

Pottsville sports began with outdoor basketball by George S. Jones

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Although basketball was the last of the major high school sports presented in Arkansas, it has been the most important one played at Pottsville. Dr. James A. Naismith invented basketball at Springfield, Massachusetts in 1891. He needed a sport that his college boys could play indoors in the cold wintertime. A short twenty-five years later it was a very popular sport at Pottsville being played outdoors. It remained outside until the mid-1930s when Atkins and Hector built gymnasiums. Then in 1939, Pottsville, Dover, and London finished gyms built by the W.P.A.

The railroad played an important part in athletics after the Civil War. In 1870, there were 200,000 miles of railroad track in the United States. The year 1873 produced the first track through Pottsville. Short distances perpendicular to the track had to be covered on foot, wagon, or horseback. Therefore, if Pottsville played Dover, transportation was by wagon until the mid-twenties. The first school bus in the county was at Hector in 1930. Most of the competition was done by teams that lived along the railroad tracks.

First athletic association

The state Interscholastic athletic association was organized in 1906. The first State Meet for basketball was in 1912. It is believed that around 1925, the AAA had organized the state into twelve districts. The winner of each district basketball tournament for high school boys plus four invited teams met at Pine Bluff to determine a state champion. In 1925, Pottsville was in district eleven, which ran along the railroad, north of the Arkansas River from Conway to Mulberry.

Pottsville had played in the AAU, Amateur Athletic Union, or AAA state tournaments a few times before 1925, but these teams were more of a town team and not just high school boys. Any team could come to Little Rock and play. Some of the names of the early athletes are listed in F>C. Purviance's article about a game in 1912. This article was published in the Atkins Chronicle around 1970. Farris was a school superintendent in south Arkansas for many years.. The George Jones in this article is my great aunt's (Lou Ann Rackley Jones) son.

The following article is by F.C. Purviance (Fallbrook, Calif.): *The August 16 edition of the Chronicle recalling the 65 to 2 score between the Atkins and Jerusalem basketball teams, which Jerusalem won, turned my mind back to December 1912, when a game at Pottsville with Dover ended 142 to 2 in favor of Pottsville.*

The Dover team had been coached by Walter McNutt using girls' rules which provided for a three-division court. The Pottsville boys had coached themselves using boys' rules. Henry Rogers was the referee. The game was played under boys' rules. The game was played in two twenty-minute halves with a ten-minute rest between halves.

A rope was stretched around the court six feet from the lines. Unless one was knocked outside the ropes, no personal contact was called.

The six players on the Pottsville team were Knox Oates, George Jones, Hayse Boggess, Boyce Williams, Farris Purviance, and Monroe Falls. Monroe was the one and only substitute. George, who was 18 years old, scored 43 field goals for a total of 86 points. I do not recall the scores of the other four players.

The Pottsville school board passed a rule that basketball was not to be played on the school ground. Hence, Arthur Boggess permitted the boys to make a court in his field, adjacent to the school ground. This refers to the old site of the school, just west of the Methodist church. The Dover game was played on the present school site.

Three members of this team are still living. They are Knox Oates of Pottsville, Farris Purviance of Fallbrook, Calif., and Rev. Monroe Falls of Kansas.

Two weeks from the Pottsville game the locals went to Dover for a return game which ended with Dover 20 and Pottsville 8. This game was a hectic affair with the referee staying well out of range and seldom blowing his whistle.

I well remember being knocked down near the Dover goal which proved worthwhile to the Dover boy with the ball. He used me as a stepping stone to get closer to the goal which netted him two points.

Pottsville suits consisted of a red jersey which cost about \$1 and tan shorts which cost 50 cents. The trip was made to Dover in a covered wagon drawn by two mules. The boys wore the basketball suits in lieu of regular underwear. It was only necessary to remove outer garments to be ready for action. This was well and good, but playing minus dinner and working up a sweat and then putting on outer garments and heading for home proved heartbreaking. A blizzard blew up and we almost froze in that covered wagon. However, we survived – and had fun. (This is the end of the article).

Football begins

Football was very slow to take hold in the high schools of Arkansas. Some schools were playing by 1910, but it was as late as 1921 before Pottsville had a team (look at the picture in the Centennial calendar. (Oda McNutt was Ozra McNutt). Many of these early teams were more of a town team because many good athletes would return to play after they had finished or quit school.

Football was last played in 1932 at Pottsville. The school year of 1933 started very late, probably mid-November, because of the Depression and the lack of money. Milton Rackley, Forest Henry, Jr. and Morton Rankin enrolled at Russellville, but when schools started at Pottsville, Milton and Forest came back. Morton stayed and along with Rube Boyce from Dardanelle helped provide Coach Wallace Bailey with what was called a ten-second back field in football. Morton, as well as his brother, Curtice, are in the Russellville Athletic Hall of Fame. The next spring, 1934, Little Rock won the state track meet with 28 ¾ points. Russellville and North Little Rock tied for second place with 28 points each. Morton and Rube scored many of these points. Curtice lost his life in World War II. He had attended Ouachita

College, where in 1950 he was voted the outstanding athlete to graduate during the first fifty years of this century.

I have heard the story told about Little Rock, "The Tigers," coming to Russellville in the late teens or early twenties to play basketball. They were going to play at Russellville in an old store building at night. So when the train stopped at Pottsville, they got off to play our "Tigers". Ishmael Jones was one of our best at this time. He along with, probably, Harold Boggess, Burl Pryor, Sid Adams, and others beat Little Rock on our outdoor court that afternoon before they got back on another train to travel to Russellville where they beat the Cyclones that night.

"If I were going to (and I am not) name an all-Pottsville team, I would begin with Ronald Kendrick."

Some of the other good athletes in the twenties and early thirties were Jim Chronister, Silas Teeter, Forest Henry, Jr., Charles Loveless and Lamoyne "Dub" Martin before he left Pottsville for Fordyce to play with Bear Bryant.

State track meet

The first time that I know of any participation in the state track meet was in 1940 when Coach Forest Henry, Jr. took those of us to Little Rock that had qualified by placing first or second in the District II meet at Arkansas Tech. I placed second in the district in the discus behind Carl Sorrels from Atkins. We both broke the district record. I did not place in the state meet.

Those that have won first place in a state meet are as follows:

Tommy Dunn, 1941, 880 run, time 2:14.9

Bill Tucker, 1942, 880 run, time 2:20.7; mile relay and mile medley relay, 1942, time 3:53.4 and 4:01.7

Ray Lee Venable, 1947, 1948, pole vault 13'4", 10'2"

Katandra Jackson, 1982, 100-meter

Amy Halsted won first place in tennis in the state meet in 1994. Brad Hill won first place in cross country in the state meet in 1996.

The only team to win first in state competition in ninety-one years was the boys' cross country team in 1996.

Pottsville has gym

In the fall of 1939, a gym was finished at Pottsville. In 1938, a boys' basketball coach was hired, Coach Scarborough, while the girls were to be coached by Coach McMinn with all home games to be played on an outdoor court west of the school. We traveled to London to play our first game and won 17 to 16.

This was on an outdoor court, and of course, we did not know that this would be the only game we would win all year.

J.C. Owens and Elwood Teeter came back for an extra year just to play basketball. Reginald Brown, J.L. Teeter and I usually completed the list for the starting five.

In the spring of 1939, Coach Raymond Burnett filled in the last two months of the school year and started us in track and field.

The coaches that have followed, but not necessarily in the exact order, are Forest Henry, Jr., Vernon Ford, Bruce Bevins, George Jones, R.E. Hudson, John Schaffer, Kent Butler, James Lile, Fred McMillian, Bill Stanley, Joe Miller, Calvin "Cotton" Thomas, John Ray Needham, David Hawkins, Larry LaFevers, and Steve Tanner all coaching the boys.

Those that have coached the girls only are Nina May Daniels Rice, Sarah Jane Jones Rochester, David Huddleston, Jim Yeager, Kenny McCoy, and Carin Pinion.

First county tournament

The first county tournament was played at Pottsville in the spring of 1940. It would have been almost impossible before the gyms were built to have a tournament. Kenneth Owen was a great athlete to come from this period. The Teeter twins, William and Russell, and Burn Falls in 1941-42 were also outstanding along with Robert McAnulty a year or two later.

In the late forties, Larry Motley was one of the best basketball players in the county. In fact, in his senior year he played for Pottsville on Thursday night, moved to Russellville Friday morning and started for them that night.

The boys' team of 1952 were coached by John Schaffer until their last year, then Kent Butler took over as coach as well as Superintendent, and the girls team of 1955 were two of the all-time best. The starting five on the boys team were Billy Baker, Bob Bowden, Jack Jones, Harold Reeves, and Charles Roberds. Billy, Bob and Jack went on to play college basketball. Bob was the center and shot short hooks with either hand. He went on to be a good coach finishing up at North Little Rock and later as athletic director for the Pulaski County School District.

Billy played for Arkansas Tech and lost his life in a car accident while returning home with the team after a game. Ortis Sweeden from Atkins was the first to shoot a one-handed jump shot in this area in 1947-1948. He had learned the shot in Missouri before moving to Atkins. Billy Baker had perfected the one-hand jumper in high school and later at Tech. If you needed a film on the jump shot, I would have used either of these two shooters because their form was perfect.

Jack at Pottsville and Tech was Mr. Hustle all the time and also a great leader.

They fell one game short of going to the state tournament when they lost to Hartford in the district tournament at Hartman in 1952. Hartford, with great athletes got all the way to the finals of state

before losing to Valley Springs 53-34. This was the third consecutive year for Valley to win state with the same group of boys.

Pottsville had good boys' teams all the way through to 1968. Some of the better boys during this time were Jerry Jones (Kent Butler thought Jerry was the best talent during the time Kent was here), Bill Martin, Ronnie Duffield, Dale Kendrick, Wayne Taylor, Joe E. Jones, Wayne Allen Jones, John Paul Jones, Joe D. Norris, Ray Morris Kendrick, Harold Kendrick, and Alton "Hoot" Nelson.

1955 girls

Sarah Jane Jones coached the 1955 girls' team whose starting guards were Nina Duvall, Shirley Channey, and Martha Jane Eoff. The starting forwards were Eleanor Porter, Wilma Hutcherson and 6'2' Clair Jo Nelson.

In 1955 there was only one classification for girls in basketball in the state. Pottsville won the district tournament at Magazine and drew Texarkana in the first round of the State Tournament at Marianna. They lost a heart breaker in the first round 73 to 72. Eleanor and Wilma, the two outside forwards, were both great shooters while Clair Jo could cleanup inside. Clair Jo went on several years to play with Hazel Walker. I had some beautiful girls at Atkins, but nobody had a more beautiful starting six than Sarah had at Pottsville in 1955 and they were great players also.

I remember watching a game they played at Lamar in a tournament. Pottsville was winning easily, but was being fouled a lot. Wilma, especially, was spending a lot of time at the free throw line and hitting every one she shot. In fact, when she had connected on about her first fifteen shots, everyone wanted to know how many she had consistently made. After that, the game was not the most important thing; it was when was Wilma going to miss? She would make another one and everyone would applaud. Finally, the game was over and Wilma had made 22 without missing a free throw.

"Cotton" Thomas had started one of Pottsville's all-time great teams. Coach Needham took them over their last year after he had learned a few things about coaching the year before at Wonderview. With leadership like Dickie Jones and athletes like Gale Robinson, he didn't have to do a lot of coaching. Coach Needham and the boys worked a lot in the summer getting to know each other and putting together a winner. Carl Wiliker, Jackie Taylor and Bobby Taylor rounded out the starting five. Wendell Hawkins, up from the junior team the year before, gave them a sixth man that could play almost anywhere. Wendell went on to play for Dick Winningham at Arkansas College and did a good job. He was a good all-around athlete. As I remember, Ricky Lunningham, Benny Carothers, Keith Shipley, Duran Davis, Terry King and Jerry King rounded out the list of members of the team.

The following story is in the 1968 Apache annual concerning Robinson's jumping ability. It is entitled, "Robinson's Jumping Ability Fantastic for 6-3 performer."

Midway through the first frame Robinson turned in the play of the season.

An Apache field goal attempt rimmed off and was suspended in mid-air a few feet from the hoop. Robinson, a 6-3 senior post man was in the air about the same time the ball strayed from the mark.

With hands high above the rim, Robinson snared the ball with one hand, switched it to his other hand on the opposite side of the goal and dropped in a field goal. The entire maneuver was accomplished in one motion, hands remaining well above the hoop at all times.

I will vouch for this story being something like it was told.

Gale was one of the best all-around natural athletes I have had the privilege to watch perform.

Ronald Kendrick

If I were going to (and I am not) name an all-Pottsville team, I would begin with Ronald Kendrick. He only played one game in junior high as a ninth grader and that was the first game of the season at Coal Hill. The next time he played was as a point guard on the senior team. He was regular in size, regular in age but very unusual as a basketball player. In fact, Pottsville won the district tournament at Hartford and Ronald made all-district in senior high, yet he was only a ninth grader. Ronald Kendrick was the best passer, dribbler combination that I have ever seen. He was a fair shooter, a great jumper and a great all-around athlete. He could have been a quarter back in football. Had he not worn ankle weights a lot he would have been a great sprinter, hurdler, and long and high jumper.

He wanted to win, and was willing to pay any price to accomplish the goal. No young man ever worked at his sport any harder than Ronald. No one like athletics more than I do, and I certainly enjoyed watching Ronald play or practice.

The following junior boys went to state in 1971: Danny Cocanougher, Dennis Davis, Chuck Brannon, Mike Savage, David Hawkins were the starters.

The school year 1982-1983 in senior boys' basketball is a story of what was good but also the beginning of a story about what might have been great the next year. Five of the top eight boys – Tony Creager, Roger Kendrick, Mark Patton, Cleve Reasoner and Damon White – were juniors with another year of playing time. Keith Kendrick and Tony Thrasher were seniors and would be graduating. Jimmy Cole, a sophomore, would be returning for the sixth person.

To make a long story short, the team got to the state final four in the state tournament and I believe Mark Patton and Roger Kendrick made all state. With these six boys on the same team the next year, the possibility looked bright. Many of us believed that Pottsville could win its first state championship in sports.

Roger Kendrick enrolled in Russellville and made all state again, but in AAAA classification. Pottsville and Coach Needham had a good year but no state championship. Just as in 1929 with Curtice Rankin, 1933 with Morton Rankin, 1950 with Larry Motley, 1971 with Nelson Ennis, in 1984 Russellville got some good help.

Tigers!!

I was a "Tiger" in the class of 1940. Jerry Jones (Benton's son) and, I believe, Joe Mathis got the name changed to "Apache" in the 1950's when they were in Junior High School. They were reading a book in the library one day about the "war-like Apache Indians" in New Mexico and thought they would like to be one. The next day they approached the superintendent of the school about their brainstorm and the mission was accomplished. Yea "Tigers"!!

Some of the boys since 1968 that have been good basketball players at Pottsville and have not been previoStark, Randy Bradley, Ricky Taylor, Jeff Gray, Tommy Detrick, Bill Sprafke, Terry Tidwell, Jason Needham, Mike Patterson, Michael McCoy, Buck Harris, Randall Smith, Randy Tucker, Jeremiah McNeely, Kevin Price, Ricky Smith, Brian Griffith, Scott Heflin, John Robertson, Monty Peters, Robert Taylor, and J.J. Foshee.

1983 girls

When I visited with Coach Yeager about his teams at Pottsville, he had this to say, "The 83-84 team was the best high school team I ever coached. We won the Tech Tournament, the County Tournament, the District Tournament, and won our first 27 games before losing 38-36 to the eventual state champion, Flippin. That team finished 27-1 and was ranked 9th in the state by the *Gazette*. Diana Wise, Jamie Needham, and Melanie Oates were the senior starters."

The senior girls' team of 1984-1985 was very easy to define. I don't know how Coach Jim Yeager felt about this statement.. Cindi Patton, 6'1", was a great basketball player both in high school and at Arkansas Tech where she made All American. Celeste Reed was a good high school player, and Pam Duvall, Sherri Jones, Melanie Easter, and Paula Jones were fair but were outstanding role players.

From the pictures in their annual, one can see that we did not have the three-point shot at this time. Therefore, Sherri only got two points for each of those, threes now, long shots she made from long range. Celeste would penetrate and jump shoot, while Pam came up with the ball under the goal and would get a "jump shot". Although Paula did not grow much taller after sixth grade, she had to spend a lot of time around the goal cleaning up. Melanie played under the goal all the time. Cindi could hit the goal on the stretch shot anywhere from the free throw line on in. They were all six smart, and Coach Yeager did a superior job with the right mix all the time.

They won regional at Perryville and got to the final four in the State Tournament at Arkansas Community College at Harrison.

Other members of the team were Tena Hull, Darlene Jackson, Faith Reed (third of the Reed sisters), Cecilia Ferguson, Shawna Morphis, and Kim White.

The Pottsville Junior Girls set a record for a four-year period, 1979-1982 in basketball that will be hard to beat. They were undefeated in 1978-1979 with a record of 24-0. In 1979-1980, the first year of five on five for girls' basketball in Arkansas, they won fifteen while losing five. Then for the next two years with David Huddleston coaching, they did not lose a single game.

The school year 1976-1977 would be one of the best although neither senior team made it to the state tournament. The junior girls won 16 and lost 7. The junior boys won 15 and lost 5. The senior girls won 16 and lost 6, while the senior boys had the best record of 18 wins and 4 losses.

In the school year 1979-1980 was the first year of five on five girls' basketball (a huge mistake) my last year to coach and Coach Needham's last year to coach senior girls. Linda Tucker, Paula Reed, Mary Lynne Reasoner, Marty Reed, Sadra Smith, Judy Freeman, Shirley Lewis, Brenda Davis, Michelle Pinn, Linda Sigler, Paula Butto, Teresa Dorn, Pam Alvey, and Vickie Kendrick became the first team to reach the semi-finals of the state tournament which was at Monticello. Coach, with that group of athletes, had we still been playing sis on six, you would have won it all. That group had more good basketball players than any team that has ever been assembled at Pottsville, but to make the final four was like plowing new ground for us.

There are two different teams of Junior Girls that I coached that I would like to name. In 1973-1974 the team of Lisa Newman, Kristie Jones, Marcia Roberts, plus the six starters for the next year won 18 and lost three. On the 1974-1975 team, Jaquita Eoff, Nancy Bruhn, and Denese Davis were the starting guards, with Marilyn Lewis, Jerri Sweeney, and Dequita Tucker starting at forward won 20 and lost one. Plumerville had beaten us in the first game of the season and then as seniors three years later Plumerville won the state tournament.

Darla Tullous Jones preceded the 1974 group by one year. She had a knee to tear up in the summer of her ninth grade year. In my 35 years of coaching girls' basketball players, Darla is one of the top three athletes I had the privilege to coach. She participated in two years of track, being the outstanding girl in a bi-state meet at Waldron her ninth grade year. Then in a 25 team bi-state meet at Arkadelphia, where she could only enter three events, she placed in two of the events. She was a ninth grader competing in the senior high divisions. She came in fourth place in the shot and third in the 50 yard dash. I still believe she won the fifty. Earlier that year in a junior high meet at Waldron she scored 36 points.

24-0: undefeated

I had a senior girls team at Atkins to go 17-1, but my junior girls at Pottsville in 1978-1979 went 24-0 to become the only undefeated team I ever coached. Freeman. They averaged over 50 points per game for the season. The three guards were Dedra Latham, Michelle Pinn and Lorinda Batchelor. Jamie Needham and Diana Wise were several seventh graders that plugged in on either end when needed.

Our district tournament was in Hartford and we played four nights straight. The last three trips were in the snow. The biggest scare came in the semi-finals with Pleasant View. With 27 seconds to go, we were down by three points and had a jump ball on the defensive half. Marty jumping. Time out. "Marty tip the ball to Sadra (who was also playing guard) and pass it to Judy," were my instructions. Now time out again. "Judy set low, Marty in to Sadra, Sadra penetrate and score. Now take the ball away on the throw in and score," were my instructions. All of this they did, and we won by one point.

24-0 is thrilling

I have had track teams to win state championships, but 24-0 ranks alongside any of it.

Other good high school girls' basketball players, but not previously listed are: Donna Bowden, Sharon Chenowith, Glenna Taylor, Barbara Race, Jamie Friar, Carolyn Duffield, Emily Henry, Martha Reba Jones, Orpha Wiliker and Janet Higdon. Also, Barbara Sinclair, Leslie Jones, Angela Bowden, Pearl Channey, Laura Duvall, Lillian Dale Motley, Patsy Jones, Amanda Sisney and Amy Halsted.

Tennis

Miss Linda Bean started high school tennis at Pottsville in the 1980's. Miss Annette Bewley continued coaching the sport when Miss Bean moved on. They have been very competitive as a team in boys as well as girls. Amy Halsted has won first place in the state meet.¹

Baseball has been played about one-half of the time since the 60's. Probably the best team to come out of this group was the 1994 team coached by Coach Kenny McCoy. Probably the best team to come out of this group was the 1994 team coached by Coach Kenny McCoy. John Robinson (catcher) and David Ciesla (pitcher, first baseman) made all-state. Michael McCoy was a good pitcher and fielder, as well as, effective with the paddle.

In the year of 1996, Coach Carin Pinion started a girls' slow pitch softball team with good success. Next, because of the local golf course, we will have both a boys' and girls' golf team. A few boys and girls run track in the spring. All of this, along with AAU basketball, keeps the Pottsville athletes busy in the spring.

Cross country

Billy Mills came to Pottsville to teach Science in the fall of 1987. The next fall he was coaching cross country with athletes that were not playing basketball. It remained that way until 1995, when a few boys started doing both basketball and cross-country. In this nine year period his teams have placed third in the state meet twice, second four times and in 1996 won first place in the state in the "A" classification.

Danny Farmer made all-state four times placing fourth, third, second, and fourth the last year. Mike Allen made all-state one year. Toby Allen made all-state twice and Rudy Guajardo made all-state three times. Brad Hill made all-state last year before winning first place this year. To make all-state a person must be in the top ten percent of the runners to finish.

The 1996 team that won first place was composed of Brad who won in a time of 17.25 on a soggy 5000 meter course. Ray Wheat eleventh place, Chris Bradley twelfth place, Edward Hill thirteenth place, Adam Caudle fifteenth place, Jeff Wheat 21st place, and Jeff Marshall 38th place.

Pottsville's score was 35 compared to Arkansas School for Math and Science that scored 82 points in placing second.

Jessica Harris, a 9th grade student at Pottsville, made all-state in the girls' division by placing 8th in the 3200 meter race. Pottsville High School has been the host school for the state meet this year as well as

last year and with the help of Coach Carnahan and his people from Russellville, Pottsville has done a great job of putting on the championship meet. This year we had over 600 runners and an estimated 2,000 spectators. The site for these two championships has been my old home place (the J.C. Jones Sr. farm) on Pine Ridge Road in Pottsville.

The 1996-1997 basketball season for the Pottsville senior boys would be classified as successful. They won 26 and lost 9 while losing their final game to Jessieville, 56-53 in the Regional tournament at Cutter-Morning Star. The seniors on the squad were: Adam Caudle, Chris Bradley, Ronnie Garrett, Jeff Watson, Brad Hill and Steven Williams. In addition to the seniors, there were four juniors that played a lot. They were Keith Tanner, Jeremy Box, Kevin Parks, and Matt Sawdy.

Daniel Davis was an outstanding basketball player on the junior boys' team. With the help of the other 9th grade players plus more than 10 10th and 11th grade boys, things look bright for next year.

The Pottsville senior girls showed progress from the year before as they finished with a record of 16-17 for the year. They were plagued with a lot of adversity all year. For example, Shayne Russell and Sara Harris were injured most of the year and if at full steam they were two of the best.

There were only two seniors on the team, Sara Williams and Kristie Sanders. All three juniors, Shayne Russell, Kelly Sisney, and Amber Johnson played a lot. Nichole Boggs, Jennifer Byford, Rebecca King and Tiffany Choate were the 10th grades that saw about as much action as anyone.

The junior girls with a great attitude would have been a pleasure to coach. They won a few games and showed a lot of promise. I learned a long time ago to never sell a bunch of junior athletes short because they have a lot of growing to do.