

# Hawks look back on 1962 hoops championship

**HAWKS,** from Page AA1

mile or less from the Maryland-Pennsylvania line, said. "I think a lot of people thought we were rednecks, and we definitely had some kids who'd come to school with a little manure on their shoes. But, we won the first state title in school history, and we only had two guys over six feet tall."

"We beat teams that season who were 23-0 when we played them, and we did because we were a team," he said. "There were no superstars, no one player who won games by himself. We played our game the whole way through, and it worked for us."

## Duck farmers

"I pretty sure I know where the 'duck farmer,' stuff started," Lloyd, who is also from Cardiff and was childhood friends with Whiteford, said. "That was from when North Harford High first opened, in 1950. Over where Harford Mall [in Bel Air] is now there was a race track, and they would have farm fairs there. North Harford had a really good agriculture program, and some students got wind that the Future Farmers of America from Bel Air were grooming a steer to enter in a competition at one of those fairs."

"What the North Harford kids did was pull a couple of ducks from the pond at the high school and enter them. Well, the ducks wound up winning a blue ribbon, and I think Bel Air's steer didn't win anything," he continued. "So, the Bel Air kids started calling us duck farmers. I think they thought it was a put down, but I never thought of it like that."

The picture of the duck you see in the 1961-62 yearbook on the championship team's page was drawn by a DeRan, who was already demonstrating a talent for drawing and painting that would lead to a career as an artist. The duck made it into the yearbook via a happy accident.

"I was on the yearbook staff, and DeRan got that picture to me," Sanborn, a native of Norrisville, said. "Well, the day we were putting together the basketball team's page, the head yearbook editor was out sick, so I decided to use the duck drawing. I'm glad she was out, because I'm positive she would have axed it. We all loved it though."

## Inauspicious beginning

Though recognized as a solid team coming into the 1961-62 season, the Hawks were not saddled with great expectations.

"A lot of people thought the 1959-60 team was the one that was going to win a state title," Sanborn said. "My brother was on that team, and I think they beat Havre de Grace by 45 or 50 one game that year. They could really play, but they wound up getting knocked out in the district tournament. Honestly, I don't think anyone put us in the same league as that team, but we did OK."

Two players who had not been with the Hawks during the 1960-61 campaign returned to play in what would be the championship season: Lloyd, who sat out his junior year, and Bonhage, who was absent for another reason.

"I had dropped out during my junior year to get married," Bonhage, who is from Jarrettsville, said. "I missed that whole year, but decided to come back and finish up school. I came back and did my junior and senior year all in one and graduated. I'm awfully glad I did."

"It was Bonhage and Mac [Lloyd] coming back that really gave us what we needed," Garbacik, who resides in Bel Air, said. "Bob had left school the previous year and returned, and Mac, who was a point guard when I coached him on junior varsity, just about grew out of his boots the year he was gone. He was a back-court guy, and now he's 6-4. We put him in the post, and there weren't many defenders who could keep up with him. He was just too big."

Despite the addition of Bonhage and Lloyd, the Hawks started slow, and were 5-5 10 games into the season, with their fifth loss a 55-52 heartbreaker to rival Bel Air.

"That was a very tough loss," Bonhage, who recalled missing two key free throws down the stretch in that game, said. "I felt sick afterward. It was like when the Colts lost to the Jets in the Super Bowl, same feeling. Coach Garbacik came up to me afterward, put his arm around my shoulder and said, 'things are going to change, you watch.' That made me feel a little better, but I was still pretty upset."

"I remember that game very well," Whiteford said. "The coach at Bel Air, Pat Hennessy, had his guys guarding me so I'd run right into them sideways. I fouled out really early, and we wound up losing by three points. That was tough."

At .500 overall, and in third place behind Aberdeen and Havre de Grace in the county standings at 2-2, the Hawks lost another local matchup with Aberdeen, then won their next two games, the second of which was a 61-57 overtime thriller with North Carroll.

"We were losing to North Carroll by 22 points, I think," Garbacik said. "But, we wound up coming back and beating them in overtime. That game was important for us."

The Hawks would not lose another game.

## Turnaround

"Somewhere earlier in the season, we had played West Nottingham, which was a powerhouse then," Garbacik said. "They had some guys who were just using that as a prep school before they went on to play at big colleges. We gave them a pretty good game, came pretty close to matching them, and we had a meeting afterward. I said,



MATT BUTTON | AEGIS STAFF

**A banner celebrating the 1962 North Harford state champion basketball team proudly hangs in the school's gym.**

'we're into the season now, let's knuckle down.' I had two skiers on the team, Sanborn and Nevin, and they agreed to give up the skiing for the rest of the season rather than risk getting injured. We couldn't afford to lose anyone with our roster."

Following the victory over North Carroll, the Hawks avenged their loss to Bel Air, defeating the Bobcats, 49-41, on their home court.

"Those were always intense games with Bel Air," Lloyd said. "We thought they were our big rival, but I don't know if they thought we were."

"It was a lot like the Army-Navy game, in our eyes," Bonhage said. "If we beat nobody else the rest of the year, we wanted to knock off Bel Air."

"Sometimes during those games, a Bel Air student would bring a duck with a green and gold ribbon on its neck, and let it loose on the court at halftime," Whiteford said. "It was, 'you're not the mighty Hawks, you're a bunch of duck farmers.' But, when we played them in Bel Air, some North Harford fans would take a kitten and turn it loose on the court, to say, 'You're not the Bobcats, you're a bunch of kittens.' It was all in good fun, but we played them hard."

"At that time the rivalry with Bel Air was pretty heated," Sanborn said. "There wasn't much of one with Edgewood or Havre de Grace, because we usually beat them pretty good, but we could always count on a tough one from Bel Air."

After the rubber match victory over Bel Air, the Hawks wrapped up the regular season with a 58-43 win over Brooklyn Park. Aberdeen, which had taken Harford County's first boys basketball title back in 1951, won the county title, having handed North Harford two of its three county losses, while the Hawks took second place with a 5-3 mark.

"I think Aberdeen was probably the toughest team we played that year," Bonhage said. "I think we could have beat them in one of those games, but they had our number."

Among the county's Class B teams (Aberdeen and Bel Air were Class A), the Hawks finished first with a 4-0 mark (sweeping both Havre de Grace and Edgewood), which earned them a berth in the District 3 tournament.

## Post-season run

On Friday, March 2, 1962, the Hawks began their championship run with a rematch against North Carroll in the Class B District 3 semifinals at Western Maryland College in Westminster. Lloyd had a monster game, scoring a season-best 23 points, and the Hawks advanced to the finals with a 57-38 victory.

The district finals proved a bit trickier, as the Hawks came back to Westminster the following day to play the Hereford Bulls, who put North Harford to the test, forcing two overtime periods before surrendering, 49-44.

"That was the most intense game I've ever played, period," Lloyd said. "The crowd was screaming so much that my ears were ringing. You couldn't hear what your teammates were yelling it was so loud."

With the score tied in the final seconds of regulation, a Hereford player tossed up a desperate half-court attempt that nearly ended the Hawks' run,

"One of their guards got off a shot at the buzzer," Lloyd said. "And I'll tell you, that ball must have circled the rim about 20 times. It did everything but go in. My heart was down in the pit of my stomach."

"We knew we could beat North Carroll on a neutral court," Garbacik said. "And, after that game, we knew that if we beat Hereford, that we would be able to stack up against anyone in the finals."

## Playing at the Mecca

The Hawks' District 3 title earned them a spot in the Class B State Championship, which was held at the home of the

Maryland Terrapins, Cole Field House.

"Cole Field House, for a 17-year-old basketball player, was like Mecca," Sanborn said. "It was startling being out on that floor."

"We had the smallest gym you could imagine at North Harford back then," Lloyd said. "We called it 'the matchbox.' We would push back the bleachers to get used to playing at other schools that had bigger courts. Well, there was no preparing for Cole Field House; it was just huge. I had a real problem getting focused down there."

"I took three practice shots when we first got out onto the floor at College Park, and they all missed by about three feet," Bonhage said. "Our gym was this tiny little bandbox, so Cole Field House looked like an aircraft hangar. Also, those glass backboards threw off your depth perception if you weren't used to them. We played on wood backboards the whole season, and that threw us off a little bit. Really though, we never expected to get that far, so we were having a good time."

"One advantage we had was that we'd never been that far before," Whiteford said. "I don't think playing there affected us that much. After you play together for so many years, you get in step with each other. We all played well under pressure, and the reason that team was so good in the first place was because everyone contributed. So, if one guy was off his game, nervous, another would step up."

The Hawks squared off with Springbrook on Thursday, March 8 in the state semifinal, and advanced to the state championship round with a 43-37 victory.

"Springbrook had some big guys, but they were very slow," Garbacik said. "It was funny. We were warming up, and Mac or Dave dunked the ball, which you didn't see much back then. I looked over and the Springbrook players were staring at us, a little frightened I think."

Two days later, the North Harford boys returned to College Park for the Class B title game, in which they would play North Carolina. The Hawks, who had relied on defense the whole season, were stingy as ever, shutting down the opposing offense in a 44-33 victory. With the win, North Harford became the second Harford County basketball team to capture an MPSSAA state title, and the first team in school history to earn a Maryland championship banner in any sport.

"It became apparent with about a minute left that we were going to win the final," Lloyd said. "They substituted for me with 1:04 left, which never happened, so I figured we were in good shape."

"I heard the North Carolina captain yelling at the team during halftime," Bonhage said. "He said, 'if we don't get our crap together, we're going to lose to these yokels.' I thought that was pretty funny."

"We played very well defensively in both games during the finals," Sanborn said. "We were running a very mean zone defense, and we didn't allow many second shots. It seemed like we missed a lot of shots in the championship game, but when you hold the other team to 33, you can afford to miss some."

"They had someone foul out in the first half," Garbacik said. "That opened up the floor for us. We wound up getting a lot of quick, easy buckets, and the game broke wide open."

Lloyd remembered a small but not insignificant detail of the Hawks' run the championship.

"We had two sets of uniforms that year," he recalled. "The home uniforms were brand new, white with green trim; very nice looking. The others, our road set, were about four generations old, and they were gold with green numbers. We hated wearing those things. During the district and state tournaments, our assistant coach, Jiggs Woodcock, would flip a coin before every game to see who played as the home team. All four times he flipped, we wound up as home team, so we got to wear the

sharp new uniforms the whole time. I can't say it affected our play, but little things like that can help a lot."

## Champs

The Hawks, the duck farmers from the wilds of Harford County, came back from College Park on March 10, 1962, having achieved what no other North Harford basketball team has since.

"That was a wonderful experience," Bonhage said. "Coach Garbacik told us to put everything out there in the finals, so we wouldn't regret it later, and we did. We gave it everything and won. It was definitely one of the highlights for me."

"A few days after we won the state title, a bunch of us from the basketball team went down to the Bel Air bowling alley," Lloyd said. "There's a Gold's Gym there now, but it used to be a real hot spot on the weekends. We were still pretty excited over that state championship, and we walk in the place, and someone from the alley gets on the p.a. and says, 'The state champion North Harford Hawks basketball team just came in. Everyone give them a hand. Free burgers and shakes for the team.' That was just great."

Fifty years on, the members of that Hawk team who still reside in the area — Bonhage, Beattie, DeRan, Garbacik, Hopkins, Lloyd, Sanborn and Whiteford — were honored anew at a North Harford boys basketball game, which the Hawks won, beating Havre de Grace, 54-51, on Feb. 10. Blaney, who lives in Chicago, and Nevin, who lives in Oregon, were unable to attend.

"That 50th anniversary celebration was one of the nicest things I've ever taken part in," Sanborn said. "The fans gave us a standing ovation. It was a wonderful reception."

What's the biggest difference between the game played now from what the members of the 1962 championship team experienced?

"The kids are very athletic now," Lloyd, a former longtime sports editor of *The Aegis*, said. "The game is somewhat faster, but I don't think they play defense as well."

"If we played like they play today, we'd foul out in about two minutes," Bonhage said. "If you gave a guy a tough look back then you'd get whistled for it. The game is much more physical now."

"Everyone has gotten bigger," Whiteford said. "Back when we played, the really big guys were usually pretty clumsy; you could steal the ball from them pretty easily if they tried to dribble. Now, the big guys can dribble and move all over the court."

"It's much, much faster these days," Sanborn said. "There's some stuff that I don't like to see, like guys constantly trying to drive through zone defenses. You should pass around a little more. But, it's just so fast and athletic now. Most sports have improved over the last 50 years, but basketball has changed very dramatically."

"The three-point shot has changed things a lot," Garbacik, who went on to serve as principal at several Harford high schools, said. "I used to tell my players, 'you can take a long shot, but you darn well better be open.' I saw a lot of changing defenses, which I liked. That was one of the keys for us, switching defenses so the other team can't get comfortable. We were ahead of the curve there."

Whiteford may have best summed up the 1962 championship team, and what's changed in the 50 years since, when he said: "We had an excellent group of players. We would play all week, and on Sunday we'd play some more. It was just a great time to grow up, the '50s and '60s. For me that was the best time and place in the whole world. I honestly felt bad for my kids, because they had to be so careful about everything. If I wanted to go down to Bel Air for a burger and a Coke on a Saturday, I'd head out and thumb a ride. About five minutes later somebody I knew would come driving past and pick me up. It's a lot different now, but things change."