

# The Time Machine

## The 1960's, Woodstock, Vietnam, and McGuire

Article #23

The decade of the 1960's was a much more turbulent time in America than the previous one. Who can forget, "The eastern world, it is exploding...." At 88, Barry McGuire might be thinking the more things change, the more they stay the same. The kids of that era, just like those that preceded them, had big dreams for their post high school life. However, there was an unpopular war that might get in the way as well as a cultural revolution that many were drawn to. The military draft, with its numbering system, could not be ignored. Yet teenage students were busy with being just that and living in the moment.

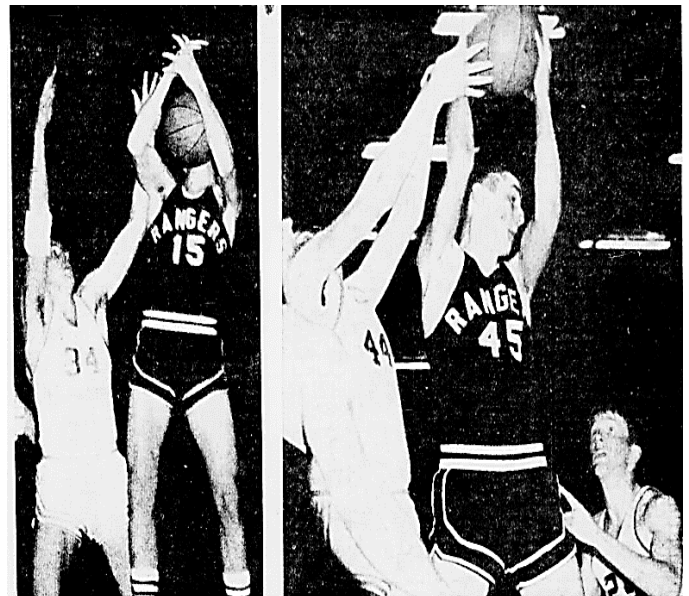
For Wadena high school the ten basketball seasons of the '60s were not very successful, at least at first glance. No district titles, no conference titles, and a record of 81-117. However, with a more in-depth review we can find pockets of success to celebrate. First let's put things into perspective. Wadena and Crosby-Ironton were in both district 24 and the Mid-State conference. Brainerd was also in district 24 and won the title five times in the '60s. In 22 years, their legendary coach Fred Kellett had four trips to the state tournament finishing in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and 1<sup>st</sup> place in 1954. Under Clayton Kermeen, and later Bill Selisker, the Rangers captured eight of ten conference titles and the other five district titles, as well as taking 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the 1969 state tournament. Let's just say the competition was worthy.

I would like to review perhaps the seven most memorable games of the decade. WHS was 3-4 in those games, and all seven were against, you guessed it, Crosby-Ironton or Brainerd. Three in the regular season and four in the tournaments.

In the regular season Wadena played C-I twenty times in the decade, plus four playoff games in the district tournaments. During the 1959 season C-I started what would end up becoming a very long winning streak. You had better sit down before you see the number. C-I's winning streak was of course Wadena's losing streak, 25 games in all, including the four in the tournaments. In that ten-year run, there were opportunities to break the streak sooner, but they did not materialize.

Let's look at some of those opportunities, in chronological order. In the opening round of the 1960 district tournament the 1-17 WHS squad gave the eventual district champs all they could handle in a 45-43 loss. How exciting for the loyal Wadena fans who made the trip to Crosby, expecting certain defeat, only to see their Wadena cagers tied with a minute to go. Wadena's conference leading scorer, Jim Uselman, led the charge only to fall short in what would have been perhaps the biggest upset in Wadena history.

Going into the 1965 district tournament Wadena was 8-10, but a much better team than their record indicated. They played half the season without starters Tony Schiller and Brent Grangruth but were at full strength for the tournament. On their way to the district title game, they upset Brainerd and Little Falls. In the championship game Wadena's leading scorer, senior Don Stoneman (18 ppg) was held to 5 points in a low scoring affair. His teammates, including Larry Schiller and Dave Campbell, stepped up against the Rangers only to fall short 43-42.



**MEN OF THE HOUR** for the Crosby-Ironton Rangers in their District 24 high school basketball journey championship win over Wadena at St. Cloud Friday are shown in these Brainerd Daily Dispatch photos by Collin Swill, but that's the basketball and not Tom Middleton's face as he goes high off the floor while guarded by Tony Schiller (34). Middleton's rebound shot gave C-I a 46-38 victory as the horn sounded. Junior center Don Brady, who hauled in 13 rebounds to lead both teams, picks off one here with Wadena's Chuck Folstead and Dave Campbell looking on. C-I now will meet Alberta, the team it defeated for third place honors a year ago, or Brainerd in the opening game of Tuesday's Region Six tourney at Moorhead, a contest slated for 7:30 p.m. Second semifinal is set Thursday and the title and consolation games Saturday.

Even with the departure of Stoneman and Grangruth, the 1966 season opened with high hopes. The returning cagers were joined by Jerry Fiskum, Francis Plautz, Chuck Folstad, Arlen Damlo, and Mel Pulju. Wadena played the entire season at full strength and finished 12-6. It was their best record since 1959. Two of the losses were to C-I, by a combined 14 points, and one loss to Brainerd by 9. The 1966 tournament was like "deja vue all over again" (thank you

Yogi Berra). Wadena won their quarterfinal game, setting up a rematch victory over Brainerd in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round, on its way to the district title game versus the Rangers, yet again. That game proved to be another low scoring affair that came right down to the wire. With the score knotted at 38 apiece C-I would take a last second shot in an attempt to avoid overtime. And they did, but the shot was missed. Unfortunately, there was still time for an offensive rebound which was put up and in at the buzzer for yet another heartbreaking loss for WHS.

So far, we have revisited three tournament losses to C-I, by a total of five points. I think we need to find a couple of big wins to cheer us up. I left out the details of Wadena's wins over Brainerd in the 1965 and 1966 tournaments. They deserve their own paragraph.

Remember, at the end of the 1965 season WHS was 8-10. BHS was 13-5 and had beaten Wadena twice by a combined margin of 39 points. Going into the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of district play Brainerd must have been looking right over Wadena's shoulder, in anticipation of eventually meeting the Rangers in the title game. Were they ever wrong. Wadena did not beat them in a close game, they dominated the Warriors, 65-46. In 1966 the 18-1 Warriors would not underestimate Wadena this time. Yet Wadena prevailed 50-49 behind a great defensive team effort and a balanced scoring attack led by Campbell, Pulju, and Fiskum. Back-to-back tournament wins against one of the state's strongest programs.

Now we return to that damn Crosby-Ironton program where we can find the last two games I wanted to visit. The 1968 team started three seniors who were their top scorers, Francis Plautz, Daryl Oja, and Dave Stormoen along with juniors Greg Willis and Kip Browne to round out the top five. Off the bench came John Flenner and Jeff Johnson. They finished the season at 8-12. In hindsight I think that maybe a slow and deliberate style of play was not what best suited this fine collection of athletes. I believe an up-tempo style would have been a better fit. We'll never know. In the 4<sup>th</sup> game of the regular season WHS had yet another chance to break hex C-I had over Wadena. Wadena led 56-55 with just seconds remaining. However, C-I had the ball and scored with three ticks left on the clock to win another thriller, 57-56. I am reminded of Cher's hit song, "The Streak Goes On."

Before we make one final, important, stop I would like to acknowledge Wadena's Mid-State All-Conference players of the 1960's.

1960 – Jim Uselman  
1961 – Duane Anderson, John Zosel  
1962 – Jack Dale, Larry Gedde, and Dennis McIntire  
1963 – Lee Overmoen, Tom Fahey, Randy Stofer  
1964 – Steve Sundby, Jim Walz  
1965 – Don Stoneman, Tony Schiller  
1966 – Tony Schiller, Dave Cambell  
1967 – Francis Plautz, Arlen Damlo  
1968 – Francis Plautz, Daryl Oja  
1969 – Kip Browne, Greg Willis

If I have missed anyone, please let me know.



Let's end this emotional "Time Travel" outing on an upbeat note. During the last season of the decade Wadena's first meeting against C-I was on the road. Wadena prevailed 62-55 behind 20 points each from Browne and Willis. The streak had been put to rest! Crosby-Ironton returned the favor later in the season by winning at Wadena, and they went on to be the District 24 and Region 6 champions. In the one-class Minnesota State Tournament the Rangers claimed the third-place trophy.

If you wish to learn more about this decade and the teams, players and coaches go to the WDC website and click on "Athletics/Activities" then scroll down to "Wolverine History" click on "WHS Basketball" and then click on the "1960-80 Scrapbook."

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