

WPJ “The Time Machine” Article #5
“Hang up the Cleats and Strap on the Sneakers”

by Jebb Willis – volunteer

Wadena County Historical Society

One-hundred years ago there were only three high school sports. Football in the fall, track & field in the spring and basketball in between. Basketball was invented in 1891 as a less injury prone activity to give the high school lads something to do after the football season had ended.

As the WDC and other area teams have concluded their 2022 football seasons those athletes have more options today for their winter activities. However, we are about to go back 100 years to 1922 when the options for winter were basketball or work. One hundred years ago from this very moment teenage WHS boys were in transmission mode. An exciting time of anticipation. A change of seasons, a change of footwear. Hang up your cleats and strap on your sneakers or get a job.

To have a sense of what the 1922-23 basketball outlook may have been during this transition period let's review their most recent football and basketball results. In the fall of 1920 WHS hired a new teacher, Mr. Kuefler, who would also become the head coach of both football and basketball. In his first three seasons (1920-22) as football coach, in the games we know about, WHS won two-thirds of those contests. In the two basketball seasons leading up to this 1922-23 campaign Wadena's success was even more impressive.

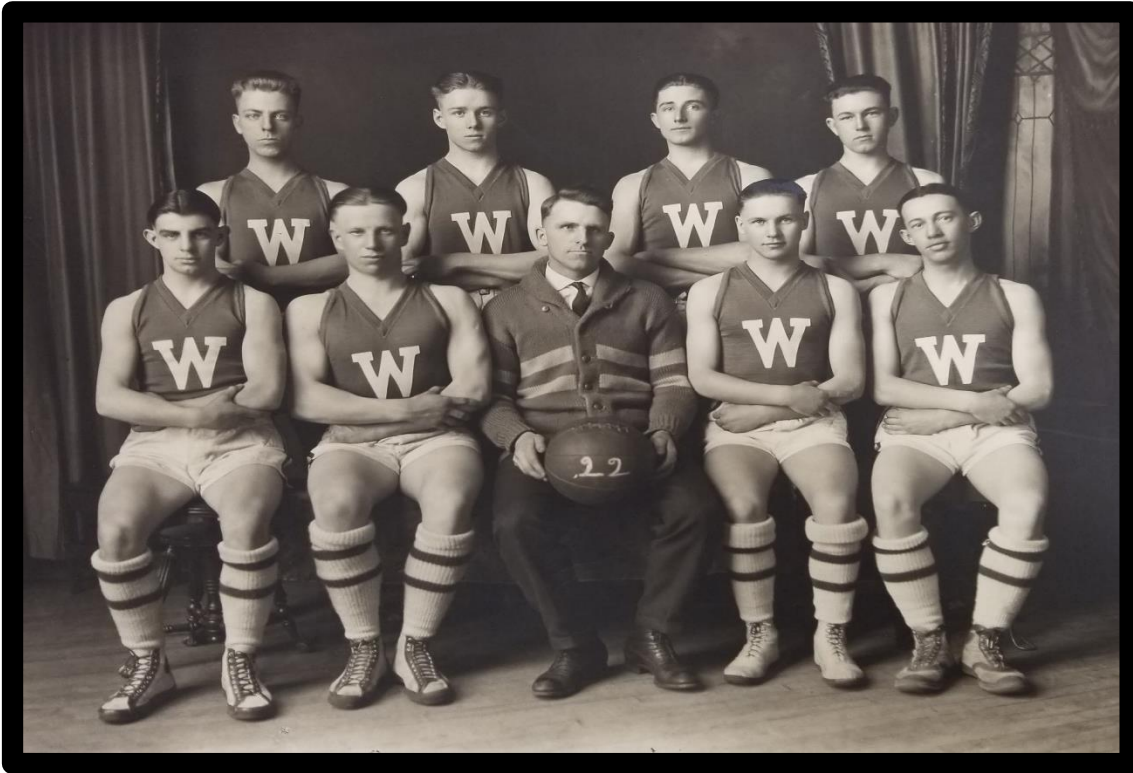
WPJ, December 10, 1970



Back: Coach Kuefler, Merritt Dodds, Vern Wright, Clair Walker, Carol Parker
Front: Marion Blaha, Carl McDowell, Harold Kruger, Bill Stevens

According to the PJ this 1920-21 WHS team was undefeated. A good start for coach Kuefler.

1922 State Tournament Berth



Back: Bill Stevens, Vern Wright, Maurice Merickel, Carol Parker
Front: Donald McKinnon, Clair Walker, Coach Kuefler, Marion Blaha, Joe Rice

The 1921-22 season was even more successful. The team's record is not known but they won their District 11 tournament. That title earned Wadena a trip to the 10th Minnesota High School State Basketball Tournament where they defeated New Ulm 27-17 in the quarterfinal round. The next evening Wadena took on Madison in the first semifinal game, losing 35-34 in O.T. Red Wing beat Madison 34-27 to win the championship for the third time in ten years.

Based on the success of both the football and basketball teams since coach Kuefler had arrived, I would say the 1922-23 basketball season outlook would have been one of optimism and anticipation. A proven coach and experienced athletes breed optimism. Unfortunately, I don't have their regular season results, but come tournament time I can let you know how the season ended for the 1922-23 Wadena High School basketball team. In the meantime, support the Wolverines as their season gets underway. I am guessing their 2022-23 basketball season outlook is one of optimism and anticipation.

As for me and "The Time Machine" I will continue to share stories about the achievements of athletes and coaches, in their sports and in their lives. Stories about the teams and games and even about the rules of the games. My plan is to have a few articles published during the basketball season much as I did during the football season.

See you in the gym.