

A century of athletics

Book celebrates 100 years of high school sports in Indiana

By JEFF DECKER

DAILY JOURNAL ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR
jdecker@thejournalnet.com

Bill Beck couldn't have written a history of the first 100 years of the IHSAA without writing about sports.

Then again, Beck wasn't about to write about 100 years of Indiana high school sports and write about nothing but sports.

Instead Beck, an Indianapolis author and a former columnist for the Daily Journal, wrote "Play On: Celebrating 100 Years of High School Sports in Indiana" with an eye on showing how Indiana society, the state's education system and sports have co-existed — and not always peacefully — for the past century.

"Play On," a 166-page hardback coffee table format book published last month, coincides with the 100th anniversary of the IHSAA.

The book is the brainchild of former IHSAA sports information director Jim Russell. Beck, a veteran author of business and institutional history publications, approached Russell about writing the 100th anniversary book a few years ago.

From the start, the book was meant to be more than a recap of 100 years of high school sports contests.

"Jim's view of the project

was that it wasn't the story of the last shot, the shot that won the big game," Beck said. "The idea was to look at Indiana high school sports and see what kind of impact it had on Hoosier society, and vice versa."

Not that the state's great sports



BY THE BOOK

What: "Play On: Celebrating 100 Years of High School Sports in Indiana"

Author: Indianapolis resident and former Daily Journal columnist Bill Beck. He is a writer and historian with more than 15 years of experience writing about business and institutional history. He has 50 published books to his credit. Beck is a 1963 graduate of Cathedral High School and a 1971 graduate of Marian College.

Publisher: Centennial Publishing LLC
Book design, marketing and advertising: Cranfill & Co., a business partner and the media/public relations arm of the IHSAA

Format: Hardback coffee-table book, 166 pages. The book includes 12 chapters, archival photographs and guest essays by U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar, Tom Carnegie, Mike Ahern, Mike Lopresti and Judi Warren and an introduction by late Gov. Frank O'Bannon.

Why now? To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the IHSAA

Cost: \$29.95 plus \$5 shipping and handling for each book

How to get it: Log on to www.playon.org or call (866) 244-4722

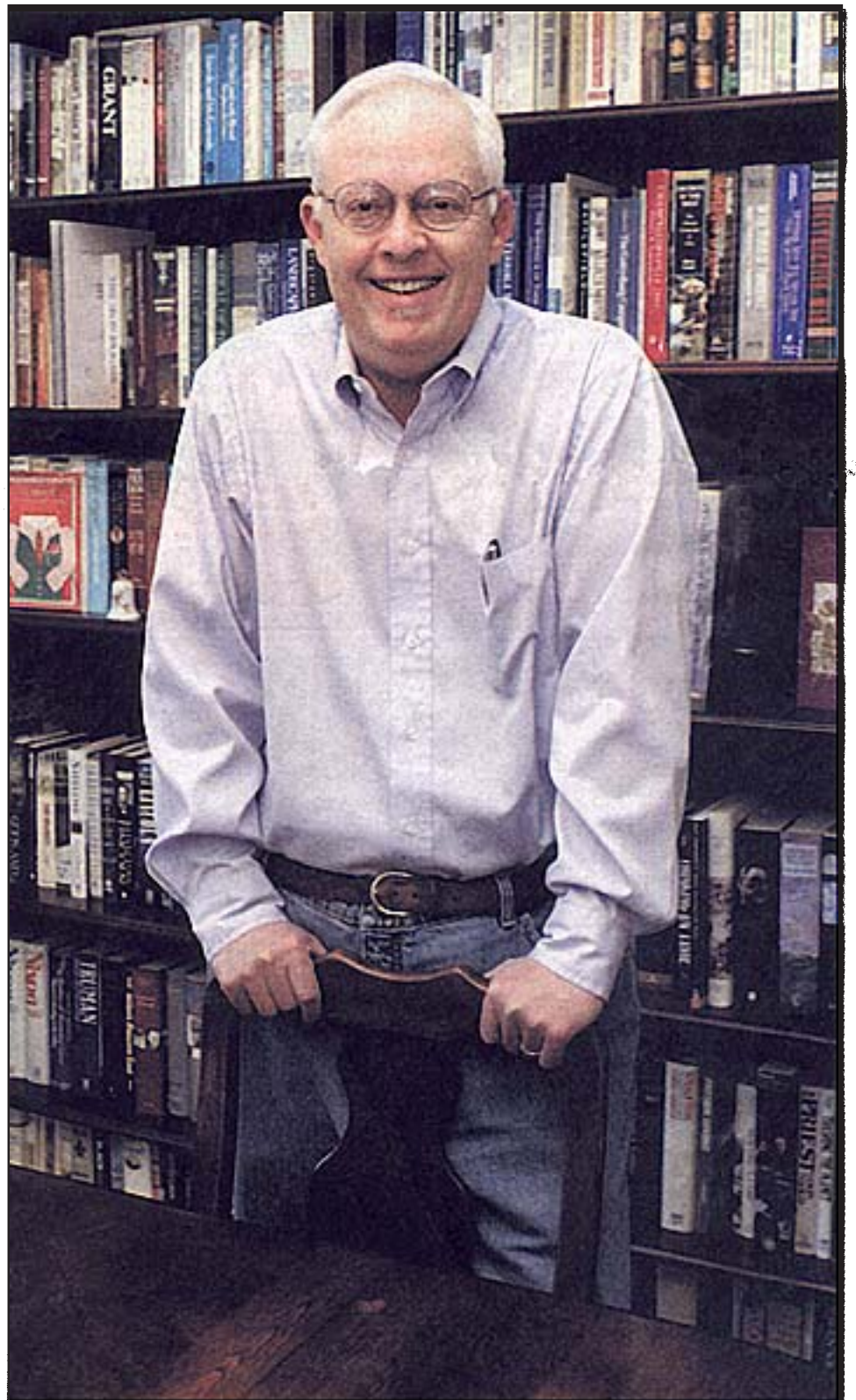
moments aren't recalled. And, yes, arguably the most important shot to win the big game — Bobby Plump's jumper to lift tiny Milan to the 1954 state basketball championship — is recalled.

But Beck attempts to put moments like Milan's championship in context,

explaining how political and societal forces converged to shape the face of Indiana high school athletics.

Chapters include "Beginnings," the story of early 20th century

(SEE BOOK, PAGE B3)



Indianapolis author Bill Beck recently released "Play On: Celebrating 100 Years of High School Sports in Indiana," a book, shown at left, commemorating the anniversary of the IHSAA.

• Book

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

Indiana and the formation of the IHSAA; "The Origins of Hoosier Hysteria," how basketball got its start in Indiana and why it became the state's most popular sport; "The City Game," a look at the segregation and eventual integration of inner-city teams of black athletes; and "Title IX," the story of the growth of girls sports in Indiana.

One of Beck's favorite chapters is "The Era of Consolidation." School consolidation in the 1960s and '70s, initiated in an effort to create better educational opportunities for students in small, rural schools, had a profound effect on Indiana high school sports.

For one, it reduced the number of IHSAA member schools from more than 800 to less than 400. Consolidation, coupled with the post-World War II baby boom, created larger small schools and mega-sized metropolitan schools.

Consolidation created friction within communities and counties in which schools were closed.

It also created headaches for high school coaches of the time. The chapter on consolidation in "Play On" tells the story of Bob Straight, who was the coach at Huntington High School when consolidation turned the 11 Huntington County schools into Huntington North High School in 1966. Straight suddenly had 60 players who had lettered in basketball the season before vying for about 12 roster spots on the Huntington North varsity team.

Consolidation, according to Beck's book, also spurred the growth of so-called minor sports such as swimming, tennis, golf and gymnastics. And eventually it ushered in the era of class sports.

"It's a huge, huge, huge story," Beck said, noting that recent generations of Hoosiers might not be aware of consolidation and its influence.

"I knew it had happened. I was in high school when it was going on, but I was in an urban high school," said Beck, a 1963 Cathedral High School graduate. "I never really understood the scope of it."

While "Play On" is a book written for the IHSAA, Beck makes an effort to take a balanced look at some of the key issues the organization has faced in the past 100 years.

Nonetheless, IHSAA commissioner

Blake Ress is pleased with the book.

"We're understandably proud of our history, and we're even more excited about what the future holds," Ress said in a press release. "As the association observes its 100th anniversary, we want to celebrate the many wonderful moments of team and individual achievement during the past century.

"And the book does just that through photographs, fascinating stories and personal experiences."

Beck doesn't sidestep such issues as:

- The IHSAA's initial reluctance to support a basketball tournament. At first fearful of promoting fierce competitiveness in interscholastic sports, it got involved only after a tournament organized by the Indiana University Booster Club was successful in 1911.

- IHSAA commissioner Arthur L. Trester's ongoing feud with Frankfort coach Everett Case. The Hot Dogs won four state championships under Case, who frequently had his teams hold the basketball, a tactic despised by Trester.

Case also got into trouble for allegedly using undue influence to recruit two players. Trester, whose philosophy was "The rule is clear, and the penalty is severe," and the IHSAA suspended Frankfort for half a season.

- The passionate battle over class

basketball. When a class basketball tournament was approved in 1997, then-commissioner Bob Gardner was vilified by critics, who called the change the ruination of Indiana basketball. Principals who supported the change hailed it as a positive step forward.

Beck grew up in Indiana but had been gone for 20 years before returning to the state in 1991. He approached the class basketball issue, as he put it, as a "third-party, disinterested observer." "I tried to explain all of the societal trends that created an environment for class basketball," Beck said. "It wasn't some kind of thing I felt religious about or anything like that."

While basketball dominates "Play On," much like it dominates the Indiana high school sports scene, the book isn't solely about basketball. Beck said great care was taken to include Indiana's wide variety of high school sports and make it a book about all regions of the state, not just its biggest cities.

When readers dig into it, Beck hopes they'll enjoy what they're reading as much as he enjoyed researching and writing the book.

"I've done probably 60 book projects in the past 15 years," Beck said. "I just thought this was one of the most fascinating projects."