

Recalling the 'Big Three' high school basketball season of 1962-63

Written by Jerry Byrd

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The 1962-63 high school basketball season was the year of the Big Three in Shreveport-Bossier City.

Many observers (including Yours Truly) considered Byrd, Fair Park and Bossier High the best three teams in the state in the 1962-63 season, regardless of classification. Byrd was coached by Scotty Robertson, Fair Park by Clem Henderson and Bossier High by George Nattin. Gyms were packed any time two of those three teams went head-to-head.

Fair Park won the only state basketball championship in the school's history, and the first for any Shreveport school in 23 years.

Byrd, in the final season of Robertson's high school coaching career (he later coached at Louisiana Tech, and in the National Basketball Association) was the only member of the "Big Three" that lost to anybody else. After opening the season with 20 straight wins, the Yellow Jackets were upset by Minden 44-26 in the Bossier Invitational Tournament.

Byrd's only other loss to anybody other than Fair Park and Bossier came in the state playoffs, when Robertson moved a quarterfinal playoff game with Lafayette from the Byrd gym to Hirsch Youth Center. The Yellow Jackets had a nine-point lead in the fourth quarter, but Lafayette rallied to score a 39-38 victory on two free throws by Bobby Rodgers in the last four seconds.

Fair Park was led by Charles Beasley, who broke the Shreveport-Bossier City scoring record that year with 916 points in 37 games, an average of 24.8 points per game. He was selected "Outstanding Player" on the Louisiana Sports Writers Assn. All-State team. Beasley later played at SMU, and with Dallas in the American Basketball Association.

Beasley and Byrd center Bob Benfield (who later played at West Virginia) were the only first-team selections from the "Big Three" on the sports writers' All-State team. Bossier High lost seven games, all to Byrd and Fair Park, by a combined margin of 13 points, but drew a blank on the All-State team. The Bearkats were led by Tommy Thigpen, who went to LSU, and Bobby Misso, who went to Louisiana Tech.

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Fair Park had a 32-5 record in 1962-63, while Byrd was 32-4 and Bossier High was 29-7.

Three years earlier, a Bossier High team coached by John McConathy won the school's first state basketball championship, wrapping up a 41-4 season with a 39-35 win over DeLaSalle (New Orleans) in the Class 3A (then the top class) championship game, played in the little gym at the end of the school building that is now known as the girls' gym. Other local teams have won state championships, but the 1959-60 Bearkats are the only team on the list of Shreveport-Bossier City state champions that won more than 40 games.

The Bearkats reached the state finals in 1949, at the end of Frank Lampkin's first season as the basketball coach, but dropped a 46-27 decision to a Many team coached by Ralph Ward, who had been Lampkin's roommate at Northwestern State. Bobby Ray McHalfey and Tommy Woodall represented that Bossier High team on the All-State team.

Haughton is the only Bossier Parish school that won back-to-back state basketball titles, as teams coached by Billy Montgomery were Class A state champs in 1968 and 1969. Kenny Covington, who later played at the University of Houston, was the Most Valuable Player on All-State teams in both of those championship seasons. Benny DePrang also made All-State for the 1968-69 team, and Montgomery was Coach of the Year both seasons.

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