

CHC- Vanderbilt Hosted High School Tournaments

by Bill Traugher

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This is not necessarily a Vanderbilt story, but I'd like to share with readers of Commodore History Corner what high school basketball was like in the 1920s.

In the 1920s, Vanderbilt University teamed up with the Nashville Tennessean to sponsor the Tennessee state high school's basketball tournament. The tournament was held at the Nashville YMCA.

The Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) was organized in 1925. Tennessee was one of the first states to include girls in their interscholastic athletics. The first boys' tournament was held in 1921 with the girls playing their first postseason the following year. Prior to the TSSAA's organization in 1925, the state instituted an invitation-only tournament.



1924-25 Central High Team

Sometimes when you are involved in the task of house cleaning and organizing, some forgotten items can be found. Especially in the attic, where I came across an old scrapbook that once belonged to my great-aunt.

The scrapbook was not dated, but further examination revealed that my great-aunt, Louise Joplin, collected mementos while she was a student at Nashville's Central High School.

Central High School was the first public high school in the county system. It was founded in 1915, but moved to a location on Rains Avenue (near the fairgrounds). That school building stood from 1921-1971 and is remembered with a Nashville historical marker.

As a writer and researcher of Nashville sports history, I was drawn to old basketball team photos of Central High. The photos were of the 1924-25, 1925-26 Central girl's team.

Both photos included my great-aunt, but the latter stated that she was the team captain. Numerous old, yellowed newspaper clippings from this period featured some basketball results from Central's girls and boys team.

A check with the TSSAA records indicates that the 1923 Central girls basketball team were state champions. That was their only state basketball championship for the Central girls. My great-aunt was not on that team, but as captain of the 1925-26 team she played in the first season of the TSSAA.



1925-26 Central High Team

Certainly basketball was played between high schools after the turn of the 20th century as more Nashville area schools were built throughout the city and the Midstate. Since the scrapbook that I found features the 1925-26-basketball season for Central, my curiosity had me researching high school basketball for that season. And of course, I was curious about the athleticism of one of my ancestors.

On the girl's side, the newspaper articles always referred to the players as "Miss Joplin" or "Miss Booker," always a "Miss" for each player. The stories were not as

detailed and long as the boy's stories, but there was a decent accounting of what happened in their games. My great-aunt, who I will now refer to as Miss Joplin, was a guard and appears in all the articles including scoring totals.

I couldn't find her scoring in any of the numerous games so she must have been a defensive specialist--and I am sure a great one. All the scoring totals for the games indicate five girls on a team.

The following newspaper article from the May 28, 1926 edition of The Tennessean reveals the writing style from that era. The caption heading read, "Peabody Girls Rally To Annex Basket Crown and Win From Central Lassies in Stubborn Struggle:"

Fighting gamely after their two forwards and main scorers had been banished from the game, Peabody demonstration school girls came from behind to nose out Central high and annex the Little Tenn Conference championship last night. The figures were 29 to 20.

Robbed of Misses Huggins and Early, and with Central out in front, defeat looked almost certain for Peabody. Miss Rip Taylor, captain of the Peabody team, who was unable to pocket a single basket from the field in the first half, began to flip them in at all angles.

She notted the score with three and a half minutes to go. Then Miss Hankins, who replaced Miss early, sent the ball through the wickets with the two points that brought victory to Peabody.

The shot seemed to rattle Central. For the Gold and Blue girls fumbled nearly every time they got their hands on the ball. Peabody took advantage of their fumbling and passing and piled up nine points in the remaining two minutes and 50 seconds.

Misses Pylant and Joplin gave a fine exhibition of guarding until the last three minutes of the game.

Central did not make it to the state tournament, held at Murfreesboro's State Teachers College (much later MTSU). The Little Tenn Tournament was for the Middle Tennessee championship and was a prelude to the state, which was a separate championship.

Nashville's Hume Fogg High School (14-2), would win that 1926 girls state championship with a 55-14 victory over Gallatin. TSSAA records indicate that the girl's state tournament was nonexistent from 1929 to 1957 for "financial reasons."

On the boy's side, eligibility seemed to be a problem for their state tournament. Prior to the state tournament held at the Nashville YMCA, several schools had to compete minus a few of their players. The only Nashville team damaged by the eligibility factor was MBA. They had three players dismissed because one player was in his fifth year, one had been attending school longer than the eight semesters allowed and one player violated the "migratory" rule.

Other schools had eligibility problems such as BGA, teams in Knoxville, Memphis and Chattanooga were also not immune. A Tennessean article expressed the concerns of the TSSAA at that time:

The present investigations if ineligibility challenges has caused a discision to be reached to close some loopholes which exists at present. One is the misconstruction of the word year in the rule which declares that a players who changes school systems must remain at the new school a year before he is eligible. Next year a player will be required to be passing in 15 hours work each week before being eligible. He must be passing at the time he signs the entrance blank.

Twenty schools from across the state were entered in the 1926 TSSAA boys' basketball tournament. The tournament was called the Tennessean-Vanderbilt Tournament, MBA must have been loaded with players, as their eligibility problems did not hamper them. MBA (16-2) won the boys' tournament over Memphis Central, 24-10.

Another interesting find in Miss Joplin's scrapbook, was a Western Union telegram sent to her at a game. The telegram read: NASHVILLE TENN FEB 25 1926: MISS LOUISE JOPLIN CAPT CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL BASKET BALL TEAM JOEL CHEEK GYM PEABODY COLLEGE NASHVILLE TENN I AM WITH YOU IN SPIRIT HERES WISHING YOU LUCK. HILDA.

Hilda was a teammate that must have been unable to play in the game. Miss Joplin's grandfather (this writer's great-great grandfather) was Thomas Joplin of Triune, TN, a member of the famed Coleman's Scouts in the Confederate Army.

More interesting "discoveries" in the scrapbook include a basketball ticket for a Central basketball doubleheader against Hume Fogg on Jan. 30, 1925 at the YMCA; a baseball ticket for a Central game against Wallace at Central's field for April 25 (25 cent ticket); and a football ticket, Hume Fogg vs. Central, Friday Nov. 6, 1925 at Sulphur Dell.



Miss Joplin

Also included are individual photographs of Miss Joplin's Central classmates, a lock of somebody's hair and great old photographs of people I don't recognize, but sure must be relatives. I spent hours sifting through the interesting artifacts that are too

numerous to mention.

Miss Joplin lived on Peachtree St., eventually married, became Mrs. Louise Derryberry and passed away many, many years ago. I only remember her when I was a child and we called her "Easy." I guess that was our nickname for Louise.

Just like her high school, she is long gone. But her decades old scrapbook, located in a box in my attic, revealed a childhood of someone who loved her high school experiences, friends and sports.

Next week read about the Vanderbilt's men's basketball team's humble beginnings in the late 1890s.

Traughber's Tidbit: When Vanderbilt defeated East Tennessee State last week 104-62 that brought the all-time record to 72-2 in games where the Commodores scored 100-plus points.

If you have any comments or suggestions you can contact Bill Traughber via e-mail WLTraughber@aol.com.