

Reliving the 50th Anniversary of Oak Ridge High School's last basketball state championship

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on March 4, 2013)

This series on the history of Oak Ridge High School Basketball is brought to us by Jack Bailey. Enjoy the memories.

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On March 18, 1961, three young sophomores were reserves on the team when Oak Ridge High School won its very first state basketball championship. It was a thriller and ORHS edged Kingsport Dobyns-Bennett, 40-39.

As that game wound down, there were shouts from the stands, "put in the little guy!" Two years later, that "little guy", Kenny Campbell, had grown from 5'5" to 6' and was a dominant player as Oak Ridge marched toward its second state championship in three years.

Read along as the 1962-63 season unfolds and we celebrate the second, and last, state champion basketball team in ORHS's long and storied sports history.

Those three young sophomores, now experienced seniors, were Captain Bud Defenderfer, Kenny Campbell and Billy Atkisson. Joining them in the starting lineup were two more seniors, Bill Ramsey and Edwin Connelly. Other team members were Juniors Billy Anderson, Bob Cantrell, Larry Robinson, Mike Stevens, Mike Sewell, Chuck Tate and Charles Tye. Steven's older brother, Ralph Stevens, was a star guard on the 1961 State Championship team.

The Wildcats' first game was against Norris and Oak Ridge won easily, 57-42, with Bill Ramsey leading the way with 22 points. It was Norris' first loss of the season after six straight wins to open the season. Oak Ridge followed up with a solid performance against Lafollette and won 59-35. Bud Defenderfer was the top point-getter for the 'Cats with 23 points.

Ira Green, who took over as Head Coach during the 1959-60 season, liked to schedule a tough early season road trip to Elizabethton and Hampton. They were tough places to play and Coach Green felt that it really helped his team prepare for challenging teams and venues later in the season. Oak Ridge won over previously undefeated Elizabethton on Friday, December 7, 1962, by a score of 52-51.

Oak Ridge trailed 42-33 at the end of three periods but Kenny Campbell shifted to forward and Defenderfer moved to guard in the final period and Campbell cut loose with 15 of his game-high 36 points in the fourth quarter. Campbell hit a short jump shot with ten seconds left in the game to win it for the 'Cats. Bill Ramsey missed the game due to an ROTC exam and Mike Stevens got the start and played an outstanding game.

The next night Oak Ridge played at the home court of the Hampton Bulldogs, who were state champions in 1960. For the first time, ORHS won at Hampton, 44-34. Bud Defenderfer led the way with 22 points. With the pair of weekend wins Oak Ridge moved to 4-0 on the young season.

After a blowout win over Knox East, the Wildcats suffered their first loss, falling to Kingston, 46-37. The Yellowjackets jumped out to a 10 point lead after the first quarter and were never headed. They shot a red-hot 49% of their field goal attempts compared to only 33% for the 'Cats.

Oak Ridge rebounded from that loss with another beat-down of Knox East, 73-46. Bud Defenderfer had a career high with 31 points to top Oak Ridge in scoring. All twelve members of the varsity saw action in the game as Coach Green cleared the bench. Oak Ridge was ranked # 3 in the first Associated Press poll of the season. Elizabethton, whose only loss was to Oak Ridge, was ranked # 4.

Next up was the second annual Oak Ridge Christmas Invitational Tournament, with Oak Ridge, Lenoir City, McMinn County and Sparta entered in the tournament. Oak Ridge won both of their

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games handily to claim the big prize in their own tournament. Campbell led the way with 22 points and Center Bill Ramsey chipped in 18 in the first game as Oak Ridge overwhelmed Lenoir City, 69-38. In the championship game, Oak Ridge defeated Sparta by the score of 53-39. Defenderfer was the top scorer with 16 points.

After the Christmas break Oak Ridge returned to action by travelling to Cleveland, TN, to play the defending state champions, Bradley County but Coach Ira Green missed his first game since becoming Head Coach. His father-in-law was seriously ill and he was in Arkansas with the family. Bradley County upset Oak Ridge, which had just moved to # 2 in the state rankings, by the score of 61-54.

Kenny Campbell scored 26 points in a losing effort. In an interesting side note, an article about the game appeared in The Oak Ridger the day before the game. In the accompanying team picture of the Bradley County Bears was a young Keyes Fillauer. Fillauer is now a well-known Oak Ridger, a member of the Oak Ridge Sports Hall of Fame and current Chairman of the Oak Ridge Board of Education.

Oak Ridge returned to their winning ways with victories over Clinton, 53-33, and Norris, 58-51, in their next two games. Those games were good preparation for the tough weekend that awaited them when Elizabethton and Bradley County came calling on January 18 and 19, 1963.

Elizabethton avenged their one point loss to the 'Cats earlier in the season by upending ORHS 37-34. In the loss to Oak Ridge, it was "a night of no hitting, futile attempts at backboard work and a defense that failed to cope with the Cyclones," according to The Oak Ridger Sports Editor, Lanny Thomas. Campbell tallied 17 points to lead Oak Ridge.

The next night was an entirely different story as the Wildcats shook off their poor performance from the previous game and overwhelmed Bradley County, 66-42. Campbell scored 23 points and Defenderfer contributed 20 for the victors.

In the early '60's ORHS-Bradley County was a great rivalry. In 1961, Bradley County defeated Oak Ridge in the regular season but Oak Ridge went on to win the 1961 state championship. In 1962, Oak Ridge defeated Bradley County twice in the regular season but Bradley County went on to win the state championship.

In a win over Lake City, 67-43, Charles Tye, a 6'4" Junior, got the start at center in the place of Bill Ramsey. Ramsey missed his second game of the season, this time due to a NROTC test. Campbell (19) and Defenderfer (16) again led the Ridgers in scoring.

Oak Ridge lost their next game, 63-53, to Kingston. The Yellowjackets boosted their season record to 20-3, while Oak Ridge fell to 12-4. Kingston was the only team to defeat the Wildcats twice in the 1962-'63 season. The significance for the 'Cats---it was their last loss of the season!! Oak Ridge fell out of the AP Top Ten poll after that loss, in fact only receiving one vote that week.

After the loss to Kingston, ORHS rebounded with a 46-40 win over Hampton the next night. Billy Anderson, a 6' 7" Junior, got his first start of the season at center, replacing Bill Ramsey. Senior guard Billy Atkisson had an outstanding game with his superb passing and ball handling skills.

Red-hot Lafollette was up next as they invaded Oak Ridge sporting a superb 17 game winning streak. The Wildcats jumped out to an impressive 16-2 early lead and were never headed as they won big, 73-43. Kenny Campbell had a season high 35 points to lead ORHS.

Coach Green was quoted in The Oak Ridger after the game, "I think there were three outstanding factors in this victory tonight. There was a lot of desire, plenty of hustle and the boys played team

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ball. They did an outstanding job on defense and they were terrific on the boards. They ran their patterns in good form and they ran at a good tempo. They got good shots and shot when the time was right."

Senior Forward Edwin Connelly grabbed 10 rebounds and Junior Center Billy Anderson, who started for a second straight game, captured 7 rebounds. Oak Ridge pulled down 32 rebounds and shot an eye-catching 52% from the field, compared to only 19% for the Owls, who only hit 9 of 47 attempts. No wonder Coach Green was pleased.

The 'Cats played great team defense, rebounded well and put up big numbers on offense. It was an indication of great things to come as Oak Ridge headed down the home stretch of their regular season and prepared for tournament time.

In their last home game of the season, Oak Ridge defeated Lenoir City, 62-40, to stop the Panthers' modest 6 game winning streak. For the second time this season, sharp-shooting Guard Kenny Campbell poured in 35 points to lead the Wildcats. Oak Ridge led 34-11 at the half and coasted to an easy win.

Oak Ridge then topped Clinton, 71-62, with Campbell again leading the way with 22 points. The next night, the 'Cats knocked off Lake City, 81-53, in a game that was originally postponed because of a heavy snowfall earlier in the week. Edwin Connelly had his top scoring output of the season as he put in 20 points to lead Oak Ridge. Both games were played to capacity crowds in Clinton and Lake City. Coach Green said, "It was a rough weekend. Both teams put up a real fight." The wins boosted Oak Ridge's season record to 17-4.

In the final contest of the regular season, Oak Ridge travelled to Lenoir City and beat the Panthers for the third time, 57-35. Lenoir City normally was a very competitive team and had won the State Championship just as recently as 1958. Kenny Campbell was the top point-producer with 26. Bill Ramsey regained his starting position at center and contributed 14 points and 8 rebounds.

The District 7 Tournament opened the week of February 25, 1963. Oak Ridge was the first seed and received an opening round bye. They easily defeated Jellico, 65-30, in their first match and then toppled Clinton for the third time in the season, winning handily, 54-42. Campbell scored 22 points in the first game, as all twelve varsity players saw action in the game. Campbell was also the high-point man in the Clinton game, contributing 23 points to the cause.

In the District Finals, Oak Ridge defeated Norris, also for the third time, by a margin of 59-42. It was Oak Ridge's fifth straight District 7 title, played before a crowd of about 1000 in the gym at Lafollette. Oak Ridge shot a sizzling 55% from the field and held Norris to only 33% with their stifling defense.

Kenny Campbell was named "Most Valuable Player" in the tournament and was named to the 10 man all-tournament team, along with teammate Bud Defenderfer. Defenderfer was credited with turning in a "remarkable performance on both offense and defense in the tournament", according to a newspaper account of the game. Coach Green was quoted in The Oak Ridger, "It was a terrific team effort. I couldn't say enough praise for the team for the credit they deserve. I have no criticism."

Looking ahead to the upcoming Region 2 Tournament, Green went on to say, "We'll certainly try to beat the winner between Alcoa and Powell. With the team effort they have been giving lately, they can do it", he assured.

Oak Ridge defeated Alcoa in their Region 2 opener and then upended favored Knox Young in the semi-finals by a score of 55-42, before an electrified crowd of 6000 at the old UT Fieldhouse in

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Knoxville. Kenny Campbell topped the 'Cats scoring with 26 points and Bud Defenderfer gave another outstanding performance on the boards and threw in 13 points.

Oak Ridge's stingy defense held Young to just 29.5% of their field goal attempts. In the Region 2 Finals, Oak Ridge won over Everett by a whopping 57-33. Campbell put up 29 points to lead the way for OR. Campbell and Defenderfer were unanimous selections to the all-tournament team.

As the team began making preparations for the state tournament in Nashville the week of March 11, 1963, Coach Green made several comments to The Oak Ridger about his team. Of being the coach of a district and region champion team, he said, "It's a wonderful experience to share with a wonderful group of boys. I enjoy it more and more all the time."

Speaking of the team, he said, "They have worked hard all season and I believe it will pay off this week. Coming into the district and regional tournaments, the boys got together and decided they had to put everything into it." Of the state tournament, he went on to say, "I expect nothing but rough ballgames. It won't be as easy as the district and region. We must improve and we've got to get better. We'll be operating under intense pressure as always."

In a side note, the AP all-state team was announced, prior to the state tournament. Kenny Campbell was the only Oak Ridger recognized and he received Honorable Mention. A couple of very recognizable names appeared on the 10 man first team All-State: Ron Widby, of Knox Fulton, who went on to letter in four sports at The University of Tennessee and had a long career as the punter for the Dallas Cowboys.

The other "name" player was none other than Steve Spurrier, of Science Hill High School in Johnson City. Spurrier went on to win the Heisman Trophy in 1966 as quarterback for the Florida Gators and is now the Head Football Coach at The University of South Carolina.

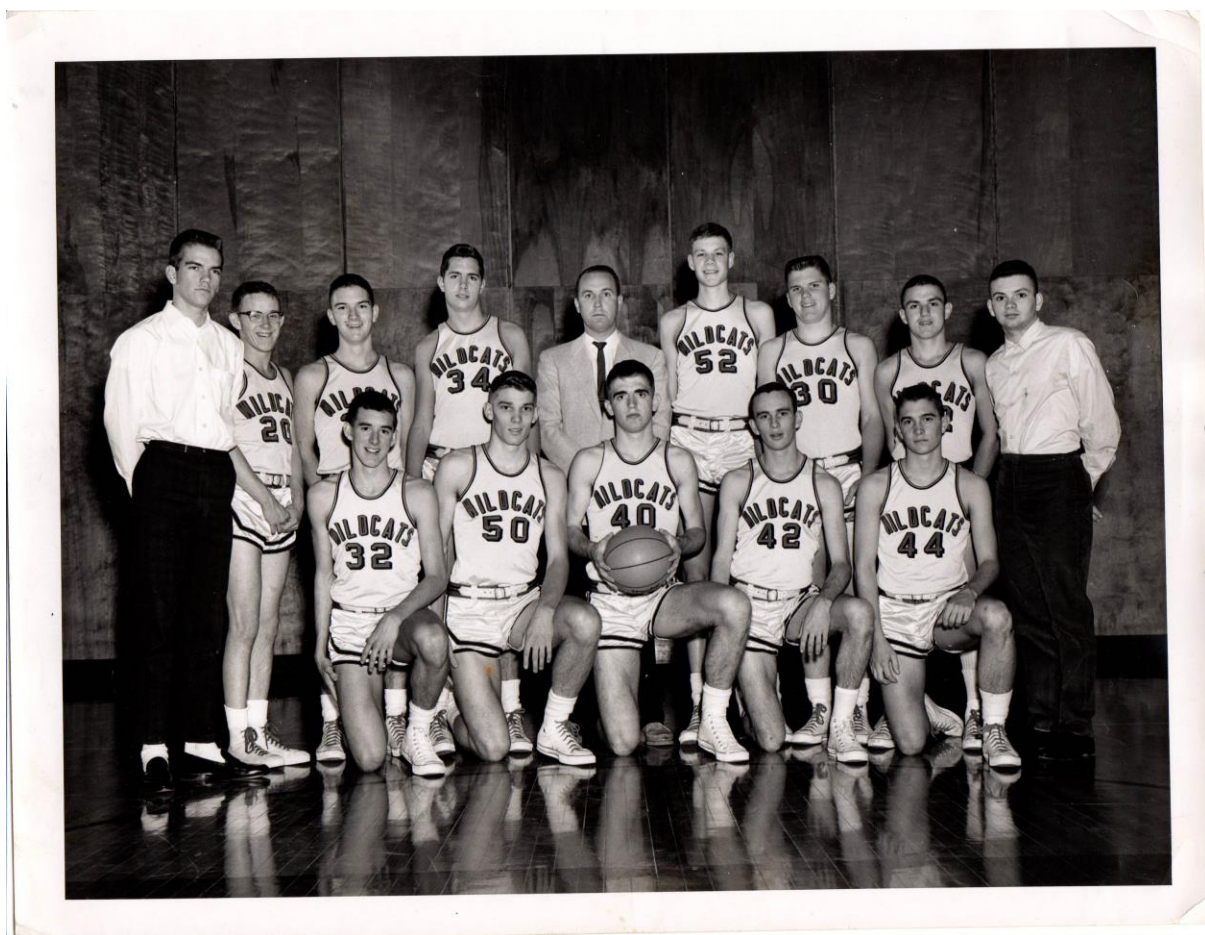
In another run-up to the tip-off of the state tournament, the Roberts Rating System of Chattanooga established Kingston as the favorite to win the state tournament and picked Oak Ridge as second best. You will recall that Kingston beat Oak Ridge twice during the regular season.

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Thanks Jack...next week, Jack will conclude this story of the Oak Ridge High School's last basketball championship.

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TEAM PICTURE:

Front row, from left, (all are Seniors)-- Kenny Campbell, Bill Ramsey, Captain Bud Defenderfer, Edwin Connelly and Billy Atkisson

Back row, from left, Junior Manager Randy Agee, (all the players are Juniors) --Mike Sewell, Bob Cantrell, Chuck Tate, Head Coach Ira Green, Billy Anderson, Larry Robinson Mike Stevens and Senior Manager Edd Evans. Absent from the picture were Junior Charles Tye and Assistant Coach Walter Porter