

“The Time Machine”
WHS Basketball’s Top Teams 1940-80
1978 and 1980
Article #19

Greetings “Time Travelers.” Before we commence boarding, remember that I am in search of a copy of the 1943 and the 1936 WHS yearbooks. Please contact me if you can help. It could prove to be profitable for you.

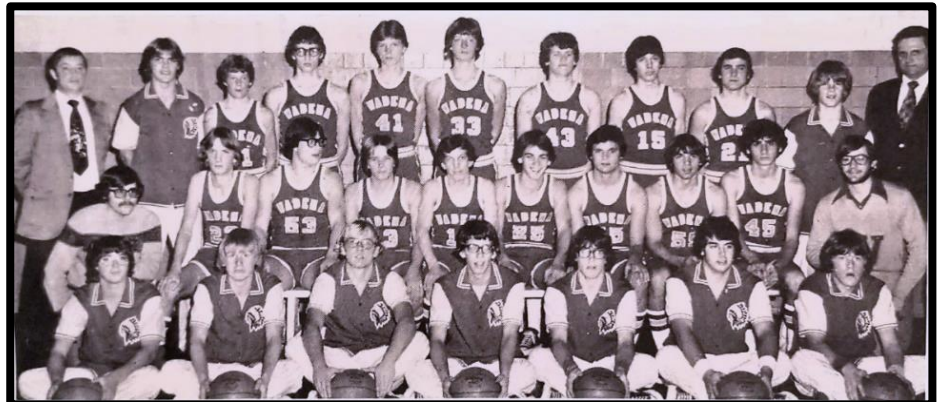
Most recently “The Time Machine” has been visiting the most successful WHS basketball teams since 1940. To date we have stopped in the 1943 (District 24 champs), 1959 (Mid-State Conference champs (t)), and 1974 (Mid-State Conference and District 24 champs) seasons. Today we will be concluding this tour with visits to the 1978 and 1980 seasons.

DISCLOSURE:

My younger brother, Brad Willis, played on both teams.

1978 District 24 Champions

Coach Lowell Roisum’s first season at the helm was 1971. Wadena won two games that year and five the next, followed by 12, 20, 17, 10 (in 1976 moved to class AA), 10, and 15 (in 1978 moved back to class A) wins in 1978. His 1978 team was loaded with good athletes. The Indians were led by seniors Randy Tappe and Jeff Browne (3-yr starter), and a strong supporting cast of juniors including Dave Hunnicutt and Tom Stinar, plus the sophomore Brad Willis.



Front: (L-R) Tim Wegsheid, Mark Freer, Mark Larson, Craig Wilcox, Jim Heuer, Dan Simmons, Ron Grewe.
 Middle: Phil Theisen, scorekeeper; Randy Tappe, John Burns, Bob Jackson, John Brown, Rod Hanson, Jeff Browne, Dean Hammes, Jim Dull, Mark Wood, team manager.
 Back: Lowell Roisum, coach; Craig Walter, Mark McDonald, Russ Thomson, Brad Willis, Ed Christopherson, Jay Olafson, Dave Hunnicutt, Tom Stinar, Carmen Walter, Charles Luna, assistant coach.

The season started with four consecutive losses but ended with winning 12 of their last 14 games. They finished the regular season at 12-6 with a 7-3 finish in the Mid-State Conference, good for 2nd place. In conference play they lost to Park Rapids twice, split with Staples, and swept conference champs Crosby-Ironton (8-2).

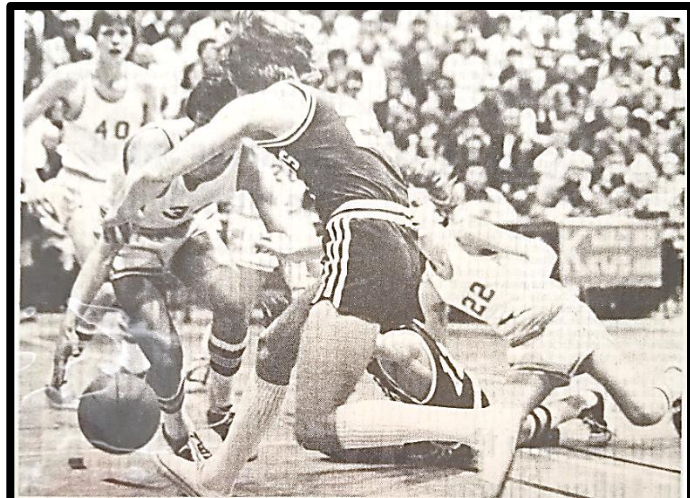


Much like the 1974 squad, this 1978 team was another Roisum quintet with balanced scoring. Browne averaged over 18 ppg, Willis over 13 ppg (w/10 rpg), Stinar over 12 ppg, and Hunnicutt 10 ppg (82%

FT). Browne and Stinar earned All Mid-State Conference honors while Hunnicutt and Willis were honorable mention.

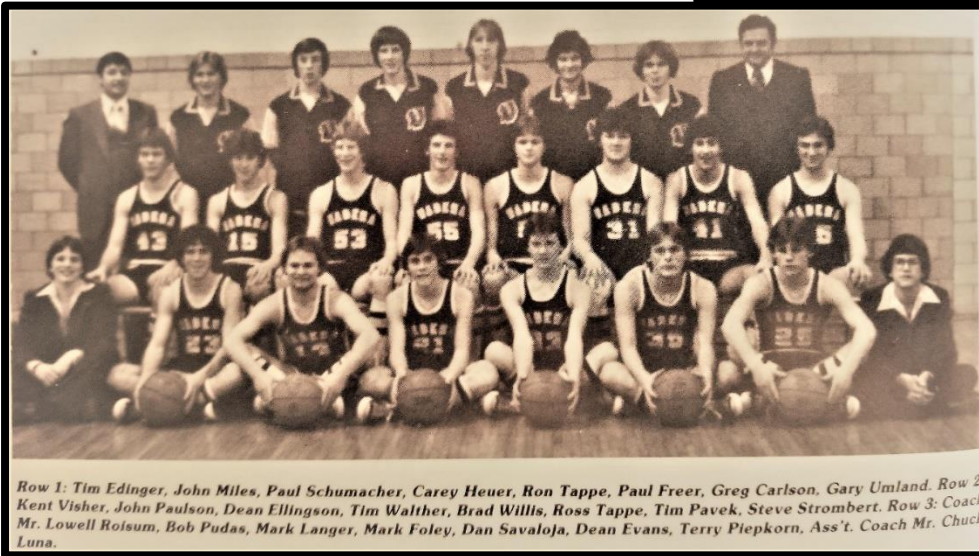
In the District 24 tournament Wadena crushed Backus (81-44) and Pequot Lakes (85-66). Staples defeated Deer Creek and Pine River to set up the perfect District 24 title game. Why “perfect?” Two reasons, Wadena’s biggest rivalry was Staples, and this would be the 1978 season “rubber match” game. Wadena had won 14 of their last 16 games and was not to be denied, winning the district championship for just the 8th time in school history. Willis and Browne scored 15 and 12 points respectively in the 50-47 win.

Wadena would meet Breckenridge in the Region 6 semifinals held at Concordia. The Cowboys defeated Wadena 72-53 late in this season. They were big with three starters over 6'5" and their best player was the coach's kid, Scott Lipp the point guard. The final score was 70-53 in favor of Breckenridge, the eventual Region 6 champions for the second time in three years.



LOOSE BALL SCRAMBLE between Wadena and Breckenridge is about to be joined by Wadena's Jeff Browne (34) and Stan Ekren of Breckenridge (23). Also pictured are Wadena's Brad Willis (40) and Randy Tappe (22).

1980 Mid-State Conference Champions (t)



Row 1: Tim Edinger, John Miles, Paul Schumacher, Carey Heuer, Ron Tappe, Paul Freer, Greg Carlson, Gary Umland. Row 2: Kent Visser, John Paulson, Dean Ellingson, Tim Walther, Brad Willis, Ross Tappe, Tim Pavek, Steve Strombert. Row 3: Coach Mr. Lowell Roisum, Bob Pudas, Mark Langer, Mark Foley, Dan Savaloja, Dean Evans, Terry Piepkorn, Ass't. Coach Mr. Chuck Luna.

The 1979 season fell in between the district (1978) and conference (1980) titles. That team may have been the best of the three during that stretch. No doubt Jeff Browne and Randy Tappe would disagree, and they may be right. The 1978 team was 15-7 with the district title and a 2nd place finish in the conference. The 1979 team was 15-6 and took 2nd place in both the conference and the district tournament. Henning, in a

double OT game, defeated Wadena 55-52 to claim the District 24 title. I was in the Brainerd gym that day and witnessed something rather bizarre. Of course, it was March, aka tournament time, and the weather was beautiful that day, warm enough to melt snow. The snow on the flat gymnasium roof was apparently creating puddles that had nowhere to go, except in one spot. As I recall, the game was in the very early stages when it was suddenly stopped. A leaking roof was detected as water was accumulating on the gym floor near mid-court between the center circle and the sideline out-of-bounds. Clearly a major dilemma for the people in charge. Their solution was to place a pale where one was needed. The players were able to avoid any contact with it, but it was bizarre!

This 1979 team was solid. The sharpshooters were seniors David Hunnicutt (12 ppg-4apg) and Tom Stinar (12 ppg-3 apg). The best athlete was Craig Walter (11 ppg-5 apg), also a senior. Twin towers at 6'5" were senior Ed Christopherson (8 ppg-8 rpg) and junior, Brad Willis (17 ppg-11 rpg).

The fall of 1979 would bring uncertainty to the 1980 season with only one returning starter and a group of others with little varsity experience. As one would hope, throughout the season, the inexperienced team's performance would improve. During the regular season Wadena was involved in three OTs, winning two, and another three games decided by three point or less, losing two. The one win was at home in the 8th game of the season against Staples, 57-54. In game number 16, at Staples, Wadena had to win for any chance at sharing the conference title. A Wadena win and a C-I loss against Aitken would put both teams at 7-3 in the Mid-State Conference. On the night of February 8 that is exactly what happened. Behind a 27-point performance by Brad

Willis, and 10 points each from Kent Visher, John Paulson, Dean Ellingson, and Tim Walther, Wadena prevailed 69-64. At the same time Aitkin was accommodating the Indians with a 50-47 victory over C-I.

The battle over the conference title was as competitive as it had ever been. The only team with a losing record was Park Rapids at 0-10. In game number 3, at home, Wadena needed an overtime to beat the Panthers. In game number 10, at PR, Wadena prevailed in a big way 63-39. Aitkin finished at 6-4 and DL and Staples were each 5-5.

The District 24 tournament changed after the 1975 season. Wadena was moved to class AA for two years and then back to class A. While in the AA class they competed in sub-section 8AA-2 along with the likes of Little Falls, Brainerd, Sauk Rapids, and others. Upon returning to class A and District 24, effective the 1978 season, both C-I and Aitkin had been reassigned to different districts. The only constant in life is change.

This concludes our travels to the WHS district and conference championship teams, from 1900-80. Eight times we won the district title game, 1922, 1923, 1934, 1936, 1943, 1974, and 1978. Those of you with an attention to detail might ask, "Why are there only seven teams listed? Good question. In 1916 Wadena won the district tournament and Zimmerman was our star player. That's all I know.

In 1959 and 1980 Wadena tied for the conference title. In 1974 WHS finished in sole possession of first place.

Thanks for joining me. I will let you know our next destination once I have figured that out.

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