

Bossier Bearkats off to another great start in 2012-13 basketball season

Written by Jerry Byrd

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Bossier High's Bearkats rolled past Natchitoches-Central 45-24 in the championship game of the 73rd annual Bossier Invitational Tournament Saturday night to improve their record to 17-3. Bossier's Tevin Robertson was selected Most Valuable Player of the tournament.

Coach Jeremiah Williams' Bearkats are head and shoulders above the pack in Bossier Parish this season, as all of the other parish teams are under .500 for the season. Benton has the second best record at 7-10.

But Bossier High basketball teams have been impressive ever since Frank Lampkin's first Bearkat team reached the 1949 state finals before falling to Many, 46-27, to wrap up a 28-12 season. Bobby Ray McHalfey and Tommy Woodall were All-Staters on that Bearkat team. The 1959-60 Bearkats, coached by John McConathy, won the Class 3A (then the top class) state championship, beating DeLaSalle (New Orleans) 39-35 in the championship game. That team had a 41-4 record, which is still the Caddo-Bossier record for total wins in a season. Cecil Upshaw, who later played at Centenary, and Dennis Kile were All-Staters on that Bearkat team. DeLaSalle was shooting for a record fourth straight state title under Coach Johnny Altobello.

Three years later, a Bossier High team coached by George Nattin posted a 29-7 record, but District 1-3A rival Fair Park (coached by Clem Henderson) won the state title with a 32-5 record. That 1962-63 season was the year of the "Big Three," when Bossier High, Byrd and Fair Park were considered the best three high school basketball teams in the state, regardless of classification. Fair Park's Charles Beasley was the Most Valuable Player on the All-State team. The Indians were 32-5 and Byrd was 29-4.

But Bossier High teams coached by Williams have won more than 30 games in each of the last four seasons. No other local school has matched that streak.

All four of those teams reached the state finals, and the 2010-11 Bearkats won the school's second state championship with a 33-2 record. The Bearkats were 31-4 last year. The 2009-10 team had a 38-2 record and the 2008-09 team was 36-7.

Before that, the Bearkats never had more than two straight 30-win seasons.

Bossier High has won 27 or more games in each of its last 10 seasons, with teams coached by Williams and Chris White. White was selected "Coach of the Year" by the Louisiana Sports Writers' Association in 2005, when his Bearkats were the only Louisiana team to beat nationally-ranked Northside (Lafayette). But Bossier fell to an unbeaten Glen Oaks (Baton Rouge) team in the state championship game.

But the Bearkats' dominance in local high school basketball dates back much longer than that, starting with teams coached by Lampkin and McConathy.

In addition to McHalfey and Woodall in 1949, J.C. Howell was a Bearkat All-Stater in 1950, Larry Teague was an All-Stater in 1953 and Pete Walpole made All-State in 1954. George Nattin was an All-Stater in both 1956 and 1958.

Whether anybody on this Bearkat team joins that parade of All-Staters remains to be seen. That will probably depend on Bossier High's performance in the state playoffs. But the Bearkats' won-loss records since Williams took over the coaching reins serve notice that Bossier is still a team to be reckoned with in Louisiana high school basketball.

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