

**Ira Green, Oak Ridge Boys' Basketball coach deserving of honor**  
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on March 22, 2011)

Jack Bailey brought us an astoundingly interesting account of the 1961 Oak Ridge Boys' Basketball State Championship season. What a joy that must have been for our city...such pride and such dedication and support. I am sure you who recall that season agree it was truly a season to remember.

But there is more to that season than the 21 game winning streak. There is more than the winning of a State Championship. A young coach who had taken over from veteran coach Ben Martin, had done the seemingly impossible. He had taken a team where he had to remove three team members and had motivated them to a championship season. Yet, he remains unrecognized at the Tennessee state level for his achievements.

Earl Nall, Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association Director of Technology, and himself the first Oak Ridger elected to the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association Sports Hall of Fame, helped greatly with the research for this Historically Speaking column. I truly appreciate his help.

Earl is the long-time Technology Director for TSSAA. Coach Ben Martin was the second Oak Ridger so honored with entry into the TSSAA Hall of Fame. The TSSAA Hall of Fame is for coaches, officials and administrators. Ira Green should be there too! He is not...yet!

Nall said of Coach Green, "Ira Green would take four more teams to the state tournament, winning again in 1963. He would leave Oak Ridge and move to Arkansas where he won two state championships, be elected to the Arkansas High School Activities Association Hall of Fame and become mayor of his town."

It seems to me that Coach Ira Green is overdue for recognition at the Tennessee state level by being inducted into the TSSAA Hall of Fame. Earl Nall said, "This will be the first year that a team was recognized where their coach wasn't in the TSSAA Hall of Fame." Shame on Oak Ridge that a 50 year honor such as this has come around and we have not properly prepared to assure our coach is appropriately honored.

Earl continues, "I suspect that Ira would be a first time pick for the Hall of Fame but someone from Oak Ridge has to nominate him. I have the application form and will be glad to provide help for anyone who wants to nominate him. Actually, I was surprised that Jill Prudden wasn't nominated this year - as she meets the requirements. Jill would probably be rubber stamped into the Hall. Other Oak Ridgers that deserve to be in the Hall of Fame are Jack Armstrong and Emory Hale. The deadline for submission to next year's hall is November 2011. We can't let this pass without submitting!

Earl went on to say, "We need to coordinate the effort to get Green in the TSSAA Hall of Fame -- he did more in Tennessee than he did in Arkansas and he is in their Hall of Fame. We can coordinate efforts and submit him for induction when the '63 team is honored. You will note in the article that five coaches in that tournament eventually became TSSAA Hall of Fame members. This is also the first year since we began honoring 50 year teams that the teams coach is not in the Hall of Fame."

Earl Nall's mother said, "Ira Green was from Arkansas and chose to attend the University of Tennessee as it was close to Oak Ridge. The reason was because he wanted to teach in Oak Ridge. When he graduated he did not get a job in Oak Ridge but did get a teaching job offer in Blytheville, Arkansas.

In Blytheville Green became friends with Earl Nall's dad who was the junior high school principal there. But he kept his hopes of getting to teach in Oak Ridge and applied often while teaching in Blytheville.

**Ira Green, Oak Ridge Boys' Basketball coach deserving of honor**  
**(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on March 22, 2011)**

After a couple of years he did get a job offer to teach in Oak Ridge. When he got to Oak Ridge, Earl said, "On a whim, he sent my dad an application which dad filled out and he got a job teaching at the high school. I have often wondered how different my life would have been if Ira hadn't decided to drop that application in the mail."

Jack Bailey sent this quote from Clifford Smith, long-time basketball coach and teacher at Jefferson Junior High School, who is now retired. Smith said, "I played pickup basketball games with Ira along with some other teachers at one of the elementary schools. He had keys to the gym."

They talked about Smith's junior high school boys to help Green know what he had coming in the way of basketball prospects. Jack noted that including the injured Howard Hay, Clifford coached 7 of the 11 members of the 1961 State Champion team while they were at Jefferson Jr. High School.

Clifford said of Ira, "He was a good guy. Very intense about everything he did. Other teachers and coaches liked and respected him. Coach Green played college tennis and initially was the Oak Ridge High School tennis team coach in the mid 1950's. We played a lot of tennis together."

Clifford concluded his remarks about Green by saying, "He was very excited when he became the Head Basketball Coach (1960). He was very helpful to me in providing basketball pointers and tips." Seems like a very nice person, huh.

Jack commented on Clifford Smith, "Clifford was the basketball coach at Jefferson from 1955-1967 and again from 1975-1977, compiling a splendid record of 132-39 over 14 seasons." Smith is obviously another good Oak Ridge coach.

According to the Oak Log, Coach Green came from Arkansas in 1954 after going to college at Arkansas Tech and Henderson State Teachers College. He coached tennis for two years.

From 1956-60 he coached the "B" team (Junior Varsity) basketball team and taught Physical Education, Health, American History. The Oak Log said he was a "most versatile teacher" and "during summer directs playground activity." He also was an assistant football coach during this time.

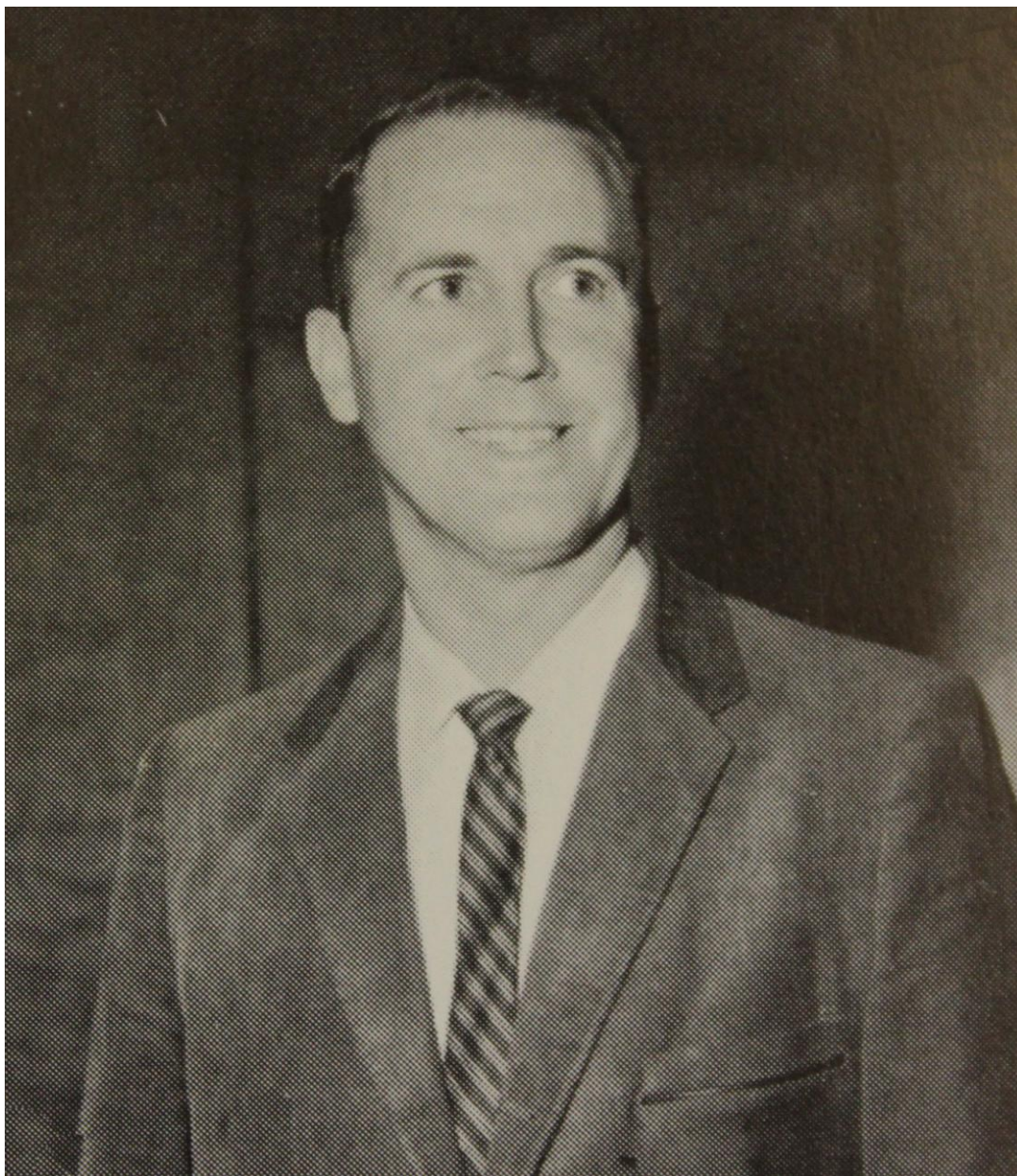
By 1960 he was teaching sociology, health and psychology and had earned his Master's degree from the University of Tennessee. He became the Head Basketball Coach at Oak Ridge High School part way through the 1959-60 season after long-time coach Ben Martin stepped down due to illness.

A bit of trivia: In the Senior Superlatives for 1961 at ORHS, John Howard was named "Most Handsome Boy" and Robbie Robinson was named "Friendliest Boy."

What an exciting trail Jack, Earl and Clifford have taken us down. I have gotten an enormous amount of positive feedback on this series. The people who were there in 1961 seemed to relive the events of that phenomenal year. E-mails and phone calls expressed joy at being reminded of the "good times 'in the day.'"

I certainly hope Ira Green can be appropriately honored for his significant contribution to Tennessee sports and that Oak Ridge will not face the embarrassment of letting a second 50 year anniversary of a championship team arrive without that being taken care of. 2013 will be here before we know it!

**Ira Green, Oak Ridge Boys' Basketball coach deserving of honor**  
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on March 22, 2011)



Ira Green in 1961

**Ira Green, Oak Ridge Boys' Basketball coach deserving of honor**  
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on March 22, 2011)



Ira Green later in life