵⁸ Kunkle interview.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ “My View From the End of the Bench,” Wabash Hoops 53-65 blog, post date unknown, http://blogs.wabash.edu/wabash_hoops_53_65/2006/10/my_view_from_the_end_of_the_be_1.html (accessed March 10, 2012).

⁶¹ Kunkle interview.

⁶² Robert Hartley, interview with the author, Muncie, Indiana, September 2, 2011. Lew Alcindor is better known today as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who went on to be the most accomplished player in NBA history. NBA Encyclopedia Playoff Edition, “Abdul-Jabbar,” http://www.nba.com/history/players/abdul-jabbar_bio.html (accessed September 9, 2011).



Fig. 2⁶³

⁶³ "Alumni Coaches Before the Battle," *DePauw Alumnus* (April 1963), cover, showing Dwight "Ike" Tallman and Commissioner Eskew with the state championship trophy.

CHAPTER II

“ONE BLACK EYE FOR BASKETBALL”

Even though the defending state champion Bearcats were supposed to dominate Indiana basketball in the 1963-1964 season, there were problems. Many of the boys also played football, and on the football team, there was trouble brewing. The team was ranked in the state’s top ten with Billy Ray, also a basketball standout, at quarterback. But there were too many good running backs, and to give each the chance to play, Coach Ralph Zurbrugg had them taking turns.⁶⁴ Both Bob Hartley, a triple sport athlete who played both offensive and defensive positions and also threw the shot put in the Spring, and Jim Reese, a tackle, recall that the team fell apart mid-season.⁶⁵ After four straight wins to open the season, the last six games were lost. During one of those final match ups against Marion, a high school that was also a participant in the Frankfort Holiday Tourney, a fight broke out on the field. Hartley recalls the referee warning Muncie Central, “You’re going to get kicked out of everything.”⁶⁶ The contentious and disappointing football season ended just days before the basketball season began.

Commissioner Eskew was giving all the high schools in the state reason to consider their conduct. Since taking the reins at the IHSAA in August 1962, a number of incidents and a growing chorus of sportswriters were providing ample warning that Eskew was not going to tolerate bad behavior by players, coaches or fan. On November 2, 1962, Knox football coach Dale Snelling earned two fifteen-yard penalties for his team for criticizing the officials. Two players were ejected during the same game, and a third

⁶⁴ Hartley interview.

⁶⁵ Ibid.; see also, Jim Reese, interview with the author, Muncie, Indiana, September 2, 2011.

⁶⁶ Hartley interview.

was penalized for “piling on” and then hitting the ball carrier. That player was suspended for the balance of his academic year. Coach Snelling was ordered by Eskew to write a letter of apology to the officials he had castigated so vociferously.⁶⁷ On November 13, 1962, Tunnelton High School beat Heltonville by nearly 40 points. It was Tunnelton’s twenty-seventh win in a row, but apparently the victory was not enough. After the game had ended, Tunnelton’s Larry Wilcox punched Heltonville’s Mike Clouse as Clouse sat on the bench. Clouse ended up in the hospital in Bedford with a concussion, and Wilcox was charged with assault and battery. Wilcox was suspended until January 21, 1963, and Tunnelton was placed on one year of probation.⁶⁸

On December 8, 1962, Richmond footballer Gary Worthington hit New Castle coach Les Ray as Ray was breaking up a player fight. Richmond declined to punish Worthington, and New Castle apparently did not complain to the IHSAA. However, *Muncie Star* sportswriter Bob Barnet was paying attention, and in an article entitled “Okay--Who Wants To Be The IHSAA Example?” Barnet warned his readers, “One thing is certain--unless coaches or principals take charge of their basketball players pretty soon, Phil Eskew is going to do it for them, and it’s going to hurt.”⁶⁹

In advance of the state basketball tournament in 1963, Eskew made it clear that he would not be tolerating “jumping coaches.” Wayne Fuson of the *Indianapolis News* wrote:

⁶⁷ “Bad Winners As Well As Bad Losers Feel Sting of IHSAA,” *Indianapolis News*, December 12, 1962.

⁶⁸ Ibid.; see also, “Knox, Tunnelton Given Probation by IHSAA,” newspaper and date unknown; “Tunnelton H.S. Star Suspended,” newspaper and date unknown; “IHSAA Probes Cage Fight,” newspaper and date unknown; “IHSAA Sifting Facts of Fight at Net Game,” newspaper and date unknown. Each of these articles is located in a scrapbook created by Elsa Barker Eskew for “June 1962-January 1964” in the private collection of Philip N. Eskew, Jr., which traces Eskew’s appointment as commissioner of the IHSAA, L.V. Phillips’ retirement, and IHSAA penalties and sanctions imposed during the first seventeen months of Eskew’s tenure (hereafter, ESB). The articles discuss the dates at issue.

⁶⁹ Bob Barnet, “Okay--Who Wants To Be The IHSAA Example?” *Muncie Star*, December 11, 1962.

During his officiating years, Eskew was known as a tough ref on complaining coaches. “I guess they knew I meant it when I told them to keep their seats, Eskew says . . . I don't care what they say. A jumping coach incites a crowd . . . if I were officiating, a second chirp by a coach would cost him a technical foul and a third would get him a fast trip out of the gymnasium.”⁷⁰

Eskew's friend, Dutch Struck, the football coach at Hanover College, mailed a copy of the article to Eskew with a note: “I wouldn't have lasted long under your rule.”⁷¹ He was not the only one.

In March of 1963, a Fort Wayne Central player attacked a Fort Wayne North player. Central received one year of probation. The IHSAA cited “heckling” from the bench throughout the game. The Central player was black; the North player white.⁷² In April, Kokomo and Noblesville received public reprimands and were threatened with suspension because their fans had “bantered” throughout their regional game.⁷³ Kokomo schools superintendent O.M. Swihart said:

I'm afraid something will happen over there [at the gym] one night. I'm amazed at the way some of the adult fans are behaving . . . I'm really

⁷⁰ Wayne Fuson, Time Out!, “Eskew Frowns on Jumpin' Coaches,” *Indianapolis News*, date unknown, ESB; see also, Bob Barnet, After the Ball, “Behave or Else' Edict Long Overdue,” February 3, 1962. Ironically, one of the great friendships of Eskew's life was with Bob Knight, who is known for his temper as well as his winning career as the head basketball coach at Indiana University. When Knight left Army to take the Indiana job, Tate Locke, who had hired Knight into the Army basketball program as an assistant several years earlier, told Knight, “When you get to Indiana, you're going to need a friend.” At Locke's urging, Knight called Eskew and asked to meet. Eskew became a friend and father figure, frequently addressing the Hoosier team in the locker room before games, sometimes accompanying Knight on recruiting trips, and otherwise providing a caring and moderating force on Knight's tendency toward temper. Eskew came to know Knight's many private acts of personal generosity and would always mention in his own speeches his admiration and respect for Knight as a coach and as a man. Philip N. Eskew, Jr., interview with the author, March 12, 2012.

⁷¹ Eskew scrapbook June 1962-January 1964. Struck was the head football, basketball, and track coach at Wabash High School when Eskew arrived there in 1935. Eskew served as his assistant. An editorial written in response to the outburst at the Frankfort Holiday Tourney expressed little admiration for Eskew's follow-through, however. “Last year before the state finals, Eskew made a statement to the effect that he would tolerate no bench antics from coaches in the state meet. In the tournament, Marion Crowley, the volatile coach from Lafayette Jeff put on an act that would make today's crop of wrestlers look like amateurs by comparison. The commissioner did nothing about it!” Carl Wiegman, Morning Lines, “Basketbrawl Capital?” *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*, date unknown, ESB.

⁷² “IHSAA Slaps Two Schools: Brawl is Cited at Fort Wayne,” newspaper unknown, March 1963. ESB.

⁷³ Jep Cadou, Jr., Jed Cadou Jr. Calls 'Em, *Indianapolis Star*, April 26, 1963.

afraid some of our red-hot fans will get carried away and do something all of us would be sorry for. We know . . . we've been told . . . that one more incident and we get suspended from the IHSAA. And I wonder if the fans are aware of what that would mean. It would mean that our entire athletic program would be suspended. It would mean that our athletes would be deprived of any further competition.⁷⁴

At the start of the 1963-1964 season, *Kokomo Tribune* sportswriter Bob Ford revisited the Kokomo-Noblesville fracas and warned, "The IHSAA could throw us out."⁷⁵

On December 28, 1963, Frankfort High School hosted the Frankfort Holiday Tourney, inviting Anderson, Marion, and the defending state champion Bearcats to participate. This was an opportunity for Frankfort to show off its brand new \$4.5 million sports facility. The Bearcats came into the tourney with a 7-1 record, looking to dominate.⁷⁶ In the afternoon games, Muncie Central handily defeated Marion by a score of 92 to 71. The game was a portent of what was to come: each team had a player ejected for fighting and Marion boosters threw cups and paper onto the floor. Anderson crushed the host team, scoring 67 points to Frankfort's 41. The fans were about to see two of Indiana's basketball powerhouses face off in what promised to be intense play. Eskew's personal secretary, Betty Sizelove, was there with a front row ticket.⁷⁷

Later, referee Jimmy Dimitroff recalled that the rebounding was "vicious, not just aggressive" by both teams. Muncie Central's Andie Higgins collected three fouls in the first two minutes of the game. Coach Ike Tallman described a "hard, rough game, with a

⁷⁴ Bob Ford, The Goal Line, "Our Bad Behavior Showing? IHSAA Could Throw Us Out," *Kokomo Tribune*, December 19, 1963.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ "Muncie Central Drops Two Hardwood Stars," *Indianapolis News*, January 7, 1964.

⁷⁷ The following articles reported the events at the Frankfort Holiday Tourney in the days immediately after the melee: "Braves Subdue Muncie for Frankfort Tourney Crown," *Anderson Daily Bulletin*, December 30, 1963; Bob Williams, "Clevenger's 30 Lead Anderson Past Muncie: Spectators Fight after 76-69 Tilt," *Indianapolis Star*, December 29, 1963; Corky Lamm, "Basketbrawl Gets Another Black Eye," *Indianapolis News*, December 30, 1963; Bob Barnet, "Central May Face Suspension: IHSAA Probes Brawl at Tourney," and "Tourney Fracas Probe Pressed by Official," *Muncie Star*, dates unknown HOF; Bob Williams, Hi-Lites, *Indianapolis Star*, January 5, 1964.

lot of contact.” In the opening minutes, an Anderson player elbowed Muncie Central’s Glinder Torain in the belly. Torain struggled to recover throughout the half. The Anderson boys never trailed, but the Bearcats kept it close.⁷⁸

Tallman said later that he did not see anything, and the final report on the incident exonerated him. Tallman claimed that as the game ended, he shook hands with Anderson coach Ray Estes and headed for the locker room.⁷⁹ Yet the newspapers reported that in the final seconds of that game, as Anderson won 76 to 69, Andie Higgins slammed the ball into the face of Anderson’s John Grubb with enough force to draw blood from Grubb’s nose and mouth. Fans rushed the floor and began fighting. Robert Ayres, the principal at Frankfort, tried to present the tournament trophy, but had to leave the podium to try to control the crowd. Ayres, Marion principal John Houglund, and Anderson principal Noel Douglass waded into the fracas to try to restore calm. A Muncie Central student spat on Anderson cheerleader Barbara Ballard and then hit her with his fist, knocking her into the bleachers. In the parking lot, Muncie Central fans attacked Anderson swimmer Steve Simpson, who sustained cuts around his eye. Frankfort’s team physician, Dr. Earl Applegate, treated Simpson at the scene. Firefighters stationed at the tourney worked with over a dozen Frankfort police officers to stop a “near-riot.”⁸⁰ A photograph of the fighting shows a frenzied attack by young men in straight leg pants, white socks and loafers, many wearing lettermen jackets. The image is slightly blurred,

⁷⁸ Bob Williams, Hi-Lites, *Indianapolis Star*, January 5, 1964.

⁷⁹ Associated Press, “Eskew Promises To Investigate Action of Fans: ‘Going to Get to the Bottom of It,’ Says IHSAA Boss,” newspaper unknown, December 31, 1963, HOF.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

the violence of the scene almost palpable, but that rage is incongruous with the clean-cut look of the boys engaged in the brawl.⁸¹

Sophomore Dallas Kunkle did not make the trip. A starting position on the varsity team was uncommon for a sophomore. They were more likely to play for the “Bearkittens” as the junior varsity team was known. Kunkle and his fellow sophomore, John Isenbarger, practiced with the varsity team as a rule, but Isenbarger had more starts with the Bearcats that season--at least at the beginning of the year. Everything changed after Frankfort. Then Kunkle and Isenbarger started dressing for every game.⁸² But Kunkle was not in Frankfort on December 28, 1963. Afterward, Kunkle recalled that the talk was that there had been a man underneath the basket yelling and screaming at Andie Higgins the whole day and “using the ‘n’ word, right behind the basket.” Kunkle said, “The guys on the team said this guy yelled and screamed at Andie all night long and nothing was done.” The situation was brought to the attention of the officials, but the abuse continued. “And maybe Andie flicked the ball into the guy’s head in the final minute or two . . .”⁸³

Senior Bob Hartley played in the game. Nicknamed “Hatchet” Hartley, he did not always get to start. His role was often, as the name implies, to go in for one of the starting players, throw elbows, draw fouls, and impose some discipline on the opponents. Hartley recalls fouling out of a game in a mere one minute and fifty-seven seconds on one occasion.⁸⁴ Once, in a game against Anderson, Hartley and an Anderson boy dove for the ball and the other kid came away with a broken leg. It was not deliberate.

⁸¹ Photograph, “Basket-Brawl,” *Anderson Newspapers*, December 28, 1963.

⁸² Kunkle interview.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Hartley interview.

Basketball in Indiana, basketball in the North Central Conference where these teams met and played during their regular seasons, was a physical game.

At Frankfort, all Hartley remembers is that “the game was basically over, and I remember this kid from Anderson is up in Andie’s face.” Higgins, Hartley believes, hit the Anderson player with the ball, but not deliberately. However, he heard that Higgins spit on an Anderson cheerleader. “It was not,” explained Hartley, “a team-on-team kind of thing. There was no fighting going on when we went down to the locker room. Then we started to see people going past [the door to the locker room] for first aid.”

Part of the basketball experience was the cheer block. At Muncie Central, a student had to be a junior to participate. The Girls’ Block had 185 members, and the Boys’ Block numbered 100 young men, yelling well-rehearsed chants and cheers with coordinated hand movements and other choreography. Charlotte Shepperd was in her senior year and a member of the Bearcats Girls’ Block. There were practices every week on Wednesday, with new routines to learn. If you could not make a game, an alternate filled your place. The girls wore reversible two-sided sweaters in Central’s colors of purple and white, gloves, and either white sailor hats or purple beanies. Cheer block and the full band were present at every home game. The cheer block also traveled to away games and tournaments. Charlotte was in Frankfort on December 28, 1963.⁸⁵

Marion and Frankfort--and their cheer blocks--were on one side of the gym that day. Anderson and Muncie Central were next to each other.⁸⁶ Hartley now questions, “Muncie Central and Anderson on the same side of the gym? How dumb can you be?”⁸⁷ All day the Anderson and Muncie Central fans were bickering and “chatting” at each

⁸⁵ Shepperd interview.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Hartley interview.

other. Immediately after the game, the gym exploded into a “complete melee. Everybody emptied the stands on both sides. It was a free-for-all brawl.” The cheer block sponsors yelled, “Do not go!” as the girls cried over the loss and in confusion at the “explosion” of violence. Shepperd recalls “the floor was filled with people--a sea of purple jackets” as the cheer block was escorted out to their bus. Both Muncie Central and Marion wore purple letter jackets.

Sportswriter Corky Lamm was also in Frankfort for the tourney. His column on December 30, 1963, summed up the events:

Basketbrawl Gets Another Black Eye

Scores were: 76-69 in basketball, one six-inch gash over the right eye of an Anderson pupil, two non-decisions post-game riots between Anderson and Muncie fans on the playing floors, ejection of two fans by police, one Anderson player slugged at the finish by a disgruntled opponent, two players ejected from the Muncie-Marion game for fighting, one black eye for basketball.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Corky Lamm, “Basketbrawl Gets Another Black Eye,” *Indianapolis News*, December 30, 1963.

CHAPTER III

“YOU LET YOUR TEAM DOWN”

As word of the events in Frankfort spread around the state, sportswriters revived stories of past incidents involving Muncie Central. Two years earlier, on January 27, 1962, four senior players humiliated younger players in a hazing incident on the team bus, coming home from a victory over Shortridge High School in Indianapolis. The papers reported that seven sophomores were forced by older players to “commit indecent acts” while seven teachers and coaches rode up front, apparently oblivious. *Indianapolis Star* sportswriter Bob Collins received details of the event from a source he described as a “newsman,” likely Bob Barnet, the respected *Muncie Star* sports editor. Collins reported in his weekly column dedicated to high school basketball, “Shootin’ the Stars,” that what he heard described about events on the bus “was so reprehensible I have felt like vomiting all afternoon.”⁸⁹

Hazing was a tradition on the Muncie Central team. Coach John Longfellow said as much, earning the derision of the Indianapolis sports press.⁹⁰ The boys themselves called it “initiation.” At its worst, the older players forced sophomores to wear jock straps smeared with hot liniment, threw them in the showers fully dressed, or ripped the hair out of their legs with tape. Two years earlier, the upperclassmen drenched their victims in beer and threw some punches.⁹¹ Hartley recalls, “All you had to do was put up a fight and it was over with.”⁹² This time, things crossed a new line. The sophomores

⁸⁹ Bob Collins, Shootin' the Stars, *Indianapolis Star*, date unknown, HOF.

⁹⁰ Jep Cadou, Jr., Jep Cadou Jr. Calls 'Em, *Indianapolis Star*, February 3, 1962.

⁹¹ Williams, *Color Line*, 230-231.

⁹² Hartley interview.

were intimidated and forced to kiss each other and touch their own genitals. Gene Chandler's "Duke of Earl" was playing on the radio, and the team was singing louder and louder, adding to the atmosphere. After, the older boys told their girlfriends about it, and soon everyone knew.⁹³ Humiliated, one boy complained to his parents, who complained to the school and threatened to involve the police. The seniors were kicked off the team for the season, effectively ending their scholarship hopes. A four day suspension from school was added on for good measure.⁹⁴

The senior boys were all African American. After the suspensions, racist jokes abounded. White Muncie blamed black Muncie for costing the Bearcats the state championship, as though a repeat title was guaranteed. The black community thought it unlikely that white players would have suffered a similar fate or that the white sophomore boy's parents would have demanded the ouster of his tormentors if they had also been white. But this was Muncie where one former Bearcat has described that a black player was a superstar on Friday night at the Fieldhouse and a "nigger" on Saturday. Gregory Howard Williams, a "Barkitten" player for most of his basketball career, recounts that off the court, black players were called names, chased with baseball bats, and sometimes attacked, their adoring fans and classmates pelting them with rocks and bottles if they so much as dared to walk through white areas of town.

⁹³ Hartley interview; Williams, *Color Line*, 230-231.

⁹⁴ Williams, *ibid.* Williams played football and basketball for the Bearcats but was demoted to the Barkittens in the middle of his junior season in favor of a taller boy. Williams and Brian Settles, one of the seniors implicated in the hazing scandal, became close friends. Both were biracial (and therefore black in Muncie). Williams was, in fact, only one-quarter black, and white to all appearances, yet living with his father and black grandmother forever cast him, to his mind, to one side of the color line in Muncie. Despite his early poverty and the hardships of his childhood, Williams went on to college and law school. In 2009, Williams became the president of the University of Cincinnati. <http://magazine.uc.edu/issues/1009/president.html> (accessed April 12, 2012).

Senior Brian Settles, one of the perpetrators, was known as a good kid. He was the team's co-captain with scoring leader Bill Dinwiddie who was already on a run of trouble on the night of the hazing.⁹⁵ Just the day before, Dinwiddie tangled with New Castle guard Eric Harter under the basket and managed to break Harter's jaw. That incident was not reported to IHSAA officials who heard about it later from the newspapers. When the news broke, a cartoon in the *Indianapolis Star* showed a small boy sitting in the bleachers of an empty gym holding a basketball, the backboard and the floor covered in blood, bloody footprints leading to the locker room, the words "Muncie Scandal" written on the floor, and on the backboard "Indiana High School Basketball."

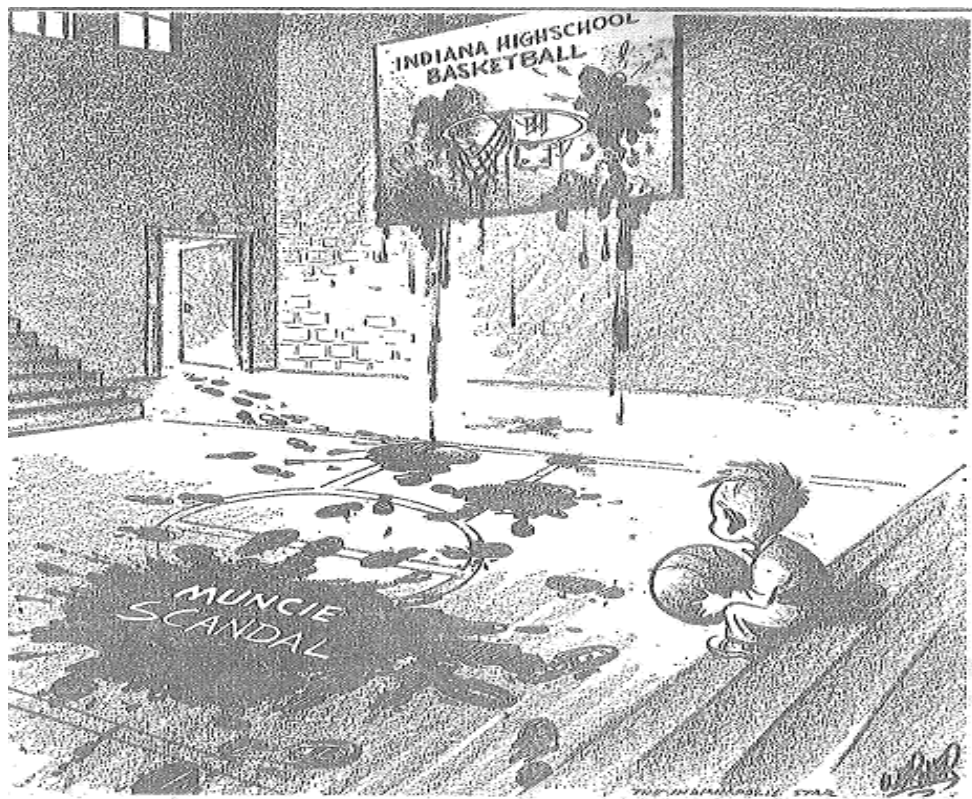


Fig. 3⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid., 225-226. In his autobiography, former Bearcat Brian Settles describes only the difficulties of finding acceptance in "Muncie's Black street culture" as a light-skinned black man, and offers little insight into the racial tensions between white and black in Muncie. Brian H. Settles, *No Reason for Dying: A Reluctant Combat Pilot's Confession of Hypocrisy, Infidelity and War* (BookSurge Publishing: Self-published, 2009), 18-27.

⁹⁶ Cartoon, "Fouled Out!" *Indianapolis Star*, February 7, 1962.

Eskew's predecessor at the helm of the IHSAA, L.V. Phillips, did nothing in response to the hazing allegations, while Phillip Bayt, the Marion County prosecutor based in Indianapolis, threatened to prosecute the perpetrators, claiming that these degenerate acts had occurred in his jurisdiction. State representatives W.W. Hill, Jr., of Indianapolis and Owen L. Crecelius of Crawfordsville called for a legislative investigation. But then-Commissioner Phillips was satisfied that it was an internal affair, and no business of the IHSAA.⁹⁷ Muncie Central imposed harsh discipline on Settles and Dinwiddie and their teammates, Ollie Hill Jr. and John Johnson, but no consequences were imposed on the seven adults on the bus that night.⁹⁸ As would happen two years later with the brawl at Frankfort, no adults were held responsible for the misconduct of boys under their supervision and care.

When Settles, Dinwiddie, Hill and Johnson returned after serving their four day suspension from school, police took up positions nearby. The *Indianapolis Star's* Collins, while appalled by what had happened on that bus ride home, reported that "the ever present dealers in hate have leaped into a situation, already sickening, and, by innuendo and exaggeration, are fanning a race incident."⁹⁹ Indeed, students were calling for demonstrations. Some white students wanted the boys kept out; black students demanded

⁹⁷ "Phillips Shuns Hazing Probe," *Indianapolis Star*, February 12, 1962.

⁹⁸ Settles' basketball scholarship offer from the University of Colorado was withdrawn, and he enrolled at Ball State University in Muncie instead at his mother's insistence. There, he signed up for the Air Force ROTC, and went on to serve as one of the few black fighter pilots in Viet Nam, flying over 200 missions. After a tumultuous career as an airline pilot, interrupted by repeated airline bankruptcies, Settles retired to teaching at Mercer College in Georgia. About Brian Settles, http://captbriansettles.com/About_The_Author.....html (accessed March 8, 2010); see also, Settles, *No Reason for Dying*, passim. Bill Dinwiddie played college ball at New Mexico Highlands, and spent four years in the NBA. NBA Historical Player File: Bill Dinwiddie, http://www.nba.com/historical/playerfile/index.html?player=bill_dinwiddie (accessed March 15, 2010). He was never disciplined for the tussle with Harter. The New Castle coach, Les Ray, shrugged it off as a "rough game," and having already suspended Dinwiddie from play for the balance of his senior year, the school saw no value in further punishment. "Hazing Furor Stirs City: Muncie Basketball has More Fame than It Seeks," *Indianapolis News*, February 6, 1962. Muncie Central principal John Huffman told the press, "These are good boys. Let's move forward."

⁹⁹ Bob Collins, Shootin' the Stars, *Indianapolis Star*, date unknown, HOF.

that they be reinstated on the team. Muncie police chief Dale Vannatter was also dismissive of efforts by “certain elements” to “stir up a racial issue.”¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, calm prevailed. The Bearcats re-grouped and played their way into the semi-finals, losing to Anderson.

The 1962 hazing incident was a distant memory by the time Tallman led the Bearcats to a record fifth state championship in March 1963. For a while, the Bearcats’ luster was restored. But the melee at the Frankfort Holiday Tourney revived every negative thing people around the state had ever heard or believed about Muncie’s basketball fanaticism and lack of sportsmanship. When Eskew was first asked by the press about the reports from Frankfort, he responded, “I’m getting about all I want of incidents involving Muncie Central athletes and fans. More than that, I’m going to do something about it.”¹⁰¹ Eskew was not alone in condemning Muncie Central without trial. Bob Williams at the *Indianapolis Star* related this from a “colleague” in Muncie (perhaps, again, *Muncie Star* sports editor Bob Barnet), who told Williams: “They’ve been covering up for these thugs around here for years. I think we’re going to get a rap and I think we richly deserve it.”¹⁰²

The Frankfort Holiday Tourney was held on a Saturday. Eskew spent Monday trying to reach Muncie Central principal John Huffman or athletic director Fred McKinley, but both were on a trip to Mexico with the school’s Spanish Club.¹⁰³ Huffman later gave conflicting reports of how he was told of the events at Frankfort,

¹⁰⁰ Harold Trulock, “Calm Rules at Muncie; Police Near,” *Indianapolis News*, February 5, 1962.

¹⁰¹ Associated Press, “Eskew Promises Action: Muncie Faces State Rap,” newspaper unknown, December 31, 1963, HOF.

¹⁰² Bob Williams, Hi-Lites, *Indianapolis Star*, January 5, 1964.

¹⁰³ Minutes of the IHSAA Board of Control, January 14-15, 1964.

saying first that he received a letter in Mexico but later claiming that his sons told him about it at the dinner table upon his return.¹⁰⁴

Within days, Muncie Central officials started an investigation. Bob Barnet reported that 433 tickets had been sold to Muncie Central, and 130 of those were distributed to students. Those students were questioned, but no one saw anything and no one was involved in the fighting on the floor or in the parking lot. Principal Huffman later said that he could find “no evidence” that any Muncie Central student did anything wrong.¹⁰⁵ A half-hearted effort to shift blame to the Anderson players and fans was mounted, with the *Muncie Star* promoting local patrolman Jack Stonebraker, who claimed that one of the injured Anderson students had previously been picked up in Muncie with a gang of boys carrying “knives and brass knuckles.” Two Anderson students were caught drinking beer on another occasion, Stonebraker claimed, yet when the Anderson athletic director was informed, he was “very uncooperative.”¹⁰⁶ Some actually claimed that the outrage was overblown. Columnist Herb Silverburg wrote in the *Muncie Evening Press* that the “squabble . . . was pale and feeble compared to the ones we used to have. Muncie Central never played at Anderson that we didn’t have to dodge rocks.” Silverburg reminisced about a time when Anderson and Muncie Central had suspended their playing schedule for nearly a decade because of the violence that inevitably accompanied every match up.¹⁰⁷ Efforts to exonerate Muncie and indict Anderson were limited, however.

¹⁰⁴ “Central Head Huffman Has No Statement,” newspaper and date unknown, HOF.

¹⁰⁵ Bob Barnet, “Tourney Fracas Probe Pressed by Officials,” *Muncie Star*, date unknown, HOF; see also, Glenn, *History of the IHSAA*, 219.

¹⁰⁶ Jerry Fennell, “Police Link Earlier Trouble: Pupils Quizzed About Tourney Brawl,” *Muncie Evening Press*, date unknown, HOF.

¹⁰⁷ Herb Silverburg, “Watching the Fouls: Are We Allowed to Speak?” *Muncie Evening Press*, January 6, 1964.

As early as New Year's Day 1964, Eskew's fifty-eighth birthday, the *Muncie Star* editorial page encouraged school officials to take preemptive action before the IHSAA convened to hear the matter. It seemed that wish was fulfilled on January 7, 1964, when Principal Huffman, freshly returned from his Mexico trip, told a stunned student assembly that seniors Andie Higgins and Billy Ray, both African American, were suspended from the basketball team for "conduct not in keeping with the regulations of the IHSAA."¹⁰⁸ The announcement was front page news in Muncie and Indianapolis. Some hoped the suspensions of Higgins and Ray would act as a talisman to ward off further IHSAA sanctions. After all, the 1962 hazing incident had drawn the wrath of prosecutors, legislators, and others around the state, and yet by suspending the four black seniors, Muncie Central avoided any penalties from then-Commissioner L.V. Phillips. Would Eskew be the same?

The Muncie NAACP chapter was not going to wait to find out. The organization and its president, Joseph Lyons, saw Higgins and Ray as scapegoats set up to take the fall for a corrupt program, "sacrificed" when Eskew announced that an investigation was forthcoming.¹⁰⁹ Lyons not only demanded the resignation of athletic director McKinley but threatened to ask Adam Clayton Powell Jr.'s congressional committee on Education and Labor to investigate the Central athletic program. Powell, an African American congressman from Harlem, had been appointed to that powerful committee in 1961. From that position, he shepherded dozens of significant social progress bills including the reforms of President Kennedy's New Frontier legislation and, later, Lyndon Johnson's

¹⁰⁸ "Muncie Central Drops Two Hardwood Stars," *Indianapolis News*, January 7, 1964; Bob Barnet, "Central Principal Says: Suspensions Not Related to Brawl," *Muncie Star*, January 9, 1964.

¹⁰⁹ Mickey Porter, "Until 1965: Muncie Central Draws Suspension," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 16, 1964.

Great Society programs.¹¹⁰ Perhaps, thought the Muncie NAACP, Powell could bring his power to bear on what they perceived as persecution of black players to save an essentially white program. Lyons threatened to press charges against Muncie Central school officials for contributing to the delinquency of minors.

Indiana, Muncie, and the IHSAA each has its own troubled history on race. Indiana achieved statehood in 1816, and abolished slavery with its first constitution, but denied blacks the privileges of citizenship. The state passed legislation in 1831 prohibiting blacks from migrating to Indiana. In 1843, the General Assembly barred black children from attending public schools. Black settlement in Indiana was prohibited in the state's 1851 constitution.¹¹¹ Although Indiana was a Northern state in the Civil War, sacrificing over 24,000 of its own to defend the Union, Indiana had its Southern sympathies.

In Muncie in the years after the Civil War, a small but respected community of African Americans thrived, building churches and businesses, and successfully petitioning the city to appoint both a black policeman and a fire fighter. In 1900, blacks made up 3.5 percent of the population of the city; by 1920 there were 2,054 blacks – 5.6 percent of the citizens of Muncie.¹¹² The 1920s saw the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, and nowhere was that felt more than in Indiana where D.C. Stephenson, the Hoosier Grand

¹¹⁰ Thomas A Johnson, "A Man of Many Roles: Adam Clayton Powell, Former Harlem Representative, Dies," *New York Times* (1923-Current file), April 5, 1972, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed March 14, 2010): 1.

¹¹¹ Luke Eric Lassiter, et al., eds., *The Other Side of Middletown: Exploring Muncie's African American Community* (Walnut Creek, Cal.: AltaMira Press, 2004), 48-51. The chapter on Indiana and Muncie history was co-authored by Hurley Goodall, a Muncie native, community activist, and the first African-American selected to serve on the Muncie Community Schools' Board of Education, and Elizabeth Campbell, a public folklorist. See also, Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1965), 13-18, and Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana 1816-1850: The Pioneer Era* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society, 1998), 442-451.

¹¹² Goodall, *Negroes in Muncie*, 16.

Dragon, was gaining political power that threatened a national reach. Muncie was home to one of the state's largest Klaverns, comprising nearly 30 percent of the white male population of Delaware County.¹¹³ The local Republican party was dominated by the Klan. All aspects of community life--the courts, the police department, and other levels of local government--had been infiltrated. The *Muncie Post-Democrat* repeatedly exposed those who sought to secretly press the Klan agenda in Muncie's public institutions, complaining in 1924 that the school system was under Klan influence and many teachers were now members.¹¹⁴ A few miles down the road, in Marion, two black men were lynched in 1930.¹¹⁵

In 1924, sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd went to Muncie to conduct what they called a "small city study" of a quintessential American town. The result was published in 1929 as *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*. *Middletown* revealed a conservative community and its world view in six areas of study: family, religion, sex, politics, crime, and income. The Lynds noted the strong influence of the Klan on popular opinion and antipathy toward blacks, Catholics and Jews.¹¹⁶ They found Muncie a sharply segregated community that ruthlessly excluded blacks from public spaces, including the local YMCA and YWCA, and even in the media where "news of the Negroes" was published in a special section of the local newspaper called "In Colored Circles."¹¹⁷ Sports, however, and basketball in particular, erased community divisions, at least for the night. The Lynds wrote, "No distinctions divide the crowds which pack the

¹¹³ James H. Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003 ed.), 40.

¹¹⁴ Goodall, *Negroes in Muncie*, 17-18.

¹¹⁵ See, Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland*, passim.

¹¹⁶ Lynd, *Middletown*, 483.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 479.

school gymnasiums for home games and which in every kind of machine crowd the roads for out-of-town games. North Side and South Side, Catholic and Kluxer, banker and machinist – their one shout is ‘Eat ’em, beat ’em, Bearcats!’” More than thirty years later, basketball continued to be a “widespread agency of group cohesion.”¹¹⁸ It was the “community’s preeminent ritual, replacing or subsuming every other ritual in the culture.”¹¹⁹

The IHSAA was not a bastion of equality on the playing field either. Arthur Trester, one of Eskew’s predecessors, refused to allow black schools to participate in IHSAA athletics. Schools in Lake County in northwestern Indiana near Chicago were excluded from play as a matter of course based on fear of that county’s African American and immigrant communities. Indiana’s single black legislator, Robert Brokenburr, introduced a bill calling for state regulation of the IHSAA, a private institution that has continually battled take-over efforts by the Indiana General Assembly. Brokenburr included in his bill a provision allowing admission of black and Catholic schools to the IHSAA.¹²⁰ Only then did Trester acknowledge the growing social trend; in 1942, the

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 485-487. “[I]n the face of the baffling too-bigness of European wars, death, North Poles, ill health, business worries and political graft; the bigness of it all shrinks at a championship basket-ball game . . . and the whole business of living in Middletown suddenly ‘fits’ again, and one ‘belongs’.”

¹¹⁹ Dwight W. Hoover, *Middletown: Making of a Documentary Film Series* (Philadelphia, PA: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992), 45, quoting Dwight W. Hoover, Script development grant proposal for a Middletown Film Series to the National Endowment for the Humanities, August 23, 1978, 17.

¹²⁰ Brokenburr was an attorney who provided representation and financial advice to Madame C.J. Walker, one of Indiana’s most prominent black businesswomen who started a cosmetics empire and became the nation’s first black female millionaire. He eventually served as chairman of the board of C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. In his law practice, Brokenburr took on civil rights cases and successfully led challenges to segregation laws. J. Clay Smith, Jr., *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 388, 420; David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows, *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 357. Brokenburr and his partner, R.L. Bailey, defended James Cameron, who had barely escaped the noose on the night of Indiana’s infamous and last lynching in Marion in 1930. See, Madison, *Lynching*, 103-109.

IHSAA finally permitted black and Catholic schools to participate in IHSAA sports.¹²¹ L.V. Phillips, who succeeded Trester and served as IHSAA commissioner from 1944 through 1962, traveled to Lake County only one time in those years. Eskew went there twenty-five times in his first twelve months in the position.¹²²

However, these overt exclusionary tactics did not preclude all African Americans from playing IHSAA sports in the first half of the twentieth century. Most Indiana towns did not have a black community large enough to fill a separate and segregated school. Muncie Central's first black player suited up in 1916, but was not allowed to play on the varsity team. However, Jack Mann played on the 1930 championship team and was later a respected member of the Muncie Police Department.¹²³ But Muncie's troubling history on race issues and social segregation made it easy to believe that Muncie Central's administrators were targeting the African American boys on the basketball team as scapegoats for the sins of a program interested only in winning.

All of the city did not reflect Gregory Howard Williams' descriptions of a racist Muncie in the early 1960s. Black and white students participated together in the school clubs, which proliferated and were the center of high school social life along with church group activities and, of course, athletics. "We didn't have a lot of problems because *everyone* was at Muncie Central: rich and poor, black and white."¹²⁴ Dallas Kunkle said, "We just played ball together." He did not perceive any tension in the locker room or on the court.¹²⁵ Bob Hartley recalls that when he read Williams' account of his childhood in

¹²¹ Hoose, *Fabulous Basketball Life*, 155.

¹²² Eskew, Jr. interview. "Dad said, 'Mr. Phillips didn't get out of central Indiana much'."

¹²³ Goodall, *History of Negroes*, 23; Schwomeyer, *Hoosier Hysteria*, 138. See also, Jack Mann, Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, <http://hoopshall.com/hall/m/jack-mann> (accessed April 7, 2010).

¹²⁴ Rankin interview; see also, Shepperd interview.

¹²⁵ Kunkle interview.

Muncie, “I was shocked.” On road trips, white players roomed with black players. Each player, regardless of race, always had a clean uniform, a new pair of shoes (in fact, multiple pair in the course of a season), and after every game, home or away, the entire team sat down together in a nice restaurant for a good meal.¹²⁶

Even if Huffman and the Muncie Central school board hoped they could mollify Eskew and win leniency with preemptive suspensions of specific players, Eskew had beat them to the courthouse. Eskew had already been tipped off about issues involving Higgins and Ray. Sometime in December, he drove out to the Delaware County courthouse in Muncie to look at the juvenile division records and found evidence of IHSAA rule violations by the two young men that only compounded the sins committed at Frankfort. After the brawl at Frankfort, Eskew confronted Huffman with his findings and directed him not to let the boys play until the IHSAA conducted its hearing.¹²⁷ Under pressure, Huffman had to suspend these boys. He enigmatically told the public and press that the suspensions were unrelated to the brawl at the Frankfort Tourney.¹²⁸ In 1964, most knew only that Higgins and Ray violated the IHSAA conduct rules. Years later, Eskew delicately described a “history of delinquency.” But he also determined that local businessmen were providing financial support to cover up their transgressions.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Hartley interview; see also, Kunkle interview. In a review of what he calls the “Golden Age of Indiana high school basketball,” a time period author Greg Guffey places between 1940 and 1960, Guffey shares a number of anecdotes from players of that era exploring how racism impacted the game. Oscar Session, a black player from the 1951 Glenn High School team, recounts, “We never had a problem with the other players, but it was a different story with the fans.” Greg Guffey, *The Golden Age of Indiana High School Basketball* (Bloomington: Quarry Press of Indiana University Press, 2006), 12. The players interviewed generally agreed that life was easier as an athlete than for other black students. Significantly, they all concurred that “discrimination was much worse in Indianapolis than in any other city in the state.” *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²⁷ Glenn, *History of the IHSAA*, 219.

¹²⁸ Bob Barnett, “Central Principal Says: Suspensions Not Related to Brawl,” *Muncie Star*, January 9, 1964.

¹²⁹ Glenn, *History of the IHSAA*, 219, from interview with Eskew conducted July 14, 1975.

The suspensions were announced on January 7, 1964. The following day, Muncie NAACP Chapter President Joseph Lyons, together with other members of the NAACP leadership including Charles Sanders, Henry Johnson, and Hurley Goodall, went to the home of Andie Higgins to discuss what had happened. Higgins explained that he had been called to the office of the athletic director Fred McKinley after practice on January 6 and suspended for “immoral conduct.” He was told, “You let the team down.” Higgins told the men from the NAACP that he had fathered a child, born the previous September, and had been paying support. He also acknowledged that another baby was on its way. The men asked him if any coaches or school offices had known of his situation “as early as the football season.” Higgins admitted that they had, but he did not provide specifics.¹³⁰

The NAACP leadership also met with Billy Ray and his family that day. Ray’s story matched that of Higgins. After practice on January 6 he was called to McKinley’s office and suspended from the team for immoral conduct and told that he had let the team down. The girl involved was the sister of one of his teammates, and this was her second child. Ray denied any involvement with her first pregnancy. Ray said that he had not been threatened or pressured but was told, “You can forget any scholarship offers.”¹³¹

¹³⁰ Handwritten notes of Hurley Goodall, Schools: Muncie Central I.H.S.A.A. Suspension Controversy and Negro Community Efforts to Resolve It, 1963-1964, MSS.033, Box 2, Folder 19, Black Muncie History Project, Ball State University Libraries Archives and Special Collections, Middletown Studies Collection. The notes state that Higgins’ first child was born “in September” and the second was due soon. Since this discussion took place in January, it appears this was a scrivener’s error, and the first child was likely born the previous year. Other inferences from the record support this conclusion.

¹³¹ Handwritten notes of Hurley Goodall, Hurley Goodall Papers, School Board 1963-1964, MSS.090, Box 8, Folder 29, Black Muncie History Project, Ball State University Libraries Archives and Special Collections, Middletown Studies Collection.

When the men asked Ray if anyone knew of his situation prior to December, the story he related was disturbing. Ray explained that he had initially admitted the paternity charge, but shortly after, Ray and the young woman fought. Now she claimed that she was already one month pregnant when they first had relations, so he was not in fact the father. Ray went to Coach Zurbrugg, his football coach and the assistant coach of the basketball team, for advice. Zurbrugg, Ray claimed, told him it was best to keep quiet and not antagonize the girl “because if he protested he would have to go to court, and if he went to court he was automatically off the team.” This occurred early in the football season.¹³²

That Higgins and Ray were both the subject of paternity suits was only reported in a Kentucky newspaper. Joseph Lyons told *Louisville Courier-Journal* reporter Mickey Porter that he suspected an attorney had tipped off the IHSAA, setting things in motion. Lyons was also angry that school officials knew about it and ignored or condoned it. “The students all knew what had been going on and so did half the people in town. It is hard to understand how officials who are supposed to teach youth honesty, integrity, and citizenship can condone such activity and then deny knowledge of it . . . sweeping it under the rug doesn’t build better boys,” Lyons complained.¹³³ Eskew would have agreed with that statement. Moreover, the paternity suits came at a time when the idea of a married high school player (or one who had fathered a child, regardless of his intentions toward the girl) was so repugnant that in one circumstance, seven opposing teams

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Porter, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 16, 1964.

canceled games on notice that a rival player, who had married his pregnant high school sweetheart, intended to play.¹³⁴

The pervasively conservative veneer of the early 1960s was not matched by correspondingly conservative sexual behavior. Premarital sex increased throughout the twentieth century, in conflict with expressed social values of chastity.¹³⁵ Teen birth rates in the 1950s had soared to nearly 10 percent of all girls between fifteen and nineteen years of age. At the same time, the age of marriage dropped, although many of these births were out-of-wedlock. There was an 80 percent increase in the number of out-of-wedlock babies placed for adoption in the first decade after World War II.¹³⁶ While more liberal standards of sexual conduct--or at least sexual thinking--developed in the 1960s, high school athletic associations were not interested in being at the forefront of social change. Across the country, state regulators shared Indiana's vehement opposition to the participation of fathers and married men in high school sports during this era.¹³⁷

Barriers to married student participation in sports would eventually be removed by continuing legal challenges and court rulings. In Indiana, the wall came down in 1972 as both of Indiana's federal district courts granted injunctive relief to married players,

¹³⁴ Steve Collins, a senior at Pioneer High School near Logansport, was married just before the start of his senior year. Judge Norman Kiesling of the Cass County Circuit Court granted a temporary injunction permitting Collins to play. The IHSAA, having already suffered a loss in a similar suit involving a football player at Valparaiso, agreed not to challenge the injunction. Schools, however, kept their bans on married players in place and cancelled most of the regular season games scheduled with Pioneer. His attorney announced, "[T]he threat of further cancelations and the pressures placed on the team made for an intolerable situation in which not only Steve but his friends and teammates as well were being harmed." Collins and his wife, Chan, attended the season opener, which Pioneer won handily over Twin Lakes. United Press International, "Collins Gives Up Fight on Ban, Dismisses Suit," December 10, 1971; Associated Press, "Married Cage Star Quits Team," date unknown, HOF.

¹³⁵ Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Backseat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

¹³⁶ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 39-40.

¹³⁷ Leslie Lund Ray, "Status and trends of rules and regulations governing married students' participation in interscholastic athletics," Ed.D. diss., Indiana University, Aug. 1972.

ultimately declaring the rule unconstitutional. The same year, the principal at Cannelton High School suspended a boy after a paternity suit was filed alleging he had fathered a child out-of-wedlock. While the IHSAA was inclined to keep the boy out of competition, the state courts disagreed that punishment could precede resolution of the pending legal action. Soon after, the prohibition was removed from the IHSAA rules.¹³⁸

Thus, the suspension of Higgins and Ray by Muncie Central was ultimately not about race, nor a strategy to placate Eskew. It was Eskew's first strike--and there was more to follow. He was angry. After receiving initial reports on the Frankfort Holiday Tourney, Eskew had told the press, "If Muncie Central wants to play its games and make sure its players and fans behave like ladies and gentlemen, we're glad to have them in the IHSAA. If Muncie Central doesn't, then we can *damn* well get along without them."¹³⁹ Now the Muncie City Council jumped into the fray.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Associated Press, "Eskew Promises To Investigate Action of Fans: 'Going to Get to the Bottom of It,' Says IHSAA Boss," December 31, 1963, HOF.

CHAPTER IV

“LAXITY AND IRREGULARITIES”

On January 6, 1964, at its first public meeting of the year, the Muncie City Council voted 8 to 0 (with one abstention) to demand that Commissioner Eskew apologize to the City of Muncie for using profane language.¹⁴⁰ Most Muncie citizens cringed at this action, fearing it might further provoke Eskew in advance of the scheduled hearing before the IHSAA Board of Control. One letter writer, however, compared Eskew to a “braying ass” and suggested that the school officials, “if there is an ounce of manhood in any of them,” demand his resignation.

Mr. Eskew may not be the big-mouthed impulsive, prejudiced ass that his public utterances make his appear. It may be that he is being misquoted and that his ears are only normal in size. If, however, he has been quoted correctly, then we citizens of Delaware County have a right to be annoyed.¹⁴¹

Meanwhile, waiting for the hearing that would decide Central’s fate, the Bearcats played two games, losing to Lafayette Jefferson on January 10 and to Indianapolis Technical the following night.¹⁴²

A snow storm made travel to the IHSAA office in the Circle Tower building on Indianapolis’s Monument Circle hazardous on the morning of Tuesday, January 14, 1964.

¹⁴⁰ Warren Collier, “Council Demands Eskew Apologize to Muncie,” *Muncie Evening Press*, January 7, 1964. One citizen responded with a letter to the editor suggesting that Eskew’s response to the Council should be “it is none of their damned business.” Letter to the editor, “Irked by Action of City Council,” *Muncie Evening Press*, January 8, 1964. The Council’s letter read, “Be it here known that the City Council of Muncie goes on the record expressing its disappointment at the language used by you in regard to the incident at Frankfort, Indiana. We are hereby asking for a public apology. We also believe it would be better if no criticism was offered until after both parties had a chance to present their case.” As of January 9, 1964, the letter had not been mailed. It is unclear whether it was ever sent. “Council Letter to IHSAA Is Delayed,” *Muncie Evening Press*, January 9, 1964.

¹⁴¹ E. Dixon, letter to the editor, “A Proposition,” *Muncie Star*, January 10, 1964.

¹⁴² Stodghill, *Bearcats*, 124.

The hearing was scheduled to begin at 10:30 in the morning, but was pushed back until after the lunch hour. As a private organization, the IHSAA had no legal obligation to open the hearing to the public. It also banned the press. Each of the principals from the four schools participating in the Frankfort Holiday Tourney had been ordered first to submit a written report and then commanded to appear before Eskew and the IHSAA Board of Control. In addition to Principal John Paul Huffman, Muncie Central athletic director McKinley, Coach Tallman, and assistant principal Robert Gibson were also ordered to appear. Game officials Jimmy Dimitroff and Wendell Baker had tendered their written reports on the experience. Dimitroff said of the game, “It was awful. I lay awake most of the night thinking about it.”¹⁴³

Newsmen from around the state reported on what little they knew. The *Indianapolis News* ran a quarter-page picture of a grim McKinley, Huffman, and Gibson waiting to present their case.¹⁴⁴ The hearing lasted into the evening. Eskew and the Board heard evidence seated at a long conference table in Eskew’s office in the Circle Tower Building in downtown Indianapolis. First, Noel Douglass of Anderson High School and his athletic director, Charles Cummings, answered questions for twenty-five minutes. They were followed by Robert Ayres, the Frankfort principal managing the tourney, and finally John Hougland of Marion. When Hougland was released to return to the anteroom, Assistant Commissioner Herman Keller, once Eskew’s college roommate, escorted the Muncie Central men into the hearing room. After an hour, all the principals

¹⁴³ Although the press was banned, Bob Barnet was permitted to sit in the anteroom of the IHSAA offices in Indianapolis. The following articles were consulted for information on the hearings: Associated Press, “Muncie on Trial Today,” multiple newspapers, January 14, 1964; Bob Barnet, “Muncie Central No. 1 on IHSAA Docket,” *Muncie Star*, January 13, 1964; Bob Barnet, “Ruling Wednesday: IHSAA Board Delays Decision on Bearcats,” *Muncie Star*, January 15, 1964. See also, Bob Barnet, “Central May face Suspension: IHSAA Probes Brawl at Tourney,” *Muncie Star*, date unknown, HOF.

¹⁴⁴ George Tilford, photographer, “On Their Way,” *Indianapolis News*, January 14, 1963.

were convened for a group session lasting another hour. At 4:40 p.m. that afternoon, representatives from Anderson, Frankfort and Marion were excused. Huffman, McKinley, and Gibson spent another forty-five minutes on the carpet. Eskew called a break at 6:30 p.m. that evening, and he and the Board went to dinner. After, the press was told that no announcement would come that night. Deliberations would resume the following morning.¹⁴⁵ Muncie held its breath.

On January 15, 1964, tickets for a scheduled Muncie Central-Anderson contest to be held in Anderson two days hence went on sale. Bob Barnet called for the game to be cancelled, and failing that, for fans to stay home. An Anderson sportswriter countered that the better plan was to throw “hoodlums” in jail and go ahead with the game. Calling off a game between these historic rivals “would be the coward’s way out.”¹⁴⁶ After the IHSAA announced its decision, however, the debate was moot.

“STATE CHAMP MUNCIE SUSPENDED FOR YEAR” read the front page of the *Indianapolis Times* on January 15, 1964. Newspapers around the state--Anderson, Muncie, Frankfort, Marion, Huntington, Bloomington, Fort Wayne, and Hammond--reported it as the biggest story in the state that day. Louisville and Chicago papers carried the news, too. Principal Huffman announced the decision to the Bearcats squad in his office at 1:30 p.m. that afternoon, then used the public address system to inform the school: “It is my duty as principal of this school to inform you that Central has been suspended from the IHSAA.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Bob Barnet, “Ruling Wednesday: IHSAA Board Delays Decision on Bearcats,” *Muncie Star*, January 15, 1964.

¹⁴⁶ Bob Barnet, “Cold Eye of IHSAA Fixed on Fieldhouse,” *Muncie Star*, January 10, 1964; Sports Raven’ with “Red” Haven, *Anderson Herald*, January 14, 1964.

¹⁴⁷ Brian Usher, “Sorrow Grips Central On Dramatic Day,” *The Munsonian* 46, no. 8 (January 23, 1964).

The team heard talk of the investigation, but mostly focused on practice and the next game.¹⁴⁸ Dallas Kunkle was in geometry class that day. His teacher, Hal Warren, had been the team's equipment manager for years. When the team was called to come down to Huffman's office to await the phone call, Warren began to cry. "This is the end," he said.¹⁴⁹ The entire team was in Principal Huffman's office as the call with the IHSAA decision came in. First, Huffman spoke with the coaches. Then he told the team. He was crying, but told the players, "Be good role models." They returned to their classrooms, ordered not to say anything. Shortly after, Huffman announced the suspension to the student body.¹⁵⁰

It was another blow for a senior class that had already had a difficult year. The previous year's senior Class President George McCoy died in a plane crash with his family in September 1963.¹⁵¹ On October 31, 1963, the Coliseum at the State Fairgrounds in Indianapolis was rocked by an explosion that killed 74 and injured 400. The disaster so overwhelmed the city's resources that the Coliseum itself was turned into a temporary morgue.¹⁵² For the young men and women at Muncie Central that Fall, the Coliseum explosion was deeply felt.¹⁵³ Indianapolis was just down the road, and the horror of it seemed frighteningly close. Three weeks later, President John F. Kennedy

¹⁴⁸ Nearly fifty years after those events, many do not recall that the suspension of Higgins and Ray were not contemporaneous with the IHSAA announcement. In fact, the timeline of events and the announcement of the suspension seems to have an almost surreal quality for the players and students it affected most deeply. See, Hartley, Kunkle, Reese, Rankin, and Shepperd interviews.

¹⁴⁹ Kunkle interview.

¹⁵⁰ Hartley interview.

¹⁵¹ *The Evening Independent*, September 28, 1963. See also, Rankin and Shepperd interview.

¹⁵² Indiana State Fairgrounds Coliseum Explosion, Indianapolis Firefighters Museum Collection, Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, Indianapolis.

¹⁵³ Rankin and Shepperd interview. Shepperd writes, "[M]ajor news had more impact, because we weren't inundated, jaded really, with 24/7 information coming at us. And, close-to-home news really mattered. The explosion was one event, wrapped into several events, that shook our world. Collectively, those kinds of events truly made an emotional difference to graduating seniors preparing to leave what they'd known all their lives--the security of school and the comforts of home." Shepperd email to author, March 19, 2012.

was assassinated in Dallas. Kennedy had visited Muncie several times during his 1960 presidential campaign.¹⁵⁴ His death coincided with the first home game of the Bearcats 1963-1964 season.¹⁵⁵ The Class of 1964 was reeling when the suspension was announced.

All the conversation at Muncie Central centered around Commissioner Eskew after that. “Everyone was certain he was from Anderson.”¹⁵⁶ Each year, the senior class purchased a gift for the school. That year the seniors suggested a statue of Eskew to be placed in the entrance of the school, next to an existing statue of Abraham Lincoln. “Let Abe take care of him,” said the students.¹⁵⁷

The IHSAA soon issued a press release announcing that “laxity and irregularities in the administration of the inter-scholastic athletic program by Muncie school officials were contributing factors to the decision. The Bearcats, including the ninth graders at its three “feeder” junior highs, were suspended from all IHSAA sports competition for one year, at which point the school could apply to be reinstated on a probationary basis. Anderson received a year of strict probation. Marion was placed on probation for the balance of the school year. Ayres, Houglund and Douglass were commended for their actions in responding to the situation.¹⁵⁸ The decision concluded by admonishing, “The Board of Control feels that it is unfortunate that a small group of irresponsible fans had

¹⁵⁴ Goodall, *Negroes in Muncie*, 44.

¹⁵⁵ Muncie Central High School Magician (yearbook), 1964, Muncie Central High School Memorabilia Room, Muncie, Ind.; see also, Rankin interview.

¹⁵⁶ Shepperd interview.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ IHSAA Press Release by Commissioner Phil Eskew, January 15, 1964, published in multiple newspapers, HOF. The IHSAA omitted any conclusions about the professed ignorance of Coach Tallman and assistant principal Gibson.

contributed to the jeopardy of the entire sports program. The Board respectfully requests that all fans review their responsibility to the total sports program.”¹⁵⁹

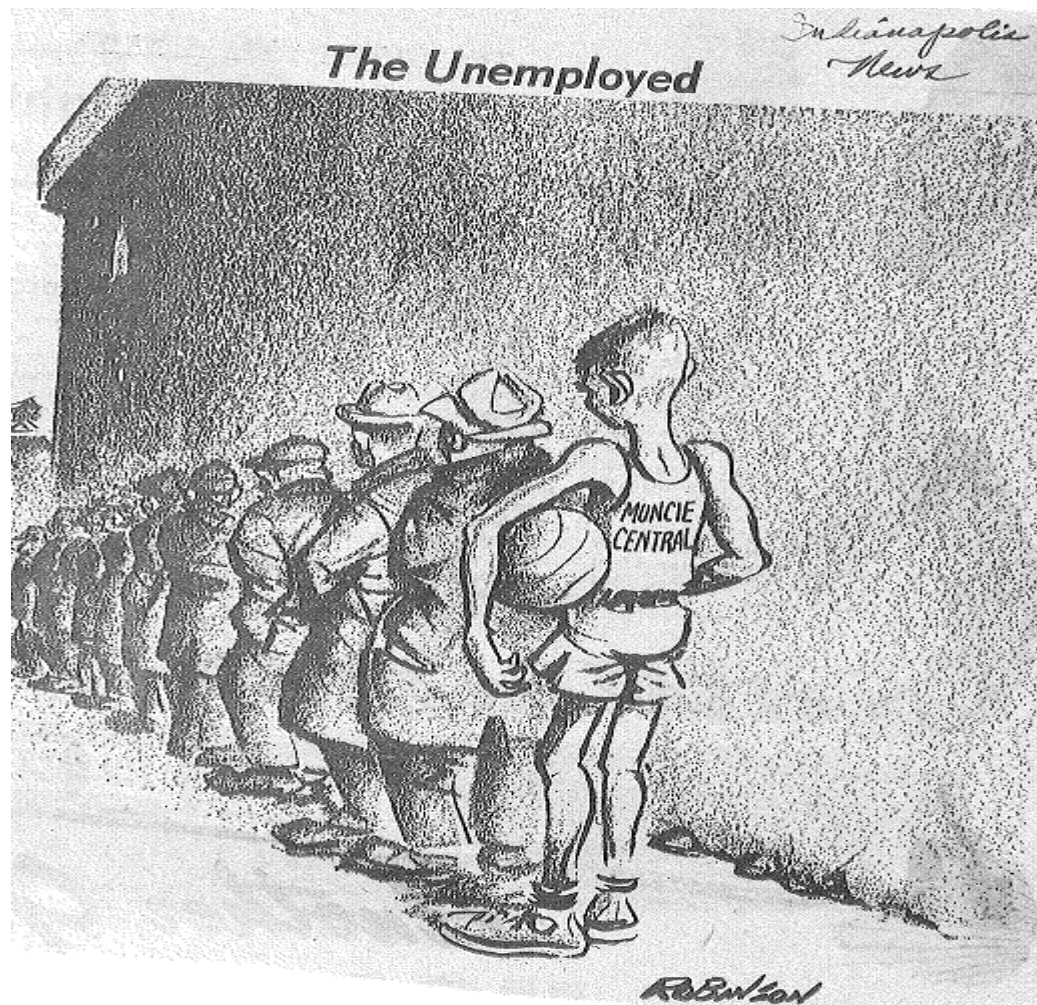


Fig. 4¹⁶⁰

Muncie Central was the first school suspended by the IHSAA for conduct rule violations since 1936. In the past, use of ineligible players--boys recruited from other schools or overaged “boys”--prompted the harshest penalties. Muncie’s mayor, John V. Hampton, a former Muncie Central athlete and a lawyer by trade, said, “Muncie is shocked but we’re big enough to take it.” That stoicism did not preclude Hampton from questioning Eskew’s impartiality or criticizing the closed-door nature of the proceedings,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. To compound the pain, the IHSAA also decided not to give Muncie Central any tickets for state basketball tourney games from the sectionals to the finals; it usually received close to three thousand.

¹⁶⁰ Cartoon by Robinson, “The Unemployed,” *Indianapolis News*, date unknown, HOF.

although he could have had no question about what happened and what was said behind those doors.¹⁶¹ In Hammond, one columnist wrote, “Like Cassius Clay, Muncie Central’s been asking for it for a long, long time.” A cartoon in the *Indianapolis News* showed a boy in a Bearcats uniform, basketball under his arm, standing at the back of an unemployment line.¹⁶²

Principal Huffman reported that he was “shocked.” His investigation had come up with not one single act of wrongdoing by any Muncie student.¹⁶³ A few days later, a small piece in the *Indianapolis News* called Huffman out for his professed ignorance. “If John Paul Huffman . . . is sharp on history, he won’t have to go out of the house to understand the severity of the IHSAA rap.” The story related how, after a 42 to 41 loss to Anderson a few years earlier, the Muncie police were needed to escort Anderson players out to their bus. Some “rascal” threw a brickbat through the bus window, striking the Anderson principal on the head. “Guess who the Anderson principal was. C’mon now, you’re not trying. It was John Paul Huffman.”¹⁶⁴

Eskew clarified his role in the decision, partly in response to Mayor Hampton’s remarks, noting that he did not have a vote; the IHSAA Board of Control made the decision after reviewing the evidence including the written statements of the schools and of the referees at the tourney and hearing the arguments of school officials. Eskew was the prosecutor, but not the judge. Nonetheless, pictures of a stern Eskew appeared in

¹⁶¹ Several articles provide a comprehensive recounting of Muncie’s reaction to the suspension. Bob Barnet, “Junior Highs Hit, Many Are Shocked by IHSAA Suspension of CHS Bearcats,” *Muncie Star*, January 16, 1964; Evan Crawley, “IHSAA Making Example of School Says Hampton,” *Indianapolis Times*, January 16, 1964

¹⁶² See fn. 159.

¹⁶³ Bob Barnet, “Junior Highs Hit: Many Are Shocked by IHSAA Suspension of CHS Bearcats,” *Muncie Star*, January 16, 1964; Jack Schneider, “Muncie Central Shocked by Severity of Penalty,” *Louisville Times*, January 16 1964.

¹⁶⁴ *Indianapolis News*, January 22, 1964.

newspapers throughout the state, as many editorial pages congratulated him for his hard line approach. Eskew's action was heralded as "invigorating" by the Evansville sportswriter Daniel Scism, who exclaimed, "Other schools of felonious proclivities had best about face from sin toward sainthood."¹⁶⁵ Red Haven of Anderson applauded the penalties, even the probation for his hometown school, reminding his readers that Anderson fans once threw bricks at a bus of team boosters from Columbus, Indiana. "But for the grace of god, it could have been [Anderson]!"¹⁶⁶

The regular meeting of the Muncie school board exploded with fury on January 16, 1964, when Mrs. Carolyn Kelley called for School Superintendent Durward Cory to resign--and threatened to run for his seat if he did not. "Did it take you 18 months to find out what's been going on?" Kelley demanded. "There was the bus incident and the principal wasn't there. There was the tourney and he wasn't there. Where was he, what are we paying him for?" Another parent said, "People think more of sports than education." Board president Mary Augburn responded that if Central had tried to suspend Higgins and Ray for their conduct issues earlier in the season, "the hue and cry which would have risen would have been heard to the Pacific ocean."¹⁶⁷ Mrs. Augburn was making Eskew's point exactly.

In the January 23, 1964, edition of the student newspaper *The Munsonian*, the editors wrote:

¹⁶⁵ Daniel W. Scism, "Sew It Seems: Shades of A.L. Trester," *Evansville Courier*, January 17, 1964.

¹⁶⁶ Sports Ravin' with "Red" Haven, *Anderson Herald*, January 19, 1964. In Marion, Principal Houglan responded to his school's probation philosophically. "It might actually help ... if we're interested in good athletics - to get these things straightened out." "No Place in Scholastic Athletics," *Marion Leader-Tribune*, January 17, 1964. In Anderson, Noel Douglass issued a stern warning to the community, calling for sportsmanship on the playing floor and in the stands. "Athletics is not the chief reason for the existence of a high school." "A Statement," *Anderson Herald*, January 18, 1964.

¹⁶⁷ Bill Brantley, "School Head Under Fire: Board Report on IHSAA Action Stirs Exchange," *Muncie Star*, January 17, 1964.

Central's "image" has long been the syrup that drew the flies. At times it had even been the bread and butter of columnists with leaky pens or a flair for emotional writing . . . People may not be sure they are right when they blame Central, but they figure the odds are on their side . . . There are several ways that might be taken to help improve the Central image, though none are guaranteed cure-alls. One sure, though perhaps unacceptable way to be better liked would be to win fewer basketball games.¹⁶⁸

The article concluded, however, that a concerted effort within the school and from the community to acknowledge all of the accomplishments of Muncie Central students, academic and athletic, was needed.

On January 28, 1964, the local NAACP leadership, not satisfied nor finished with their own discussion on the matter, wrote to Superintendent Cory with a list of grievances and requests. Specifically, they decried:

1. Lack of adult responsibility at Central High School.
2. Commercializing on boys athletic ability, while condoning bad habits, bad attitude, and bad morals.
3. Throwing our boys to the wolves when it seems you will be publically exposed.
4. That you have done the City of Muncie a disservice, Central High School a disservice, and the Negro Community a disservice by such actions.
5. That the misconduct the boys were charged with was known by certain school officials as early as Sept. of '63.
6. That the boys were encouraged by adults, who they admired and respected, to keep the girls quiet and everything would be alright.
7. That responsible adults were aboard the bus during the bus incident of several years ago, and were, in no way held responsible for what happened.
8. The Negro athletes have been spit on, called names, and otherwise mistreated while playing out of town, with no protest being made to rival school officials by Central offices.

¹⁶⁸ "Central Is Automatically Suspect," *The Munsonian* 46, no. 8 (January 23, 1964).

9. That when the team wins the State and other honors, everyone responsible shared the credit and that when something goes wrong, everyone responsible should share the blame.
10. That something is basically wrong in the athletic set-up at Central. In the method of selecting boys to participate in athletics, lack of a consistent athletic policy. And in the scholastic requirements of those allowed to participate.

The men pleaded for a local resolution, a meeting of local people “sitting down in good faith,” but threatened to have the Indiana NAACP request that that IHSAA conduct a public investigation of the suspensions of Higgins and Ray. They demanded that McKinley be replaced along with any other school official who had knowledge of the allegations against the boys and participated in covering them up. They asked that black teachers be hired “who also can double as counselors.” The letter was signed by Joseph Lyons, Reverend Oliver, Charles Sanders, Hurley Goodall, and Henry Johnson.¹⁶⁹

The following day, January 29, 1964, the men met with Superintendent Cory at his office. They began by discussing Higgins and Ray and their suspensions and treatment. Cory insisted that the IHSAA penalty against Muncie Central and its junior high schools was based on the IHSAA’s belief that Higgins had deliberately thrown a ball into the face of an Anderson player, although he said he knew this by inference only. The IHSAA, he acknowledged, “did not come right out and say it.” Cory also related that concern had been expressed over the length of time Billy Ray had been away from school after the death of his father, something that had happened over a year beforehand. Apparently there were also a number of letters written to the IHSAA critical of Muncie Central that may have influenced the decision.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Letter to N. Durward Cory, January 28, 1964, MSS.033, Box 2, Folder 19, Middletown Studies Collection.

¹⁷⁰ Handwritten notes of Goodall, *ibid.*

Higgins, Cory said, was involved with a white girl. Hurley Goodall recorded in his notes, “From Dr. Cory’s statements it was apparent that he feels that if a negro boy gets involved with a white girl, then whatever is done to him is justified.” Cory told the NAACP leadership group that the school had received a call from an attorney in 1962 that paternity charges against Higgins had been dropped. That these charges were still pending and thus discoverable by Commissioner Eskew was an “oversight” according to one of the local judges. Attorneys had had both cases against Higgins removed from the court files, Cory explained, and school officials had told Eskew that they themselves could not have accessed them without the assistance of counsel. Yet Eskew was able to walk in off the street and see them.¹⁷¹

Because of their concern that other young men not be caught up in such situations, the leadership probed Cory to see if other student-athletes were at risk of discovery. Cory related that someone had pushed a baby carriage onto the court during a game the previous year, and now its meaning seemed clear to him. He also had heard “rumor of abortions and other things, but that he had no proof.” Cory mentioned one boy by name who “may” have fathered a child, but the girl “threw herself at him and he was a shy boy who didn’t know any better, also the girl’s reputation was not too good.” This young man, also a basketball player, was white.¹⁷²

Each of the men from the NAACP then asked questions in turn, some specific to Higgins and Ray and the suspensions, others turning to broader questions of race relations and the specifics of their letter. Cory said that athletic director Fred McKinley was concerned for his job since he was the only one identified by name, but need not be

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

since he was friends with members of the school board through his church. They would stand by him, said Cory, “come what may.” Cory then explained that the school board had been looking for qualified black teachers for “several years.” The men responded by listing competent members of the Muncie community who had graduated from Ball State Teachers College in Muncie, which had a respected education program.¹⁷³ Cory said, “Most Ball State graduates are not fit to teach in the county, let alone the city of Muncie. Ball State gives all its students ‘As’ and ‘Bs’ whether they deserve them or not.” Reverend Oliver commented that he was sure Dr. Emens, president of the college, would be glad to hear that statement.¹⁷⁴

When pressed to set a meeting as requested in the letter, Cory stated that he did not know if the school board would respond to the letter. He refused to commit to answer by any specific deadline and did not answer when asked if he was willing to sit down again with the group to work on solutions to the enumerated issues. Reverend Oliver then said, “It is obvious that Dr. Cory is not a free man and that the school board has his hands tied. It will be up to us to free his hands.”¹⁷⁵

Cory issued a press release. The NAACP leadership attempted to publish a response, but it was refused by the publisher. The men were offended by the implication in Cory’s press release that all the group wanted were scholarships for Higgins and Ray. In fact, the statement acknowledged, the Muncie NAACP first became involved in the situation because all athletes punished by Central High School for rule violations were black. “But,” they wrote, “after the discovery of so much dirt during our investigation,

¹⁷³ The name was not changed to Ball State University until 1965. Ball State University, History and Mission, <http://cms.bsu.edu/About/HistoryAndMission.aspx> (accessed February 16, 2012).

¹⁷⁴ Handwritten notes of Goodall, MSS.033, Box 2, Folder 19, Middletown Studies Collection.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

we realized that the problem was much larger than we had anticipated.” The statement emphasized that while black teachers were needed in the schools, the men were interested in the well-being of all children. Nothing would improve in the schools as long as the same individuals stayed in positions of power making the same mistakes. “We are concerned and wonder where are the parents and other Christian citizens in the community who believe in morality, good citizenship and responsibility. They have made themselves conspicuous by their silence in this matter.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Bob Barnet wrote a heartfelt editorial in the aftermath. “High school basketball was practically out of control in Indiana and IHSAA commissioner Phil Eskew knew it and admitted it frankly. Players did as they pleased . . . Coaches inflamed impressionable students and other onlookers with sideline hysterics. Students and adults brawled and cursed from the Ohio River to the Calumet.” Barnet asked, “Who is to blame?” His answers: students and adult fans cursing at game officials, players refusing to demonstrate basic sportsmanship on the playing field and the hardwood, and even newspapermen, for helping to “fashion a Frankenstein monster that brought cold, quivering fear to the gymnasiums of an entire state--and had to be shackled.”¹⁷⁷

Grand words, to be certain, but nowhere in the reality of what happened were Muncie Central fans behaving with less decorum than fans of any other team. On December 28, 1963, Muncie Central fans were fighting, but they were fighting fans of other teams. Yet Muncie Central was suspended for a year while other teams only received suspensions. Everyone knew that there were always fights and hysteria surrounding the games. When the team traveled to Richmond, Dallas Kunkle recalled that “it was so loud it was one pitch. I’d never heard anything like it, and I never have since.”¹⁷⁸ When the Bearcats played football at Anderson, the field was surrounded by police K-9 units. The team would put on their helmets on the bus at the city’s edge.¹⁷⁹ At other stadiums, the team walked in with their leather travel bags over their heads because the fans would throw license plates at them. The fans that followed the team to

¹⁷⁷ Bob Barnet, “Will Central Agony Bring Back Sanity?,” *Muncie Star*, January 17, 1964.

¹⁷⁸ Kunkle interview.

¹⁷⁹ Hartley interview.

away games were “redneck fighting guys” who drank between games. But that was not unique to Muncie Central.¹⁸⁰

The story of the Frankfort Holiday Tourney game told in the press mentions only one Bearcat player: Andie Higgins. Yet an entire school and every sport was suspended. Moreover, an Anderson player viciously elbowed Higgins’ teammate, Glinder Torain, in the belly earlier in the game. Anderson was not suspended for having players refusing to demonstrate sportsmanship on the hardwood. No coaches or school officials were sanctioned in any way, nor even publicly rebuked, despite Eskew’s later comments indicating his belief that there was a concerted effort to help Higgins and Ray conceal their paternity issues. Only the students were punished, as had happened with the hazing incident in 1962.

Andie Higgins and Billy Ray both lost any chance for a scholarship.¹⁸¹ Higgins disappeared as far as his teammates knew, but sits today in a Texas prison.¹⁸² Billy Ray was drafted and died in the service, not in Viet Nam but from an allergic reaction to anesthesia he received in a dentist’s chair. Jim Reese lost his senior season of track, but sees good in what occurred. Muncie Central created more intramural sports and girls’ sports in the aftermath of the suspension, giving everyone an opportunity to participate in athletics.¹⁸³ In fact, the new intramural program allowed 200 boys to participate by playing on twenty basketball teams in a “net league.” Over 100 girls now played

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Handwritten notes of Goodall, MSS.033, Box 2, Folder 19 and MSS.090, Box 8, Folder 29, Middletown Studies Collection.

¹⁸² Andie M. Higgins, Texas Prison Units, Wynne Unit, *Texas Tribune*, <http://www.texastribune.org/-library/data/texas-prisons/inmates/andie-m-higgins/120039/> (accessed March 2, 2012); *see also*, Crimes Committed by Residents of Rockwall County, *Texas Tribune*, <http://www.texastribune.org/library/data/-texas-prisons/counties/rockwall/crime/> (accessed March 2, 2012); *Higgins v. State*, 2004 WL 2595849 (Tex.App. Dallas, 2004) (appealing the trial court’s consideration of a prior conviction in California in imposing a life sentence).

¹⁸³ Reese interview.

intramural volleyball.¹⁸⁴ “It just kind of brought us down to where we should be,” says Reese. Nonetheless, he thinks “things had been building through the years. Everyone was against Muncie Central. There was just the feeling that you’re always going to keep your thumb on us and everyone’s out to get Muncie Central.”¹⁸⁵

Dallas Kunkle, a sophomore that year, says, “At that time I was angry with anybody who was in authority who made us get suspended. I don’t think it was fair. The other kids had nothing to do with it. There was never any indication that the swimmers or the wrestlers had those problems.”¹⁸⁶ Yet because of Eskew’s decision, the tennis team, 1963 North Central Conference champion with three returning lettermen, lost their season and instead played adult teams from Muncie and surrounding cities in the Spring of 1964.¹⁸⁷ M.L. Bryant, who was undefeated in eight matches, was expected to win a state championship as a heavyweight wrestler in 1964. Bryant lost the balance of his senior year and conference tournament competition. His coach, Leo Mench, cried when the suspension was announced. Bryant’s new shoes for the upcoming conference meet had just come in that day. Mench held those shoes and knew Bryant would never wear them. The wrestler, “bewildered,” asked, “You mean we’re done?”¹⁸⁸

Fighting by and among fans and players was certainly not going to be tolerated by Commissioner Eskew and the IHSAA anymore. Eskew had made that clear over and over in his first seventeen months at the IHSAA with the suspensions and reprimands issued to Tunnelton, Knox, Fort Wayne North, Kokomo, and other schools, players, and

¹⁸⁴ Muncie Central High School Magician (yearbook), 1964.

¹⁸⁵ Reese interview. Jim Reese went to Ball State Teacher’s College in the Fall of 1964. Lacking focus, he soon left, taking a job at Ball Hospital and joining the Naval Reserve. Viet Nam and the draft were an ever-present reality. At Ball Hospital, he met his wife, a nurse. Reese eventually spent thirty years working for Ameritech (Bell Telephone). He still lives in the Muncie area.

¹⁸⁶ Kunkle interview.

¹⁸⁷ Muncie Central High School Magician (yearbook), 1964, p. 96.

¹⁸⁸ Brian Usher, “Sorrow Grips Central On Dramatic Day,” *The Munsonian* 46, no. 8 (January 23, 1964).

coaches. Sportswriters saw it coming. Just nine days before the Frankfort Holiday Tourney, Bob Ford of the *Kokomo Tribune* wrote, “The IHSAA could throw us out.” Bob Barnet had asked his Muncie readers, “Who wants to be the IHSAA example?” It is doubtful, however, that the boys who most suffered with the penalty knew of these events or were aware of the warning signs.

In an interview more than a decade later, Eskew also confirmed that the suspension was not just about the fight at the Frankfort Holiday Tourney. The hazing incident in 1962 still troubled people. That same season, Bill Dinwiddie broke a player’s jaw in rough play. Two players on the 1963-1964 team had paternity suits filed against them, which some of the coaches and school administrators knew and kept quiet according to the statements Higgins and Ray made to the NAACP leadership. Eskew believed that community businessmen were paying to keep matters quiet.

In the weeks between the Frankfort Holiday Tourney and the suspension of Muncie Central by the IHSAA Board of Control, the NAACP stepped forward to suggest that racial issues were involved, not only because its leadership believed black players were being set up to take the fall, but also due to the apparent lack of caring about the wrong path these young men were taking with their lives.¹⁸⁹ There was a long history of racial discrimination in the IHSAA, in Muncie, and throughout Indiana to lend support to that suspicion. But ultimately the suspension of the Bearcats was not about race, or at least, race was not the primary issue, just as it was not the primary issue in the hazing

¹⁸⁹ Twenty years later, this theme was exposed again, painfully, in the PBS documentary series *Middletown Revisited*. The second installment, entitled “The Big Game,” focuses on the Muncie Central-Anderson basketball rivalry. Muncie Central’s white superstar Rick Rowray is recruited by universities. Andre Morgan, an outstanding Anderson player, but poor and African American, views athletics as his “ticket out.” Several difficult scenes show Morgan’s mother complaining bitterly that no one, not Andre, not his coach Norm Held, a man whose moral core is as obvious as the pressure upon him to deliver a winning season to satisfy school officials and fans, cares about whether this young man does well in school or achieves anything other than success on the hardwood.

incident. In both circumstances, those who broke the rules received the initial suspensions. Moreover, the NAACP leaders ultimately concluded that the problem they themselves uncovered was larger than the issue of race.

The school board and City Council were rocked by community outrage over the incident at Frankfort and what it said about a tradition of bad behavior by the team, repeatedly overlooked by coaches, administrators, and local boosters. There was clearly dissatisfaction with the old guard. At the time, Eskew told his son that part of the problem at Muncie Central was the principal, John Paul Huffman. Eskew believed Huffman was “weak” and a poor leader with no control. He privately shared his concerns with members of the school board as well. Huffman, however, survived the suspension, to Eskew’s amazement and frustration. Politics, however, was not the downfall of the boys on the Muncie Central roster during the 1963-1964 season.

Sex and social mores that locked boys who fathered children out of high school sports played a role, but the IHSAA’s penalty was not strictly about sex, either. While it is not known who among the coaches and administrators was aware of Higgins’ two children and Ray’s conflict with the sister of one of his teammates, both implied that at least Coach Zurbrugg knew. School Superintendent Durward Cory’s flippant response to the NAACP men’s concerns, with his tales of baby carriages and the helpless white player who had succumbed through no fault of his own to an aggressive girl of ill-repute suggests he was not particularly concerned by such matters. He did not approve of Higgins’ relationships with white girls, but it seems unlikely he exposed this detail to the IHSAA and Commissioner Eskew, although the court records may have said as much. When Eskew was interviewed about the suspension nearly 15 years later, the interracial

aspect was not one that he raised. Eskew banned “fathers”--black and white--from athletic participation throughout his tenure with the IHSAA.

Eskew viewed the events at the Frankfort Holiday Tourney as an affront to everything that athletics should represent in the lives of boys: friends, finesse, fortitude, and fight, in the best sense of that word.¹⁹⁰ The brawl was an extraordinary event. It mandated investigation, and it forced Eskew and the IHSAA to confront the fact that at least some of those at Muncie Central who were charged with molding the characters of young men not only ignored wrongdoing but condoned it in order to field a winning team. Most ultimately concluded that the suspension was not about the “basketbrawl” but a culmination of events. The state resented Muncie Central’s domination in basketball. The hazing incident had garnered an enormous amount of press but seemingly gone unpunished under Eskew’s predecessor, L.V. Phillips. Now, two young men had fathered children with adults in the community complicit in covering up evidence of those facts.

Following the IHSAA’s announcement, the Bearcats played industrial teams, intramurals, and church teams for the balance of the 1964 season and again in the Fall. Many of these games were against grown men, including former Bearcats.¹⁹¹ On December 22, 1964, after meeting with Principal Huffman and his new athletic director, John Longfellow, the former Bearcats coach, the IHSAA announced that it was lifting the Bearcats’ suspension on January 1, 1965, but with an additional year of probation.¹⁹² On

¹⁹⁰ “4 Fs” (speech), EPC.

¹⁹¹ Muncie Central High School Magician (yearbook), 1964.

¹⁹² Bob Barnet, “We’re Figuring on John Being the Boss,” *Muncie Star*, undated. Fred McKinley’s ouster had been demanded, and now he was sent to a local junior high to take over as its principal. Superintendent Cory insisted it was not related to the suspension.

January 2, 1965, the Bearcats returned to competitive play, beating Hammond Clark High School by one point before a sell-out crowd at the Fieldhouse.

Phil Eskew was approached by the Democratic party leadership in Indiana and encouraged to run for governor at the close of the term of his good friend, Roger Branigan, who held the office from 1965 through 1969. Eskew was popular and knew the lobbyists and legislators well, partly from his habit of spending available lunch hours at the Press Club across the street from the State House, playing bridge and swapping stories, lending his practical opinions to matters involving education and athletics. He also had the habit of dropping by the offices of the *Indianapolis Star/News* to talk to the sportswriters after he had been to a game, so the press liked him, too. Eskew gave it great consideration, but ultimately decided that being commissioner of the Indiana High School Athletic Association “was the best job in the state.”¹⁹³ During his fourteen years as the state’s chief regulator of high school athletics, he again suspended entire sports programs on three occasions, most notably Gary West Side High School, after its students rioted following their loss to Connersville in the 1972 state championship game, sending dozens of people to the hospital and causing thousands of dollars in property damage.¹⁹⁴ This time, athletes fought back in court seeking an injunction to allow them to play, but Eskew prevailed, and the one-year suspension was enforced.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Eskew, Jr. interview.

¹⁹⁴ Glenn, *History of IHSAA*, 220-224; see also, Bob Williams, “IHSAA Hands Gary West 1-Year Suspension,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 16, 1972.

¹⁹⁵ IHSAA Board of Control Minutes, May 19, 1972. Gary West Side player, Michael Pate, received a temporary injunction allowing the West Side track team to compete in a regional tournament, but it was subsequently dissolved. *Ibid.*, June 13, 1972. The IHSAA is a private institution in which membership is voluntary. Accordingly, the courts have consistently held they will not interfere in the IHSAA’s enforcement of its own rule absent mistake, fraud, collusions, arbitrariness or invasion or personal or property rights. See, for example, *Sturup v. Mahan*, 290 N.E.2d 64 (Ind.App. 1972).

Fans and players, coaches and school administrators, the cheer blocks and the boys drinking behind the gym during half-time--all were part of the atmosphere of Hoosier Hysteria that made the legendary gyms of Indiana, including the Muncie Central Fieldhouse and the new gym at Frankfort, exciting and wild and worthy of the name. The shiny surface of Hoosier Hysteria seemed to reflect the values that Commissioner Eskew espoused: students and athletes and fans all drawn together in a common purpose that erased the racial and social issues outside that sometimes divide a community. The brawl cracked that surface and showed that the racial concerns in Muncie were not obviated by the cohesion in the locker room. Fans came out to cheer for the team, but some harbored serious doubts about the school administrators and the promotion of athletics at the expense of other treasured values. And boys and girls were having sex and having children, as they had since time began and still do today.

What the brawl revealed does not answer the question of why it happened. Why did the gym at Frankfort explode at the final buzzer of the Muncie Central-Anderson game? Surely not every fan in that gym saw what sportswriter Corkie Lamm reported: a ball inbounded by Higgins into Grubb's face with such force that it drew blood. All day the crowd was restless. All day the fans bickered and "chattered" at each other. The final moment of the final game was the release valve on a winter day in central Indiana filled with building tension and frustration and excitement, and when the reigning state championship Muncie Central Bearcats lost to their biggest rival, the fans exploded in joy and anger and youth and because that is what fans did in Indiana back then, although never at this scale.

Commissioner Eskew could not get to the heart of the problem by suspending two young men who had broken the paternity rule. Eskew could not lock the fans out of the Fieldhouse on Friday night. The problem was in the interrelationship that also created everything that was and is positive about Indiana basketball. Focusing on the individual wrongdoers would have been easy, but it would have failed to impact the deeper tensions and inherent problems that were uncovered in the investigation and had been simmering around the state in the months leading up to the Frankfort Holiday Tourney. The only way for Eskew to get at that interrelationship was to sit the whole program down--to impose the "death penalty" at Muncie Central for one year--on every athlete, every team, and every sport. That action, drastic and dramatic, made the front page of every paper in the state and beyond. Eskew made his point, but at a high price for those who were least culpable on that December day in 1963.

After the dust had settled in Muncie, few ever spoke of the suspension again. Today, many still do not care to. The suspension did not end the problem of "jumping coaches" or rowdy fans. Boys still got girls pregnant. Basketball continued to be and still is a rough, physical game. For a few weeks during the winter of 1964, the brawl at the Frankfort Holiday Tourney destroyed the ideal of team, of community, and of sport, and revealed that web of complex underlying tensions, some as old as the game. This is a state, though, that calls its love of the game "Hoosier Hysteria" and says it with pride. This is a state that calls basketball its religion. True or not, every fan in Indiana wants to believe that the sport really is about friends and finesse, fortitude and fight, in the best sense of those words. It is Indiana's game, and it still draws people together despite prejudice, class, politics, and other barriers that divide communities away from the

hardwood. On Friday night at the gym, basketball binds us together, cheering for our team, rooting for each basket, down to the final buzzer.

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