

Dream Team

assists.

“We were locked in. We knew this was it for us, and we wanted to go out with a bang,” Jones said. “We wanted to go out with our names in history. We wanted to go out being known as one of the best teams ever, not in Indiana, but in Marion. Everything that we did, and everything that we wanted to accomplish was for the town of Marion. It was pride for us to put that Marion jersey on. We all went to the games when we were little. We all watched the Marion Giants bust out of that paper ring they were running through.

“We just wanted to keep the tradition up, and we wanted to make sure that we made the city of Marion proud.”

The Giants returned home to face the Muncie Central Bearcats for the NCC title, and it was more of the same. Muncie kept the game close early, but a 13-2 run in the second half helped the Giants take control before eventually winning the contest 79-56.

Marion won their final two regular season contests – a 90-66 win over Indianapolis Chataud and a 76-61 triumph over Fort Wayne Snider – and heading into the tournament, the Giants knew that third straight championship was fully in their grasp.

“It was the desire that no way in the world are we going to lose in this tournament,” Persinger said. “It was the feeling, at least in my mind, that we were all back. There is no reason, if we have every starter back and we won it last year, that we shouldn’t win it this year.

“We wanted to leave no doubt. We felt we were the best team in the United States. We thought we were one of the best teams ever. This was our opportunity.”

Marion, for the third straight season, cruised through the sectional, defeating Elwood 81-57, Mississinewa 66-48, and Oak

Hill 96-60 in the sectional championship. Against the Golden Eagles, Marion shot 60 percent from the floor.

In the regional the following week, the Giants crushed Peru 106-69, scoring 67 points in the second half after a closely contested opening two quarters, before winning the regional title with an 81-70 triumph over Belmont. Edwards scored 31 points against the Braves,

while Keys added 18 points, 10 boards, and six blocks.

Once again, the Giants headed north to the Fort Wayne coliseum, where they would face off against Michigan City Rogers for the fourth consecutive season.

But unlike 1986, where the Giants needed a steal and a free throw from Persinger to earn the victory, Marion put the state of Indiana on notice – nobody was going to beat them.

“In the Michigan City Rogers game, we realized, again, that this team had the ability to beat you,” Brunner said. “The year before, they had to get a steal in the last five seconds to beat them. They had all of their players back. They had D1 players all up and down their roster.

“And the Giants came out that game and absolutely [dismantled them.] That game, when you consider who the competition was, I don’t think Michigan City ever lost that badly. They buried them.”

The game was close in the first half. The Giants led by just five points, 17-12, after the first quarter, and only three points, 35-32, at half-time.

But despite Edwards sitting on the bench due to foul trouble, the Giants, behind Jones, found another gear in the second half.

Jones spearheaded a 19-4

run, scoring 13 points and helping the Giants take a double-digit lead they would not relinquish. Marion shot 63 percent from the floor and outscored the Raiders 60-31 in the eventual 95-63.

“Michigan City Rogers had everybody back too, so it wasn’t like they had lost people the year before,” Persinger said. “We heard a lot about them. We were 1 and 2 all year, and there was

a lot of talk that they were going to get us. That was our opportunity. We wanted to prove something. We felt we were better. We felt we were the best team in the state. We were ready.”

“We were talented, and when you put that talent with focus and hard play, we had another level that other teams couldn’t go to,” Jones added. “Even in the Michigan City game where we blew them out, we just turned it up. From the beginning, we knew what we wanted to go do. We wanted to play them again. We wanted to show them that it wasn’t a fluke, and this time, we were going to beat them worse.”

Against Penn later that night, Marion once again dominated, shooting 60 percent in the first half and holding leads of 24-8 and 50-28 before coming away with a 97-63 triumph.

“[The semi-state] was the validation that this was the Dream Team,” Brunner said. “At the Final Four, [we knew] it was going to be the crowning of the kings. Nobody was going to beat them.”

Brunner turned out to be right.

“We knew we had a chance to really put our mark in history,” Jones said. “When we went into the tournament, before every

game started, we would all get in the huddle and say, ‘Don’t let this be our last game. Let’s play to our ability and go out there and get it done.’ When we got down to state, we hugged and said, ‘This is it. This is our last time. Don’t let this end any other way than the way we wanted it to end.’

Marion’s toughest game in their third championship came in their first state championship contest against Damon Bailey and Bedford New Lawrence. Bailey, the all-time leading scorer in the state, was a freshman averaging 23.7 points and nine rebounds per contest.

The Giants actually trailed after the first quarter, 18-16, but Jones continued where he left off in the semi-state, scoring 14 first-half points to give Marion a 32-30 halftime lead.

Bedford continued to stay right with Marion, trailing just 47-46 after the third quarter, but after a quiet first three period from Edwards, he scored 11 points in the final frame to help the Giants advance to their third straight state championship contest.

An 8-0 run, capped off by a 17-footer from Edwards, put the Giants up 55-47, and Bedford never threatened the Marion lead after that.

“We were focused,” Jones said. “We knew all about the history, but we were focused on just winning and going out the way we wanted to go out. It wasn’t necessarily the three in a row, we just did not want to get beat our last year.”

In the final, Marion faced conference foe Richmond for the second time in three years, and just like in 1985, the ending was the same.

A 13-4 run in the second quarter helped the Giants to grab control, and though Richmond cut their advantage to six with 2:49 to play, Edwards capped off his brilliant high school career with two free throws and two dunks, capping off a 69-56 triumph and helping to etch the Marion Giants into immortality.

“There was obviously a lot of joy and satisfaction,” Persinger said. “Our hard work and effort had paid off. Not only that, we had stayed together as teammates. We accomplished it as one unit together. [We] we put a stamp on a great tradition. We spent a lot of years together. The guys I played basketball with in high school are still my team-

mates. There is still a special bond, and there always will be.”

“It was awesome. It was surreal. We were so happy, and we knew we were going back to Marion for this big parade and people were going to be out,” Jones added. “It was a big deal, and we were just so happy. We were happy for ourselves but we were happy that we were putting Marion on the map.”

In single class basketball, the Giants became only the second team in state history, and the first team since Franklin completed the feat in 1920, 1921, and 1922, to win three straight state championships.

The Dream Team is a staple of Marion. They are interwoven into the community. If you step foot inside the Bill Green Athletic Arena, chances are the teams from 1985, 1986, and 1987 will be discussed.

“Marion was the capital of basketball,” Keeton said. “It was the Marion Giants, and then everybody else. That was the ‘Dream Team,’ because it was like a dream. This is a team that will be talked about as long as they talk about basketball.

“They aren’t going to forget this team.”

...continued from Page 8



HORNER'S
Marion • Fairmount • Alexandria
765-662-6112 • 765-948-4433 • 765-705-4054
www.hornersbutcherblock.com

Special Buy!

Indiana Kitchen
Platter Bacon—\$2.99/lb.

While supplies last

Sav-a-Bundle Meat Packs
A great way to stock up
Place order ASAP • Be prepared

Visit hornersbutcherblock.com
Horner's to Go

This past week has been the longest year!
be nice! • be kind! • be patient!
wash hands! • focus on positives

We are happy to help with food needs
Shop online—pick up order at store



Park Avenue Barber Shop

Celebrating 50 Years in Business

Haircuts—\$11; Retirees—\$10

1652 W Euclid Ave., Marion, IN

765-668-7055

Tue.-Fri. 9 am-5 pm, and Sat. 9 am-1 pm

