

Hall Of Fame Report

Unbeaten 1945 Mountaineers going into Sports Hall of Fame

(EDITOR'S NOTE - The 1945 Kings Mountain High School men's basketball team will be inducted into the Chamber of Commerce Sports Hall of Fame Monday night, March 29 at 7 p.m. at the Community Center. Tickets are \$10 each and are available at the Chamber of Commerce, Kings Mountain Herald, Champion Contracting, McGinnis Department Store and Carolina State Bank).

By GARY STEWART
Editor of the Herald

In an era when low-scoring games were the norm, Kings Mountain High School put a basketball team on the floor in 1945 that was so talented that it often ran up a big score by halftime and Coach Don Parker got players out of the stands to play the second half.

The '45 men's team was the first undefeated athletic team in the school's history, and to this date is the only basketball team to go through an entire season without a loss.

The team will be inducted into the Kings Mountain Chamber of Commerce Sports Hall of Fame Monday night at 7 p.m. at the Community Center. It becomes the second team (the other being the 1964 KMHS football team) to be selected for the Hall of Fame.

Parker, who coached basketball for over 20 years at KMHS, had three of his better teams in his first three seasons. In 1943 and '44 the Mountaineers finished 14-1 each season and missed winning the Western Conference by just one game.

In '45, however, there was no question who was the best team in the conference. The Mountaineers ran roughshod over all 15 opponents with their closest game being a 13-point victory over Lincolnton.

In a time when 20 points often won basketball games, the Mountaineers compiled 756 points in 15 games, an average of 50 points per game. They could have scored a lot more but, in most games, Coach Parker played all 17 of his players.

Averaging over 50 points per game in 1945 was a remarkable accomplishment, as Coach Parker noted.

"That was a lot of points for that era," he said. "You have to remember that you had a jump ball after every basket which slowed the game down a lot. We didn't try to run up the score. We just had a great team."

The team picture and roster from the '45 season listed only 10 players - Houston Black, Robert Neill, Jim Herndon, Jim Hullender, Dub Hicks, L.P. Stowe Jr., Bill Cashion, Bill Dettmar, Joe Hord and Gene Mitchem - but several game reports in the Kings Mountain Herald reported that Parker "cleared his bench" of all 17 players.

Coach Parker, and several players, recalled that the team only had 10 uniforms. Often, at halftime or even before, Parker would send his starting five to the dressing room to give their uniforms to the JV team, or "midgets" as referred to in one Herald article.

Several players fondly recalled a game against Cherryville which the Mountaineers won 84-13, and by the way, clinched the Western Conference championship. They recalled that Parker decided before the game that the first unit would play the first quarter, the second team the second quarter and the third team the third quarter.

Jim Herndon recalled that the third string players were sitting in the stands. "Coach Parker called them down and we all went to the dressing room and the starting five gave them our uniforms," he said. "They went out and played the third quarter, then Coach Parker put the second team back in and they played the fourth quarter."

Parker pulled a similar move in an earlier season game with Cherryville, which Kings Mountain won 65-20. The Mountaineers were out front 29-4 after the first quarter. The Herald reported that "Parker searched the bleachers for his midgets and pitted them against Cherryville for the last half."

According to a post-season wrap-up in the Herald, the Mountaineers were loaded with talent.



The starting five in 1945 - Robert Neill, Houston Black, James Herndon, James Hullender and Dub Hicks.

Houston Black, a 6-1 forward, led the team in scoring with 211 points and a 14.1 points per game average, which was almost unheard of in that era. The Herald referred to him as "the spark plug of the team" and raved about his "accurate shooting ability with either hand." Black, who was also an outstanding quarterback on the KMHS football team, went on to play college basketball at Catawba.

Jim Hullender, who now lives in Mississippi, was a 6-2 center who scored 151 points (10.1 average) and led the team in rebounding. The Herald noted that he was "the most consistent player on the squad, and was a steady influence on the team throughout the season. His height enabled him to control the rebounds under both baskets."

Jim Herndon, who still lives in Kings Mountain, was the other forward. He scored 107 points and was an outstanding shooter. The Herald said he was a "long shot artist from any point on the floor."

The starting guards were Bob Neill and Dub Hicks, who both now reside in Charlotte. Neill, who went on to play sports at Gardner-Webb, was noted as "the hardest worker" on the team. "His determination to fight enabled him to score 112 points while always holding the opponents to a low score," the Herald reported.

Hicks, who went on to play basketball and baseball at Wake Forest, was the other guard. He scored 73 points, most from long range, and was the team's playmaker and defensive standout.

"He was the best defensive player on the squad," the Herald noted. "His guarding against fast breaks often kept his team out of trouble. His passing ability and teamwork was something to be remembered for a long time."

The second unit - which included Gene Mitchem and L.P. Stowe Jr. at forwards, Joe Hord at center, and Bill Cashion and Bill Dettmar at guards - "contributed greatly to the success of the team," the Herald noted. "They were the unsung heroes who pushed the starting players for their positions."

Neill was a 10th grader and was the only starting player to return the next year. Hullender and Black were 12th graders and Hicks and Herndon were 11th graders. Prior to 1946, only 11 grades were required to graduate but students were given the option of coming back for a 12th year to take additional courses.

The '45 season started with a bang with the 65-20 victory over Cherryville, and things never let up. In their second game of the year the Mountaineers defeated R-S Central 39-12 to gain revenge for their only defeat of 1944. Herndon scored 14 points and Black 10.

Just two games later, the Mountaineers defeated R-S again, this time 33-14. Black scored 13 points and Herndon 10. Black scored 15 and Neill 12 in a 52-22 waltz past Shelby. The game report in the Herald said the game featured "accurate passing and fast breaking."

All 17 players saw action in a 52-8 romp over Bessemer City and Kings Mountain defeated Lincolnton 42-29 after trailing 6-2 at the end of the first quarter. The Mountaineers came back to lead 20-15 at halftime. Herndon and Hullender scored 12 points each.

Parker used "three complete teams" in a 44-26 win over Forest City in a game which saw Black score 16 points. The Mountaineers pulled away from Lincolnton again in the second half to win 46-27 behind 13 points by Black and 11 each from Herndon and Neill.

In their second meeting with Shelby, the Mountaineers broke to a 26-7 halftime lead en route to a 56-22 victory. Hullender and Black scored 17 points each.

The Mountaineers closed out their unbeaten season with a 34-14 victory over Forest City as Hullender scored 14 points and Hicks 8. The Mountaineers broke the game open after leading by just 9-8 at halftime.

Even though basketball has changed tremendously over the years and many teams have won more games and scored more points than the '45 team, those players can certainly look back with pride to their accomplishments of being the school's only unbeaten team as well as being a team which did not even come close to losing a game.

"One thing I've often told is that we had two records that will probably never be broken," said Herndon, "and the fact that we went undefeated is not one of them. It is that we had the biggest point spread with the 84-13 victory over Cherryville, and the closest we came to losing was the 13-point win over Lincolnton."

The Mountaineers had good size - even though 6-1 and 6-2 players aren't considered big anymore - and they also were outstanding shooters and defensive players. And, in a time when most teams came down court slowly and worked the ball around for a wide open shot, the Mountaineers operated a fast break and scored a lot of points while still being very unselfish with the ball.

"You just didn't have real big players in small schools at that time," Herndon recalled. "Our graduating class had only 40 people. There's probably more people in the senior class now than there were in the high school when I graduated."

A fast-moving basketball team was unheard of in the forties, and Coach Parker usually fit the mold of other conservative coaches. But, in '45, he knew he had the talent to push the ball up the floor.

"Parker believed in a passing team," remembered Neill. "He didn't like to see ball hogs. He wanted to see other people receive the ball. The year before they had a team that had a lot of good dribblers and good players. They executed by taking the ball from the backcourt to the frontcourt, keeping it and dribbling it for awhile and then taking it on in and shooting. Parker was determined that we were going to share the ball."

Parker, whose coaching career spanned three decades in which all sports made tremendous strides, said he was as proud of his 1945 team as he was for any he ever coached.

"In those days, that was as good a basketball team as you'd find," he said. "Basketball has changed a lot over the years, but they were all good shooters and good defensive players."

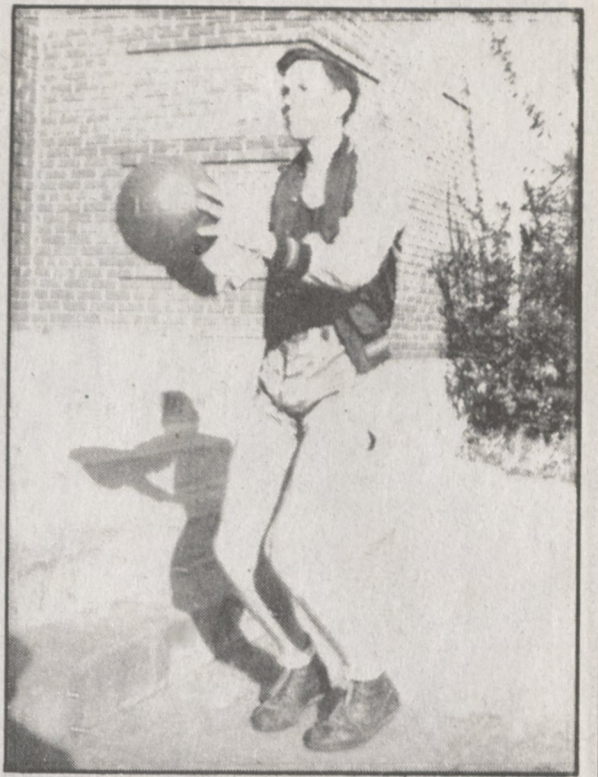
"Back then speed was the key," he went on. "You didn't think too much about height back then because nobody had any height. But we were quick and scored a lot of points."

Parker said he is also proud of the '45 team because all of the players went on to become successful business and professional men.

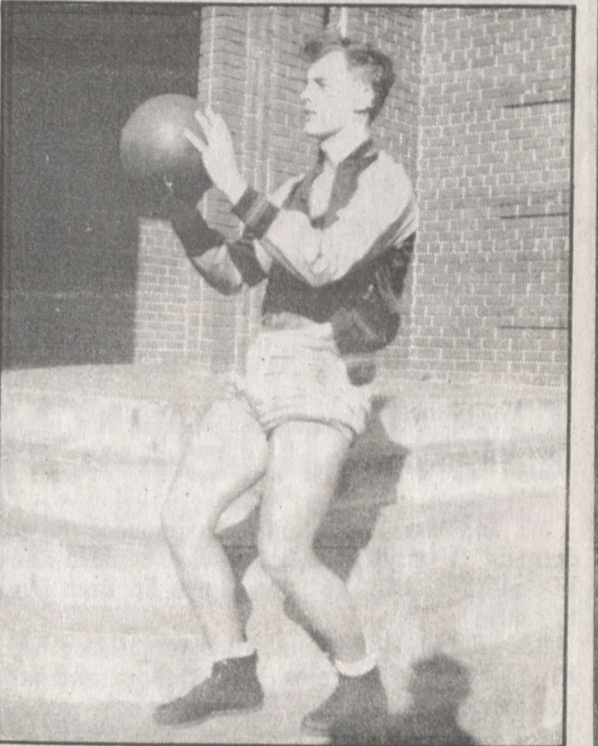
"You look at that list of players, and every one of them has been successful in life," he said. "That's what it's all about."

Dub Hicks said Parker, more than anyone, was responsible for the players' success, both on the basketball court and in later life.

"Coach Parker is the best," he said. "I came from Grover to Kings Mountain to play ball, and it's the best move I ever made. I got a college education because of Coach Parker."



HOUSTON BLACK



ROBERT NEILL



DUB HICKS



JIM HULLENDER



JIM HERNDON



The 1945 Kings Mountain High men's basketball team ran roughshod over all 15 opponents to win the Western Conference championship. Front row, left to right, Coach Don Parker, James Herndon,

Houston Black, Jim Hullender, Robert Neill and Dub Hicks. Back row, Dickie Foster, manager; L.P. Stowe Jr., Eugene Mitchem, Joe Hord, Bill Dettmar and Bill Cashion.

THE '45 SCOREBOARD

KM	OPP.	Score
65	Cherryville	20
39	R-S Central	12
46	Grover	14
33	R-S Central	14
52	Bessemer City	8
52	Shelby	22
48	Grover	11
42	Lincolnton	29
44	Forest City	26
65	Gastonia	24
46	Lincolnton	27
84	Cherryville	13
56	Shelby	22
50	Bessemer City	19
34	Forest City	14
756		275