

“25-0 and only four more to go!”



Remembering the undefeated 1970 South Ripley Raiders



By Jared D. Rogers
ASSISTANT EDITOR

That was the battle cry following a 74-65 South Ripley Raiders victory over Lawrenceburg on Saturday, March 7, 1970, to claim the IHSAA regional championship at Connersville High School. The come from behind win - South Ripley trailed 29-13 in the second quarter - earned the Raiders a ticket to the Sweet Sixteen at historic Hinkle Fieldhouse in Indianapolis the following weekend. It was the team's 25th straight win of the year.

“The 5,875 fans that were packed into the Connersville Bowl of the tourney (sic) were just astonished at the play of the Raiders in both the afternoon and evening contest. They were magnificent to say the least in both contests,” wrote William “Tiny” Hunt the following Tuesday in the Osgood Journal.

Hunt chronicled the “Ramblin Raiders” journey in rich detail during the 1969-70 basketball season. He selected the team to win the 46th annual Ripley County Tournament, and they went on to defeat defending champions Jac-Cen-Del 67-60 in the final game to earn their 13th win of the season and first Ripley County Tourney title in the young school's history, having consolidated in 1966.

“The shooting in the final contest was like Buffalo Bill used to do in the circus,” said Hunt, as the Raiders hit .504 from the field on the game, while the Eagles shot .484.

From there, nearly each victory was numbered in the headlines until the Raiders entered the sectional tournament with an untarnished 21-0 record (8-0 ORVC). According to Hunt, they were the first Ripley County team in history to accomplish such a feat. In 1970, they were one of four teams in the entire state to win all of their regular season games.

“This is it...the big moment is about to arrive,” wrote Hunt. “The sectional tourney championship, the biggest prize of them all, will start Thursday night in Batesville,” and, “The winner will carry the torch to the Connersville regional.

“Yes, it is sectional time in Ripley County once again when you have popcorn all down your back, you set on someone else's chewing gum and you try to get your rear quarters on an 18-inch seat,” Hunt concluded his preview.

After thumping Moores Hill 91-53 in the semifinal round of the sectional, South Ripley met a stout Batesville team. The Bulldogs downed Sunman (75-58) and Jac-Cen-Del (60-58) to earn their chance at toppling the mighty Raiders.

As Hunt predicted, Batesville came out strong and led the first three quarters of the game, up four points at halftime and three going into the final set. “Kelvin Comer canned a jump shot from the side with 0:02 left to play to knot the score at 55 all and send the game into an overtime period,” wrote Hunt of the fourth quarter. Two extra periods later, South Ripley emerged victorious, 69-66. All five of the South Ripley starters - Chris Smith, Ronnie Linkmeyer, Steve Latimer, Paul Bess, and Kelvin Comer - scored in double digits and were named to the all-sectional team.

“It was a superb coaching job turned in by the youthful coach of the Raiders, Dale Ricketts to get this team to victory lane,” Hunt acknowledged. This nod to Ricketts came knowing that his team had to overcome more than just a tough opponent in Batesville to secure the title. During the afternoon break between the semifinal and final rounds, Coach Ricketts broke the news to his young men that Chris Smith's father, Leon, had died of a heart attack that day while working.

Before the big game, Smith told his coach he wanted to stay in the starting lineup. “Showing an unbelievable amount of courage and strength at a time when heartache must have been at its worst, the lad boldly took his position on the floor with the Raiders and turned in a brilliant performance during the ball game scoring 14 points and accepting the sectional victory trophy...Coach Dale Ricketts said after the ball game that his boys grew up very quickly and they learned to be men Saturday night during the hectic contest.”

The next Saturday, the Raiders notched two victories at the Connersville regional, first over North Decatur 82-78 in overtime and then Lawrenceburg 74-65 to stamp their ticket to the dance in the “big barn” as Hunt referred to Butler's Hinkle Fieldhouse. South Ripley's Smith, Comer, and Bess were named to the all-regional team.

The magic season concluded with an 89-67 loss to Indianapolis Crispus Attucks in the opening round of the semi-state. The Attucks Tigers were credited with ruling the boards while the Raiders struggled from the field with their lowest shooting percentage of the season. Paul Bess was named to the Associated Press Semi-State Tourney Team for his effort.

“Everything came together,” Head Coach Dale Ricketts recounted with a smile at the team's reunion dinner at South Ripley High School on Saturday, February 1. Along with Coach Ricketts, players, cheerleaders, managers, and spouses enjoyed a meal together and looked back on their banner year. Later, the team was honored by South Ripley's homecoming crowd at halftime of the varsity boys game against Jennings County.

“These guys were my idols growing up,” Superintendent Rob Moorhead shared in his welcome. Moorhead, who grew up in Versailles and is now in his eighth year as superintendent of the school corporation, said the 1970 crew was the first basketball team he remembers from childhood. High school principal Joe Ralston told the group he was excited that students in attendance had the chance to meet and learn from real-life role models. Ralston related the team's success on the court and in life as examples of “what our kids can aspire to if they put in hard work and dedication.”

At the beginning of the 1970 school year, the feelings around southern Ripley County weren't so warm. Indiana was in the midst of a major wave of school consolidation, where town schools were closing in favor of larger township and county corporations. South Ripley's inaugural year was 1966-67 as a combination of Versailles, New Marion, and Cross Plains schools. Prior to the 1969-70 school year, Holton closed its doors for good and joined South Ripley.

“Three of us from Holton moved over here,” guard Dan Meisberger remembers. “We only played together six weeks” before the season began, he also noted.

The consolidated team fit together though, leading Tiny Hunt to write, “The one great thing about (sic) the Raiders, a coach told us last week at the regional, you do not know which one of the starting five is going to turn on. They all can do it at any time. That is what makes them so dangerous and that is the big reason they are 25-0 on the year.”

From uncertainty to success, Coach Ricketts shared that many people have told him through the years that it was the basketball team that brought the new community together. He commended the players, their parents, and supporters for finding common ground on which to rally. That ground was literally a full parking lot at Tyson Auditorium on winter Friday nights in Versailles - with cars double parked along the street - because everyone wanted to watch the Raiders play.

The 1970 squad took the court once more together after the halftime buzzer rang, being introduced to a packed homecoming crowd. By the time their lengthy list of accomplishments was read, fans were on their feet cheering for the “greatest team in school history.”

Then, they sat back and watched the home team earn a 16 point victory. The Raiders spirit is still ramblin' on.



JARED ROGERS PHOTOS



Golden memories: The squad comes home

Above, members of the 1970 team gather around their regional championship photograph at South Ripley High School on Saturday, February 1. From left to right is Janet (Ruble) Meyers, Libby (Williams) Bess, Mike “Big Joe” Havey, Paul Bess, Ron Linkmeyer, Danny Meisberger, “H2O Pete” Holcomb, Jack Parker, Steve Underwood, Joan (Ruble) Deal, Coach Dale Ricketts, Faye (Cook) Phillips, and George Daily.

Left, Coach Ricketts congratulates his team after the ceremony held in their honor at halftime of the varsity boys basketball game against Jennings County. The 1970 team received a standing ovation from the crowd which included dozens of South Ripley graduates in attendance for homecoming. The 2019-20 Raiders also defeated Jennings County 66-50 to cap a memorable night for the South Ripley - Versailles community.



BOB BOSTIC | RIPLEY PUBLISHING COMPANY FILE PHOTO

Connersville regional champions

The South Ripley Raiders are shown above just after they had annihilated the Lawrenceburg Tigers 74 to 65 to win the first regional crown in the history of the new high school in the Connersville high school gym, Saturday night. Front row, left to right: Cheerleaders Janet Ruble, Libby Williams, Phyllis Obendorf, Faye Cook and Joan Ruble; Second row: Athletic Director Wayne Ralston, Student Manager Howard Hewitt, Paul Bess, Craig Castner, George Daily, Student Manager Terry Webster, Dan Meisberger, Steve Underwood, Student Manager Dennis Holcomb, and Student Manager Mike McGrew.

Back row: Assistant Coach Bill White, Ron Linkmeyer, Kelvin Comer, Chris Smith, Gary Underwood, Jack Parker, Varsity Coach Dale Ricketts, Steve Latimer, Mike Havey, Freshmen Coach Larry Sutherlin, Superintendent Forest G. Waters and Principal William “Gus” Moorhead.

Note: all cutlines on this page copied from newspaper archives.



BOB BOSTIC | RIPLEY PUBLISHING COMPANY FILE PHOTO

Big hug for Ricketts

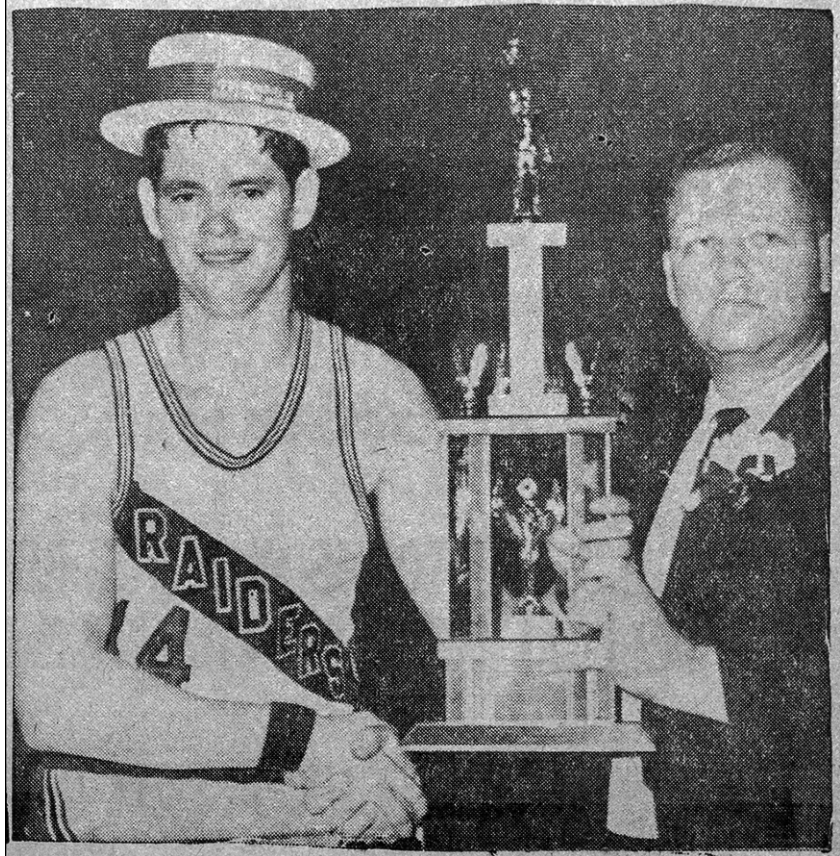
Mrs. Sue Ricketts gives a winning hug to her husband Dale Ricketts, head coach of the South Ripley Raiders, just after they had won their ticket to the “Sweet Sixteen” class of the IHSAA tournament at Connersville Saturday night by eliminating the Lawrenceburg Tigers from the race 74 to 65.



The original South Ripley emblem

“The one great thing about (sic) the Raiders, a coach told us last week at the regional, you do not know which one of the starting five is going to turn on. They all can do it at any time. That is what makes them so dangerous and that is the big reason they are 25-0 on the year.”

Wm. “Tiny” Hunt, ‘The Dribbler’
The Versailles Republican - March 12, 1970

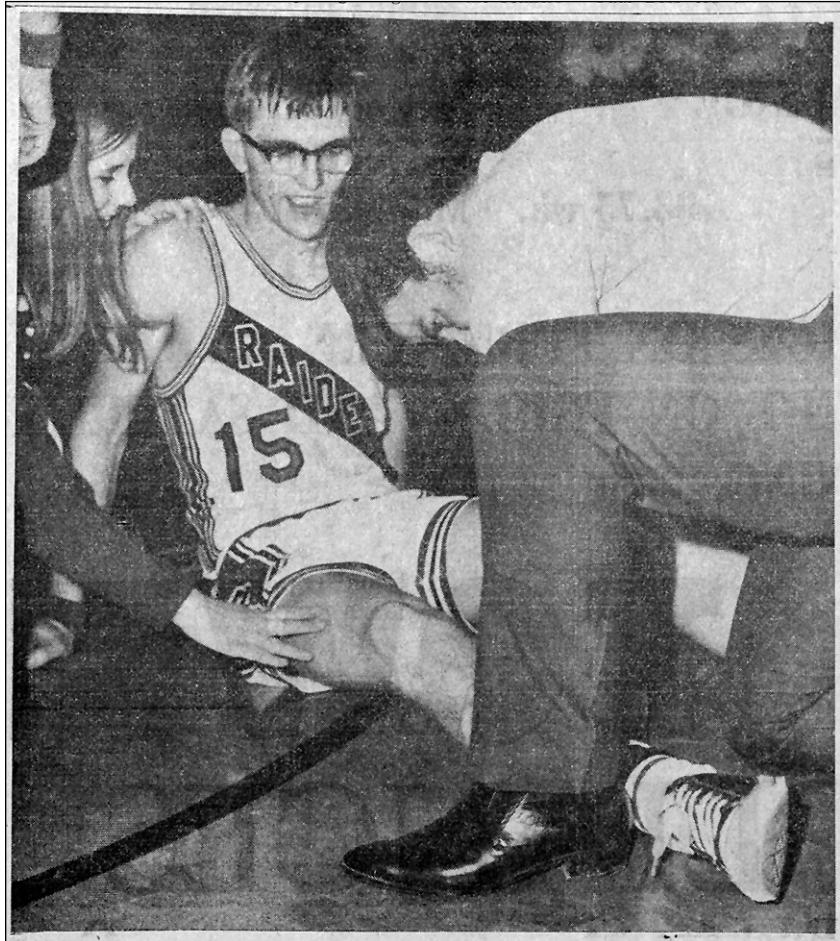


RIPLEY PUBLISHING COMPANY FILE PHOTO

Won it for Dad

Chris Smith of the South Ripley Raiders is shown above on the left accepting the Sectional tournament championship trophy from Richard Lemen, principal of Batesville high school and tourney manager, during the presentation ceremonies following the final game of the sectional tournament, Saturday night.

Chris said after he had accepted the trophy that he really had to win this one for his father Leon Smith, who died of a heart attack between games Saturday afternoon.



BOB BOSTIC | RIPLEY PUBLISHING COMPANY FILE PHOTO

Comer gets leg cramps

Kelvin Comer, star guard for the South Ripley Raiders, who scored 30 points in the championship contest of the Connersville regional tourney, is shown above on the floor after the final game was over and Cheerleader Phyllis Obendorf and Student Manager Mike McGrew are shown above giving Comer first aid.

Supporting their community 50+ years

The support from businesses advertising below made this page possible. These same entities printed clever phrases of encouragement for the Raiders after they won the sectional and regional tournaments in February and March of 1970 (seen below right). A total of two full spreads were filled for each victory - that's eight individual pages of advertisements - by local businesses and political candidates.

Out of 116 unique ads on the congratulatory regional championship pages, the businesses listed here are among a select few remaining. Their longevity and continued service to the community is duly recognized.

Thanks for the
Memories!
SOUTHEASTERN INDIANA REMC
P.O. Box 196
712 S. Buckeye St.
Osgood, IN 47037
REMC Southeastern Indiana

50 YEARS Strong!
HALCOMB HOME CENTER
2358 South SR 129 • Versailles
812-689-6060
www.HalcombHomeCenter.com

The Napoleon State Bank
Not your typical bank!
www.napoleonstatebank.com
FDIC
Memories to Bank On!

50 Years Later
Versailles American Legion
Post #173
812-689-6400

LAUGHERY Valley Ag
Osgood • Versailles • Dillsboro
(812) 689-4401
(800) 221-9731
www.laugheryvalleyag.com
CONGRATULATIONS!

Still Dreaming
Moonlite Motel
520 S. Adams St.
Versailles, IN
(812) 689-6004
Owners: Scott & Michelle Neal

THORNTON'S MOTORCYCLE SALES
812.689.6347
762 E. Co. Rd. 300 South • Versailles, IN
www.thorntoncycle.com
GOLDEN DAYS CELEBRATED!

friendshipstatebank.com **IRELY ON FRIENDSHIP**
The Friendship State Bank
start the FRIENDSHIP
FDIC
812-667-5101
VERSAILLES | BATESVILLE
FRIENDSHIP | DILLSBORO
LAWRENCEBURG | VEVAY
RISING SUN | MADISON

DQ *Still sweet after 50 years!*
VERSAILLES DAIRY QUEEN
914 S. Adams St.
812-689-4005

MAKING GOLDEN MEMORIES
OHIO ROD PRODUCTS
ORP
1415 S. Benham Rd.
Versailles
812.689.6565

IT TAKES POWER TO WIN
R. E. M. C.
Osgood Indiana

We're Banking On You RAIDERS
HOLTON BRANCH OF NAPOLEON STATE BANK
Holton Indiana

BUILD UP A VICTORY CO-OP
Osgood Indiana

Let's Run The Cycle To The Semi-State
THORNTON CYCLE SALES
Route No. 1 Versailles, Ind.

GOOD LUCK RAIDERS
AT TWENTY-FIVE YOU'LL STILL BE ALIVE
VERSAILLES DAIRY QUEEN
Loyd and Eva Delay

GOOD LUCK RAIDERS
Versailles Division
OHIO ROD PRODUCTS
Versailles Indiana

BUILD For the State Championship
HALCOMB BLDG. SUPPLY
Versailles Indiana

BRING HOME THE SEMI-STATE CROWN
Leora Weare Post 173
AMERICAN LEGION
Versailles Indiana

PUT 'EM TO SLEEP RAIDERS
MOONLITE MOTEL
Versailles Indiana

LET'S GO RAIDERS
We're Backing You! Good Sportsmanship Always Wins
THE FRIENDSHIP STATE BANK