

# MASSON'S BLOG



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## Class Basketball

February 18, 2007 by Doug Masson — 19 Comments

Because I don't feel like enough of a Hoosier rabble rouser by bringing up Daylight Saving Time frequently, let's venture into the subject of class basketball. Steve Warden, writing for the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette has an article entitled [Hoops mystique traded for parity](#). (H/t Paul O'Malley for the heads up). It has been 10 years since the advent of the abomination known as class basketball. (Nope, I'm not even going to pretend objectivity on this subject.) In 1997, Bloomington North won the last real boys high school basketball title. Since then, the tournament has been converted from one, state-wide tournament, into four tournaments based on school size. (As Mr. Warden put it, it was like grinding a fine fillet into hamburger.) Revenues and attendance from the tournament have plummeted. About the only thing proponents can point to that is positive is that more schools have won championships. If that's the goal, I have an idea. Just hand out a trophy to everybody before the games even start. Heck, you could just skip the games altogether lest any team have to endure a self-esteem bruising loss.

I'm biased. I went to Richmond High School. With a student body of about 2,500 and a gym that sat about 8,500, we were one of the biggest in the state. That didn't mean we had a bunch of titles. In fact, we had only one state championship. Growing up, I'd even been warned of the "Hinkle Hex" — meaning that when Richmond went to Hinkle Fieldhouse for the semi-state, we would surely lose. We broke out of that in the 80s — only to get mowed down by the Marion Giants in the finals 2 out of their 3 consecutive championship years. Woody Austin broke the hex and earned himself a Mr. Basketball title, but never the State title. It took his little brother Chad to finally get us to the top. And just in time, too. That must have been '91 or '92. Five years later, and we would've lost our chance.

## A Citizen's Guide to Indiana

prayers at schools like Centerville who we routinely tolled over on our way to more interesting

. Pretty much an entire  
ess I can understand if

Regional games were itching for class basketball. But, my understanding is that this was not the case. The players wanted their shot at being the next Milan. Even if they didn't win the state championship (and, really, how many schools ever won? – Muncie Central and Marion got more than their fair share, but even a giant like Richmond only got one), they had a shot at taking out an area powerhouse. And, if they did that, people would be talking about it for a decade, if not longer. No, my understanding is that this was pushed by Athletic Directors and coaches, not by players, and certainly not by fans.

At least we got 4.5 billion for the toll road. We gave up the basketball tournament, the crown jewel of high school sports (in my not so objective opinion) for nothing. Ten years later, it still hurts.

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## Comments



Paul says

February 18, 2007 at 19:57 +00006

Class basketball also has teams traveling all over the state just to play in their first round. It was much more exciting to have every school in the county at one venue. It built community.

As a kid growing up in Marion I know that every county team (and the team from Marion's small, now defunct Catholic High School) wanted their chance to see how they measured up against the Giants. Oak Hill even took the Giants down from time to time.

I think that fighting hard in a near hopeless cause may be a more important lesson

than the lesson the present system teaches, which seems to me that if you are from a small school you don't even merit a chance to test yourself.

Reply



mike says

August 16, 2013 at 10:32 +00006

Totally agree with you.

Reply



Phillip says

February 18, 2007 at 22:43 +00006

Doug,

You are exactly right. Everyone I've ever talked to liked the one class system. It may be harder for the smaller school to win but so what. I say this having attended a very small high school Loogootee High. Before this class nonsense Loogootee competed in the Washington sectional, it was a grand event in these parts with all the area teams competing. Loogootee had no trouble winning its share of sectionals against bigger schools like the Washington Hatchets and went to the final four twice in the seventies and got to the final game in 1975 against Marion. We may have lost but there was a sense of pride and accomplishment to getting that far in the tournament beating the larger schools on the way.

It used to be impossible to get a season ticket for home games and now I hear the gym is hardly ever full. Loogootee went to the state finals a few years ago and the excitement was there but not near as much as it was back in the old days.

Class basketball ruined the tournament forever in my opinion and a lot of others I might add!

Reply



preston says

September 5, 2013 at 13:08 +00006

I TOTALLY AGREE WITH YOU GUYS THAT THE CLASS SYSTEM WAS HUGE MISTAKE FOR INDIANA BASKETBALL. I GRADUATED IN 1984 FROM GARY ROOSEVELT HIGH. I WAS AT MARKET SQUARE ARENA IN 1982 WHEN WE LOST

THAT HEART BREAKING BARN BURNER TO SCOTT SKILES AND THE PLYMOUTH PILGRIMS. EVEN THOUGH WE LOST AND IT HURT FOR A LONG TIME, IT WAS STILL A GREAT GAME. THAT WAS THE GLORY OF THE ONE CLASS TOURNAMENT. THE UPSETS AS WELL AS THE VICTORIES. IF WE WOULD HAVE WON THE HYPE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN AS BIG OF A BUZZ AROUND THE STATE EXCEPT FOR US IN GARY BECAUSE PLYMOTH WAS THE SMALLEST SCHOOL TO WIN THE TITLE SINCE MILAN TOOK DOWN MIGHTY MUNCIE CENTRAL IN 1954. FOR US IN GARY OUR SECTIONAL HAD TO BE ONE OF THE TOUGHEST IF NOT THE TOUGHEST IN THE STATE. ALL OF OUR SCHOOLS WERE BIG AT THE TIME. ALL OF THE SMACK TALKING LEADING UP TO SECTIONALS WAS PRICELESS. A LOT OF THE KIDS YOU HUNG WITH IN THE SUMMER OR AFTER SCHOOL WAS NOW YOUR ENEMY. AT LEAST UNTIL SECTIONALS AND REGIONALS WERE OVER. BEING A LARGE SCHOOL IS NO GAURANTEE FOR A TITLE WE ONLY HAVE A COUPLE AND A FEW STATE FINALS APPEARANCES. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE THE BIGGER OR THE BETTER SCHOOL. JUST BETTER THAT GAME. I'VE BEEN LIVING HOUSTON TEXAS SINCE 1985 AND WHEN I HEARD INDIANA WAS GOING TO A CLASS SYSTEM IT WAS ON THE RADIO AT WORK. THE TALK ABOUT INDIANA BASKETBALL WAS NATION WIDE. WE WERE SPECIAL. IT'S ALL BEEN RUINED BY POLITICS.

### Reply



preston says

September 5, 2013 at 16:34 +00006

I ALSO BELIEVE THE CLASS SYSTEM HELPED TO RUIN SCHOOL SPIRIT AND THE ENERGY AT TOURNAMENT TIME. YOU KNEW THE TEAMS YOU WOULD FACE EACH YEAR, AND BECAUSE EVERY BODY KNEW PEOPLE ON THE OPPOSING TEAM OR FROM THE OPPOSING SCHOOL, THE RIVALRIES WERE UNTOUCHABLE. THE ALUMNI WAS AS INTO IT AS THE STUDENTS. THE WHOLE CITY WAS ROCKIN' AS I KNOW IT WAS IN OTHER CITIES AND TOWNS IN THE STATE. NOW SADLY IT'S ALL GONE AND I DON'T THINK IT WILL EVER RETURN.

### Reply



Idunno says

February 18, 2007 at 22:50 +00006

By the way, Doug.. just so you remember.. my hometown.. CONNERSVILLE.. won TWO state championships before the change. Not to rub salt in Red Devil souls..

;-)

Reply



Doug Masson says

February 19, 2007 at 6:29 +00006

The possibility that Connersville grads might be able to read this blog (let alone write a comment) had completely escaped me. I feel soiled somehow. :-)

(And yes, the fact that Connersville has more state titles than Richmond is galling to me.)

But, that notwithstanding, I look back fondly at some of those Regional battles between Richmond and Connersville in the 80s when I was in high school — even the ones we lost. That was a darn good rivalry.

Reply



Idunno says

February 19, 2007 at 7:10 +00006

Oh yeah, Doug. I know that Richmond creamed us many times. In fact, you were the one team we dreaded most (and that's not just sucking up.) If we beat Richmond — that was nearly as good as winning the sectional. I was crammed into Assembly Hall more than once.

And yeah, Connertucky grads can read blogs even. Although my poor hometown is getting battered with unemployment (Fayette County highest in the state.)and other issues... they still survive. I on the other hand have been in the Lafayette area for over

20 years... and now enjoy reading a Richmond-raised writer's blog. Ugh! And an IU grad! (Ball State here)... not to mention a LAWYER. Ok, it IS a strange world.

Keep up the good work, Red Devil.

### Reply



John M says

February 19, 2007 at 8:11 +00006

I don't think there is anything wrong with class sports per se, but the old tournament was a huge part of Indiana's culture. Indiana's tournament didn't provide small schools much of a chance, but when they broke through with a sectional title or more, it was as bigger thrill than winning a small class title. That said, I don't think there is anything dishonorable about winning a class title. Being the best of the 100 schools in one's enrollment class is no small feat and is not deserving of denigration. Still, it was a huge mistake for Indiana to make this move, and I still hold out hope that they will go back.

I'm 99 percent opposed to class basketball. But as someone who attended a small high school within the North Central Conference's footprint, the 1 percent is the pleasure I take in the reaction from places like Richmond and New Castle: "you mean, we might play a competitive game in THE SECTIONAL?! And it might not be in our gym every year?! That's, like, so unfair!"

If I were the sports czar, I would immediately go back to the old system. But, how is this for a compromise: divide the state into 16 regions, just as before. Each region would have four sectionals feeding in, but the sectionals would be class-based. So, each region would have a 1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A sectional champ playing. That would allow the small schools to play competitive games in the early rounds, but would also return the last three weeks to the familiar tournament structure and would lead to one state champ. It will never happen, but I think it would be better than what we have now.

### Reply



Doug says

February 19, 2007 at 8:18 +00006

I was going to mention that alumni of North Central Conference schools belly-aching about the demise of the one-class tournament probably wouldn't impress too many people. I don't have the numbers, but I'd be very surprised if the NCC didn't have more sectional, regional, semi-state, and state titles under the old system than any other conference in the state, by a substantial margin.

### Reply



Nate says

February 19, 2007 at 8:32 +00006

I can't believe you went to Richmond. I am the class of 1996. I was at Richmond when we lost our first sectional to Randolph Southern. Class basketball is such a joke.

### Reply



Doug says

February 19, 2007 at 8:39 +00006

RHS Class of '89.

### Reply



Joe says

February 19, 2007 at 8:47 +00006

IIRC, what they did in Kentucky was to have a Christmas-time class tournament (that no one cares about), then a single class tournament that everyone cares about. I think that's what Indiana should go to.

Class basketball is just the principals wanting more trophys. It's a shame how they screwed things up. As far as which was worse for Indiana, class basketball is worse than even daylight savings time. ;)

Reply

John M says

February 19, 2007 at 10:10 +00006

I would be that you are right about the NCC, Doug. Despite my tongue in cheek criticism, there's no doubt that the North Central Conference has the finest history of any conference in the state. If memory serves, Richmond was the last of the NCC schools to win a title when they did so in 1992—even Logansport has one from way back. It seems to me that there has been some realignment in recent years (it seems that I have heard Lafayette Jeff is no longer a member) but it certainly was a great league when I was in high school in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Reply

Jason266 says

February 19, 2007 at 14:23 +00006

Great post; couldn't agree with you more. I think I may have to write out a memory for myself.

Reply

torporindy says

February 19, 2007 at 20:22 +00006

I am pretty ambivalent about class basketball. Yeah, I miss the tournament and the excitement of it all, but I came from a small 2A school (North Knox) that had to play Vincennes every year in the sectional. We only one sectional in the forty-three year history of our school. I think South Knox won three and the other school in our sectional, Vincennes Rivet(a small catholic school) won zero. It was really frustrating to watch Vincennes win year in and year out. I hated their fans. I think class basketball is worth it just to see them suffer.



Reply

Marc says

February 20, 2007 at 7:00 +00006

Preaching to the choir Doug!

Was a student at Plymouth High School during the 1982 State Championship. A few years before that tiny Argos High School, a few miles to our south and with a school population of 250?? went to the State. I look back at class basketball with great nostalgia.

Sectionals were competitive, granted the bigger school usually won, but people my age from smaller schools can tell you every sectional and regional they won in the past 50 years and those banners hang in their gymnasiums. If revenues and attendance are down, why not bring it back?? Go Milan, Go Plymouth, Go Hickory!

Reply

Gary says

February 20, 2007 at 23:36 +00006

I hated it when Indiana went to class basketball. I remember back in 1981 seeing Vincennes and Princeton games. For the three years I was down in that area, I also went to the Evansville Regional and Semi State at Roberts Stadium every year, including the year (1981) Vincennes won state. A couple years later Princeton went to State but did not win. Sure there were a few schools that had no prayer of winning (such as New Harmony in those days) but those real small schools couldn't win even with class basketball. Today I work a lot of track and cross country meets at Munster. What amazes me is they insisted on Class Basketball but are content to leave Track and Field in one class. Larger schools have a much bigger advantage in track and field because of the many events. A really good competitive team has at least 40 members. Even schools with 1500 students often are lacking Pole Vaulters. So my position is get rid of class Basketball. We can trade them Track and Field instead. Go Mustangs!

Reply



Bill Denney says

March 2, 2009 at 8:40 +00006

Who are the only states left that do not have class basketball? I need to know for a trivia contest. Last time I heard, it was Kentucky, Hawaii, and Arizona?

Reply

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John M: Hmm. I read the opinion after I read this post, and presumed I would agree with you. To the extent this sort...

Doug Masson: More accepting, but I wouldn't think they were correct to reverse the district court – I...

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