

## **Minnesota High School Teams at the National Tournaments**

National tournaments have been held here and there from time to time, but their heyday of the national tournaments was the 1920s and 1930s. The “big” tournament was founded by the University of Chicago and their legendary athletic director Amos Alonzo Stagg and was held in 1913 and 1917, and then each year from 1920 to 1930. It was abandoned due to opposition from the National Federation of high school athletic associations, which threatened to withhold sanctioning from any team that participated. A Catholic tournament was founded by Chicago Loyola in 1923, and Minnesota teams at least participated in this tournament through 1940. This tournament was said to have been abandoned because of the onset of World War II travel restrictions. Let’s take a closer look at these and other “national” tournaments on a year by year basis.

### **1913**

In addition to the tournament of 1917 and the annual tournaments of 1920 to 1930, a precursor was held in 1913. Minnesota (and specifically Duluth) newspapers are very clear that Duluth Central participated in a tournament at Evanston, IL, in 1913.

- Duluth Central 34 Crawfordsville, IN 16. Crawfordsville is a legendary high school power from rural Indiana. As early as 1904, the Minnesota Gophers traveled east, and defeated Ohio State 31-18, Purdue 32-22 and Crawfordsville High School 28-23. In 1911, Crawfordsville won the first-ever Indiana state championship, and in 1920 they were runners-up in the national tournament. So a win over Crawfordsville was a serious feather in Central’s cap, though in fact Wingate was the Indiana state champion. But, it didn’t end there.

- Central lost, however, to the host team. It is not clear whether the University of Chicago organized the event, as it did all the others, but it was held at Evanston High School. Evanston was not the champion of Chicago or of Illinois, but it capitalized on its home court to win the tournament, including a 37-23 win over Central. Hyde Park beat Lyons 11-9 for the Chicago title while Galesburg was the state champion of Illinois.

- Central bounced back to defeat Canton, OH, 27-11 for 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Central forward “Bunk” Harris was named all-American. Central surely faced tougher competition than Fosston did at Northfield, and was surely Minnesota’s best team.

## **1917**

An article about the national tournament says that it was held from 1917 to 1930, but there is no record of a 1918 or 1919 event. But, the Web site of the St. Paul City Conference shows that St. Paul Mechanic Arts played in a “Western Interscholastic Tournament” in Chicago in 1917. Mechanic Arts was not the Minnesota champion as St. Paul teams did not belong to the state association nor play in its state tournament in this year. But, it was the city champion for the 3<sup>rd</sup> straight year.

In Chicago, Mechanic Arts defeated Brighton Military Academy, MI, 21-13, then lost to the same old nemesis from Evanston, IL, 28-10. Evanston again was not the champion of Illinois or even of Chicago where Phillips High beat Lane 22-11 for the championship. Springfield was the champion of Illinois. No one seems to know who won the national championship in 1917.

## **1920**

1920 saw the first truly “annual” national tournament, while a midwestern regional tournament was also held at Madison, WI. Minneapolis Central skipped the state tournament for the simple reason that Minneapolis schools had declined to join the MSHSL. Instead, they went to Chicago. Meanwhile, state champion Red Wing went to Madison.

- Minneapolis Central defeated Hyde Park, IL, 21-19.

- Central then defeated Ishpeming, MI, 22-16. Ishpeming was coached by future Chisholm coach Harvey Roels.

- They lost to Crawfordsville who, as we have said, went on to finish 2<sup>nd</sup>, 21-16. Crawfordsville then lost to fellow Indiana power, Wingate, 22-16 in the final. The irony of this is that Franklin had won the official Indiana title, beating Lafayette 31-13. Yet, 2 Indiana teams finished #1-2 in the national tournament. It turns out that Crawfordsville and Wingate were both suspended by the Indiana association for poaching players from one another and other neighboring villages. The national tournament made

some powerful enemies in Indiana high school basketball circles by bucking the state association and inviting these 2 teams that they had suspended.

- Finally, Central defeated Boone, IA, 12-9 to finish 3<sup>rd</sup>. Boone's main claim to fame was the longest field goal in all of the 11 or 12 or 13 years of the national tournament, a 43 foot-9 inch shot by a fellow named Moran in 1920. It is not reported who the opponent was at the time. Central, maybe? Central's Martin Norton was named all-American. The following year, Central played in the Minnesota state tournament, taking the championship as Norton set scoring records that stood until broken by Jim McIntyre in the 1940s and Cody Schilling in the 2000s. In 1963, on the occasion of the tournament's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Halsey Hall picked a 5-man all-time all-tournament team, of which he made Norton a member.

- In Madison, Red Wing defeated Jackson, MI, 15-14, then lost to Winfield, KS, 27-10.

## **1922**

Red Wing won its 2<sup>nd</sup> state title in 3 years, and its 3<sup>rd</sup> in 8, but did not participate in a national tournament. Runner-up Madison and quarter-finalist Austin went to Chicago, where both quickly tasted defeat. Austin was beaten by Fort Scott, KS, 37-16. Madison left a better impression, losing to the eventual national champions from Lexington, KY, 23-22.

- Meanwhile, Duluth Cathedral also traveled to Chicago for the last of the "open" tournaments. Once a Catholic national tournament was founded, also in Chicago, in 1923, Catholic schools were no longer welcome in Stagg's tournament. (Nor were African-Americans ever allowed to play in it.) Cathedral took advantage, first beating Grinnell, IA, 40-24.

- Cathedral then defeated Grand Rapids Union, MI, 33-14.

- Cathedral then met the powerful team from Lexington, KY, and like Madison they lost that game 37-26. Joe Benda of Cathedral, later both basketball and football coach at St. John's, was named all-American. Red Wing beat Duluth Central 30-25 in a state semi-final. Cathedral beat Central 30-15 and 30-18 in the Lake Superior Conference and was almost surely Minnesota's best team. (Lexington had beaten Frankfort 52-27 for the Kentucky title, and beat Mount Vernon, OH, 46-28 for the national title.)

## **1923**

For the first time, the Minnesota state champion traveled to Chicago for the national tournament. Aurora led Lorain, OH, 6-0 early and the game was tied as late as 18-18. But Aurora lost 28-24 as Matt Turk shot 0-for-6 from the free throw line.

## **1924**

For the first time, the Minnesota champion won a game at Chicago, and for the first time Minnesota teams played in the Catholic national championship.

- Two Harbors defeated Jackson, MI, 25-24, then ran into a buzz-saw from Emporia, KS, and lost 39-9. Emporia, sorry to say, also quickly lost and dropped out of the competition.

- Duluth Cathedral defeated Milwaukee Parochial 40-10 in the Catholic tournament, then lost Ft. Wayne Catholic Central, IN, 24-18. Cathedral defeated Two Harbors during the regular season and was probably Minnesota's best team.

- St. Thomas won a pair of games, beating Chicago St. Ignatius 21-15 and Cincinnati St. Xavier 16-14. They then lost to the eventual national champion Peoria Spalding 17-2.

## **1925**

St. Paul Mechanic Arts and St. Thomas played to an improbable 21-21 tie during the regular season. It was thought that St. Thomas had won 21-20, but a scoring error was found long after the 2 teams had left the gym, and playing an overtime period was impossible. Both then went on to win their respective state championships.

- Mechanic Arts became the first MSHSL champion to win a pair of games in Chicago, beating Nashville Hume Fogy, TN, 22-19 and Clarkston, WA, 25-19. They then lost to Kansas City Westport, MO, 29-28. This was their only loss of the season, as they finished at 17-1-1.

- St. Thomas won just one game at its national tournament, beating Cincinnati Elder 20-18 before losing to Decatur Catholic, IN, 21-16.

## **1926**

Gaylord matched Mechanic Arts' achievement of 2 national tournament wins as the Minnesota state champions. Gaylord was regarded as the first "Cinderella" champion, a small town whose last 7 wins, from the district semi-finals forward to the state final, were all upsets. Fans were so excited that they passed a hat in the lobby of the Kenwood Armory after the state final, and raised \$500 to help pay for Gaylord's expenses in competing in Chicago.

- Once they arrived in the Windy City, Gaylord defeated Memphis, TN, 25-24 and Atlanta Tech 23-7. They finally lost their 3<sup>rd</sup> game to Fargo, ND, 25-20. Fargo went on to the national finals where they lost to Fitchburg, MA, 25-14.

- Minnesota's Catholic champion, St. Thomas, lost to Kansas City Rockhurst 21-17, while DeLaSalle lost to Rochester Aquinas, NY, 28-18 in the Catholic nationals.

## **1927**

State champion Minneapolis South lost its only game at the national tournament 22-17 to Florence, MS. The Catholic champion, DeLaSalle, lost to Davenport St. Ambrose, IA, 27-17. Austin Columbus won one game before losing to the eventual undefeated tournament champion Joliet DeLaSalle, IL, 29-13. Joliet DeLaSalle is widely regarded as the best team, public or private, that year.

## **1928**

Moorhead lost to Tulsa, OK, and its 6-6 center 25-11. Again, Tulsa went no further in the tournament. St. Cloud Cathedral lost to Indianapolis Cathedral 15-14.

The Chicago tournament of 1928 is described as the most exciting tournament ever, however. The Kentucky champion, Ashland, and the runner-up, tiny Carr Creek, both participated. Ashland had beaten Carr Creek 13-11 in 4OT in the Kentucky final. Carr Creek had just 8 boys in the school and all 8 played basketball. Carr Creek immediately became everybody's Cinderella team and they won 3 games against an Albuquerque, NM, native American school; the pre-tournament favorites from Austin, TX; and Bristol, KY. They then lost to the other pre-tournament favorite, Vienna, GA 22-11. Vienna then lost to Ashland, who then beat Canton, IL 15-10 in the final.

## **1929**

Moorhead again lost its only game at the national tournament, but gave a better accounting of itself than the previous year. They lost to undefeated College Grove, TN, 30-29, as College Grove improved its record to 46-0. College Grove did not finish unbeaten or win the tournament, but they were regarded as one of the nation's top teams.

- St. Cloud Cathedral defeated Buffalo Canisius, NY, 19-16, then lost to Chicago DeLaSalle 31-12.

## **1930**

The Minnesota champion was no longer sanctioned to go to Chicago, but Minneapolis schools again chose not to join the MSHSL in 1930 and so Minneapolis South made the trip to the Windy City. They lost to Braselton, GA, 20-18, but then defeated Waterloo, NY, 39-16 in consolation play as Billy McLeod scored 25 points. They lost to Chattanooga Baylor 24-19, however, but McLeod was named all-American. This marked the end of participation by Minnesota's public schools in national tournaments.

- St. John's and DeLaSalle each lost their only game in the Catholic national tournament by just 2 points each.

Athens, TX, was the only repeat champion in the history of the public school tournament, winning in 1929 and 1930. They were led by 3 Tompkins brothers. One report says they all starred at Texas but another more plausible report is that the best of the 3, 6-foot-6 Howie, starred at South Carolina, where he is indeed a member of their Hall of Fame. They won the national title in 1930 without having repeated as Texas champion, then accepted a challenge from the Indiana champion, Washington, who had been barred from the tournament because their star player, Dave deJernette, was Black. Black players were never allowed in the Chicago tournaments, though there was a Black national championship (well, 2, initially) that ran all the way to 1969. Minnesota did not have segregated Black schools, though it certainly had segregated white schools, and so no Minnesota team ever played in the Black tournaments.

## **1931**

Minnesota's (or rather the Minnesota-South Dakota-Wisconsin) Catholic tournament was discontinued, but Minnesota teams continued to travel to Chicago for the nationals.

- DeLaSalle defeated perennial power Peoria Spalding 16-15.
- The Islanders then beat Chicago St. Mel 23-22.
- They defeated Nashville Father Ryan 29-14.
- DeLaSalle then earned a spot in the national championship game by beating Washington

Catholic, IN, 22-17.

- Finally, they defeated Jasper Academy, IN, avenging a 2-point loss the previous year, 23-21.

Center Ray Buffalo was named all-American.

### **1932-1940**

Saving you any suspense, after DeLaSalle's national title of 1931, Minnesota's Catholic schools posted a terrible record of 3 wins and 20 losses through 1940. The only wins are as follows:

- Duluth Cathedral defeated Pittsburgh St. Joseph's 25-16 in 1935, but then lost to Louisiana Cathedral 27-25.
- DeLaSalle won a consolation game in 1937, but lost 2 out of 3.
- Cretin defeated Collegeville St. Joseph, IN, 30-14 in 1940, then lost Chicago St. Leo 35-26 in

the last sanctioned game by a Minnesota school in any national tournament.

### **Summary 1913-1940**

DeLaSalle won 5 games and the national Catholic championship in 1931, and Minneapolis Central won 3 games in 1920. No other Minnesota team won more than 2 national tournament games in any one season. The 2-timers were Duluth Central 1913, Duluth Cathedral 1922, St. Thomas 1924, St. Paul Mechanic Arts 1925 and Gaylord 1926. Other than DeLaSalle's 1931 run, Minnesota teams were 25-24 in these tournaments. After 1931, they were 3-20 for a total of 28 wins and 44 losses. But, the truth is that in the "public" tournament (but including Duluth Cathedral 1922), Minnesota teams won 13 and lost 13.

### **Coda: Austin Pacelli 1959**

Austin Pacelli's trip to a regional tournament in Washington, D.C., in 1959 serves as a coda to the era of the national championships. Pacelli (formerly Austin Columbus, formerly Austin St. Augustine) finally won its first state title in 1958, and was invited to play in Washington, D.C. They didn't make it due to the quick turnaround, but decided to go in 1959 though they hadn't won the state title that year. In D.C. they ran into undefeated Archbishop Carroll High School with 6-11 John Thompson (yes, that John Thompson) and 6-10 Tom Hoover, and they got hammered. On the other hand, they won the award for "the best coached team." (The coach was Marty Crowe.) They got hammered when they got home, too. The trip hadn't been sanctioned, and so the Catholic League banned them from the state tournament in 1960.