

XXIV. Successful Program Testimonials

Readers' Writes

Readers' comments and opinions are welcome, but letters must be concise, signed and include address and phone number of the writer. Letters may be edited for clarity and/or length. Send to Readers' Writes, Sports Department, *The Indianapolis Star*, P.O. Box 145, Indianapolis IN 46206.

Ben Davis won title with teamwork, not stars

This letter is in response to how the "Ben Davis Duds" won the 1996 IHSAA boy's state basketball championship. They won it like every team that has won the "Greatest Spectacle in High School Sports," from Crawfordsville in 1911 to the unranked Giants in 1998 — with teamwork.

While society has installed this thinking that we should only be concerned with personal achievements and that it takes a star player or star players to win a championship, the Ben Davis team showed otherwise.

The Giants' group of non-All Stars on the other hand left their selfishness and pride in the schoolhouse parking lot and listened to coach Steve Witty. They showed that it takes all players, one to 12 on a roster, to win a championship, not one star player.

Obviously, it was a combination of Witty's experience of taking three previous teams to the IHSAA "Final Four" and winning the state championship in 1995 and the unselfishness of his players that led to their run in the

state tournament and eventual 1996 title.

Witty is the only coach to ever lead his team to four straight "Final Four" appearances. So he knows what it takes to get a team there. And that is what he has taken each time: a team!

Carmel won the state championship in 1977, not 1978. Former Indianapolis Colts quarterback Mark Herrmann, who was on the Carmel team, was the leading scorer and was awarded the coveted Arthur L. Trestler Award for Mental Attitude, not Mr. Basketball.

Ben Davis is not the only state champion to not have a player chosen for the Indiana All Stars. Carmel also failed to not have a player chosen on the 1977 Indiana All-Star team when they won the state championship. Besides the '77 Grayhounds and '96 Giants, the other champions not represented on the All-Star team the same season they won the title were Hammond Technical (1940), Muncie Central (1979) and Marion (1986).

Robert W. Reiff, Greenwood

Ben Davis at the buzzer 3-25-96

Why the Indiana High School Athletic Association is talking about converting its storied Boys State Basketball Finals into a class tournament is a mystery to us.

Basketball simply doesn't get any classier than Ben Davis' 57-54 double-overtime win over New Albany before 21,748 screaming fans in the RCA Dome.

If the 86th IHSAA tournament is to be the last of the single-class basketball tournaments — and we certainly hope it isn't — it couldn't have ended with much more of climax than with Ben Davis Giants forward Jeff Poisel draining a 3-pointer at the buzzer in a second overtime to give Ben Davis its second straight championship.

Bobby Plump's game-winning shot that brought Milan its miracle victory in 1954 may remain the shot for the ages in the lore of the IHSAA tournament, but Poisel's game-winner was one that will be remembered and talked about for a long time to come.

It was one of those games that neither team should have had to lose. But the Giants were certainly worthy victors.

Although Ben Davis was the defending champion, it lost most of last year's starters to graduation. In February, the Giants had a 10-6 record and were not even ranked.

Anyone who was surprised by Ben Davis' record-breaking fourth consecutive appearance in the State Finals, however, doesn't know about the Wayne Township school system's total basketball program. It is a program that involves the entire community and

one that develops winners.

While this year's team lacked the big-name stars that have helped define Ben Davis basketball in the past, the boys squad more than made up for it with individuals who understood the concept of being role players.

They also were players who didn't know how to quit.

Other teams might have been totally demoralized when New Albany's Reginald Wheeler hit a baseline shot at the buzzer to send the game into overtime.

But Giants Coach Steve Witty gathered his players and said, "Hey, keep your heads up. This is fun. This is what it's all about."

Witty probably thinks sky diving or bungee jumping is fun, too.

Ben Davis is now a team that has to be considered alongside some of the most powerful teams — Marion, Crispus Attucks, Franklin — in the annals of the IHSAA tournament. Congratulations to the coach, the players and the whole Wayne Township community for their success.

Saturday night's game was, unfortunately, a game that someone had to lose. As New Albany Coach Don Unruh said of his players, "I'm about as proud of these kids as I've ever been. They played with a lot of heart and laid it all out on the line tonight."

They may not have won one of the most thrilling championships in IHSAA history, but it's hard to say they lost it.

And as for the IHSAA, why it would want to tinker with a tournament that brings Hoosiers this kind of thrilling basketball is beyond us.

INDY STAR LETTERS TO
EDITOR
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Best hoop team

Why should we taxpayers pay \$175 million to keep the Pacers in Indianapolis when Ben Davis is the best team in town and doesn't require luxury boxes?

CHARLES HUGHES
Indianapolis
