

In The Beginning~ The Formation Of The Frisco League

By Gary Knehans

Long clouded by myth as well as misinformation, the true beginning of this area's most popular high school basketball conference has eluded our grasp- up until now, that is. After much research, KJPW Radio has finally found firm evidence of the origin of the Frisco League. And the facts do support some, but not all, of the long-held beliefs about this legendary conference.

Even though it is true that the name of the league was derived from the Frisco Railroad Line that bisected the area, the term Frisco League most likely came indirectly from a summer baseball league

of that name formed in the spring of 1924 in Lebanon. At first glance, this would seem to support the contention by some that Frisco League basketball was preceded by Frisco League baseball. However, the baseball league was an adult league and not associated with any high school competition. So, the baseball-first theory is not technically correct when applied within the context of today's high school exclusive Frisco League.

Teams in that summer league represented Lebanon, Stoutland, Richland, Conway, Niangua and Marshfield. The president of the league later would become a governor of Missouri, Phil M. Donnelly, who was then a prominent

young Lebanon attorney.

When school took up that fall, and while this baseball conference was nearing an exciting conclusion, coaches from several area school districts met at Lebanon on Saturday, September 13, 1924. At that meeting, they decided to organize the Frisco High School Athletic Association, consisting of Marshfield, Niangua, Conway, Lebanon, Linn Creek, Stoutland, Richland and Crocker. Henry Deatherage of Lebanon was elected president; R. B. Johnson of Conway, vice president; and A. Z. Black of Linn Creek, secretary-treasurer.

This association was composed of those area schools whose major sport was basketball, but who did not have an indoor court. This meant that all games had to be scheduled for afternoon competition and completed before winter weather set in. None of the schools admitted to the conference could have a football program because that would lead to practice and scheduling conflicts.

Games were scheduled for girls as well

as boys. So, Frisco League girls' basketball, believed by many to have started in the 1970's, actually began some fifty years earlier. But, after a while, girls' basketball was dropped for a long period by schools of the Frisco League.

ue playing in the rain that fell during one of their contests in 1924, and lost the game by the forfeit score of 2-to-0. Lebanon was ahead 14-to-9 at the time, but the ground was said to be so slick that "fast play became impossible."

Frisco high school basketball was not an instant success with the fans. Few working people could attend because of the time the games had to be played in the afternoon. In pleading for better attendance, a Lebanon High School correspondent wrote in a local newspaper, "Help us get back in money what we lost last Friday, when we didn't sell even enough tickets to pay the referee."

Lebanon won the girls' championship that first season and received a silver trophy cup based on having the highest percentage of wins.

The Frisco High School Athletic Association gradually became known as the Frisco League, just like its adult baseball predecessor had been called. Competition branched out not only into baseball but into academic areas as well.



1939 Richland High School basketball team; Keith Warren, Donald York, Freddie Baker, Lloyd Harrison, Bob Tucker, J.R. Lankford, Lloyd Earl Burnett, Paul Newberry, Ben Maurice Cowan, Howard Wolf, and Coach William Halter, in back. Photo courtesy of Cordell and Virginia Williams.



The 1935 Richland High School basketball team was an outstanding team and advanced to state competition. Almost all Richland went to see them play. (Front row, left to right) --Dr. Schubert, Raymond Powers, Tom Manes, Ross Harper, Lenford Miller, Orville Smith, Lloyd Newberry, Louis Knight, Raymond York, and Coach Ralph Hamilton. (Back, left to right) --Alfred Lercher, B. Belshe, Elhannon Thomas, Donald Bert Cunningham, Truman Fox, Buford Foster, and Bill Wall. Photo courtesy of Cordell and Virginia Williams.



Richland Freshman Class of 1925-26. (1st row, left to right) -- Claude (Hoot) Gibson, Ralph Bryant, Lon Stanton, Otto Trower, Cecil Davis, Burdette Carnes, Delton Hooker, and Vernon Wells. (2nd row, left to right) -- Leo Hawkins, Gordon Warren, Orpha Tanner, Edity Deberry, Alma Perkins (Tanner), Beulah Taylor (George), Lois Dowell (Walton), Faye Manes, Alpha Harris, Edna Steckel, Prof. W.B. Walker, and Vera Trower (Lowery). (3rd row, left to right) -- Maude King, LaVerne Lewis (Dodson), Sibyl Lane, Elsie Lamb, Ruby Anderson (Watson), Doris Dowell (Brown) Kermit McMilian, and Francis Winfrey (Phoenix). (4th row, left to right) -- Neva Zumwalt (Burd), Lela Zumwalt (Brown), LaVena Pippin (Hawkins), Lillian Holder (Van Nurden), Mae Manuel (York), Eula Snoderly (Goforth), Norma Ogle, Bessie Harris (Murrel), and Kermit McMilian. (5th row, left to right) -- Barney Brown, Everet Ogle, Harry Brown, Bernice Barnes, Lloyd (Penny) Gibson, and Flora Elam.

From time to time, schools dropped out of the league and were replaced by other teams. The association grew to ten teams the second year. They were Lebanon, Marshfield, Stoutland, Conway, Richland, Dixon, Linn Creek, Competition, Crocker, and Niangua. Waynesville join the league somewhere in the late 30's or early 40's, but dropped out for two seasons before rejoining it for the 1945-46 campaign.

The first games that initial season were played on September 26. In one of the contests, the Lebanon boys defeated Conway 38-to-27 in the dimming hours of the afternoon. Weather as well as darkness often interfered with the competition on an outdoor court. For example, the Crocker boys' team decided not to contin-

In 1926, Frisco League officials agreed to join the State High School Athletic Association.