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OPINION

A 1959 AMATEUR ATHLETIC FEAT STILL ASTOUNDS TODAY

VIVID BBALL MEMORIES UNLOCK DIFFERENT TIME, DIFFERENT PLACE, SAYS JOHN STEWART



JOHN STEWART
Column



John Stewart

Jerry Love, left and Bob Brock reminisce about their unlikely all-Ontario provincial basketball championship in the first year an Intermediate A champion was crowned.

Sixty years ago this month, a Mississauga team with an incredibly long name did an incredibly surprising thing.

The Township of Toronto Thomson Lumber 7-Up Saints won the inaugural all-Ontario basketball championship for intermediate A teams.

Reminiscing about it six decades later, two of the team's dozen core members can still hardly believe what happened.

My how things have changed since.

In 1959, teams played a two-game total point series to advance from round to round. On their way to the provincial title, the locals won 13, lost two and had a tie. Yes - a tie in basketball.

The team was collated and coached by Jerry Love. He'd refereed high school, university and recreational basketball and knew many of the best players around town.

Sitting in his Lorne Park home, the 87-year-old local sports encyclopedia reminisces with the team's captain, Bob Brock, 85, about how miraculous it all still seems. Details slowly come into focus as they collectively retrieve names, dates and impressions.

"It was a whole different game back then," laughs Brock. "Now they play above the rim - I was never up there."

His most vivid memory

is of the home-and-home series with Sault Ste. Marie. The team took a plane, probably arranged by the owner of their sponsor Thomson Lumber, a business located on what's now the Port Credit GO station.

"We played in a huge air force hangar up there. I was so disoriented at one point that I went up for a shot and realized I was about a mile short of the basket," he laughs. He didn't make any field goals but sank nine free throws in the win.

The team's best two players were Jerry Doucette, an Etobicoke product who spent most of his eight-year CFL career with the Argos (he worked at 7 Up and secured the sponsorship) and Al Brown, who later became principal of T.L. Kennedy Secondary School.

U of T students Bob Miner and Andy Higgins (a legendary Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame track and field coach who died last month) missed the final game, because they were writing exams.

Another season highlight was the disqualification of a player, who jawed inappropriately with a referee. That court justice was rendered by the man

later known as Mr. Justice Monte Harris.

Love and Brock spent the summer of 1956 running a dozen summer sports camps for the township's recreation department. In September, Love was hired full time, joining a staff of 11. He'd stay 35 plus years leaving an indelible mark and a sports sponsorship fund that's still helping children.

Brock taught at Queen Elizabeth Public School for two years - prior to it being rebuilt - then at Allan A Martin and Gordon Graydon, where he coached all-Ontario track champions.

He and his wife rented their first apartment in Iggy Kaneff's first building, a Cooksville sixplex.

The old teammates' memories offer a rear-view reflection of a foundational time for sports and for Mississauga.

How did they do it?

"It was really simple. We all really liked playing together," says Brock. "Plus, we got a free 7 Up at every practice."

John Stewart is a retired longtime journalist with the Mississauga News. His column, My Back Pages, appears each week.