

Drought

knocked down, we can move forward, and these young kids out here can see that it is possible.”

Sixty-seven years after the core of Larry Hedden, Dick Smith, Martin Burdette, Bob Roark, Larry Atkinson, and Bob Mitchell won their second straight title, a talented, determined, and hungry group battled through trials and tribulations all season long, and on Saturday night, to finally claim what the Indians’ boys basketball program, and the Gas City community, had so desperately coveted.

“Freshman year – the heartbreaking loss to Marion, sophomore year getting beat by Norwell, junior year getting beat by Norwell, we had to come in with a chip on our shoulder,” senior shooting guard Landen Swanner added. “It means so much. We’ve been

working for this our whole lives. It’s just awesome.”

“It means so much,” fellow senior guard Colin Yoder said. “Our fans are amazing. They are here every game, when they can be, to support us. Just to get the win for our team and the community is awesome.”

Swanner led the way with 16 points in the victory, while Yoder finished with 13 points. Lucas Asbury put together an excellent performance off the bench, scoring six points and adding seven rebounds.

Though the night ended with elation and joy for the Indians, it began with an early nine-point deficit.

The Knights, Luke McBride, specifically, came out firing, knocking down a plethora of tough shots despite strong defense from the Indians.

McBride scored the first five points of the contest, and Norwell opened the game on an 8-0 run, putting the Indians in an early hole. Yoder finally broke the Indians’ scoreless drought with a triple of his own, but two baskets from the Knights increased their advantage to 13-3 with 3:08 to play in the frame.

Mississinewa, however, did not allow the early deficit to faze them. Another basket by Yoder inside, combined with back-to-back make from Swanner cut the Norwell lead to 15-9, before McBride hit his second three at the buzzer to give the Knights an 18-9 advantage.

Between the first and second quarters, Reed, and the Indians, talked about committing to defense, making it hard on Norwell to find open shots or create the looks they found in the opening eight minutes. Their defensive play in the second quarter, especially, helped the Indians get back on the right track.

In total, Mississinewa held Norwell to just five total shots and six points.

“Hands up on defense, block out, rebounding was the main thing. Com-

munication and grit – that’s what we have been preaching most of the whole year,” Yoder said. “We just had to keep pushing, and we would get ours. We got it here tonight.”

“We knew we would be fine. We just needed to continue to play our game,” Asbury added. “We locked them up, and we came out ahead.”

While the Indians’ defense found their rhythm, it was Lucas Asbury that provided the offensive spark, and confidence, that Mississinewa needed. Asbury scored the Indians’ first points of the quarter, cutting their deficit to 18-11, before knocking down a crucial three with 5:27 to play in the first half to cut the lead to five.

“For him to hit that shot, I’m sure our crowd was excited, but our bench was even more excited,” Reed said. “The defense that he played, the rebounding effort...he has worked all year to have that role, and it was so huge to put him in at that moment and for him to produce for us.”

“He was getting to the rim, he was getting every rebound, and he was playing super physical,” Swanner added. “He got us going.”

Asbury’s triple sparked a 7-3 run, as a pair of

buckets from Swanner, a rebound basket from Jalen Detherage, and a free throw from Asbury made it a 24-23 Norwell lead at the halftime break.

After falling behind 13-3 in the opening stanza, the Indians outscored the Knights 20-11 the rest of the first half.

“Usually, we have that one quarter where we don’t have a great start or a great finish,” Swanner said. But we were able to get through their run.”

Yoder, one of the Indians’ most tenacious defenders, found his offensive game early the third quarter, scoring back-to-back baskets to give Mississinewa their first lead of the evening at 27-24.

McBride helped the Knights to take the lead back briefly at 32-31 with 3:01 to play in the period, but Swanner and Hayden Ulerick each scored in the final 1:34 to give the Indians a 35-32 advantage heading into the fourth quarter.

Armed with the lead, the Indians would not relinquish it again. A put-back from Tai McClung put the Indians up by three, and Swanner followed with a triple to increase Mississinewa’s advantage to 40-34.

In the final 1:03 of the contest, the Indians

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knocked down five of their final six free throws, including a pair from Ulerick with 4.4 to play. Norwell’s final shot careened harmlessly off the glass, and the community of Gas City was sent into a long-awaited, well-deserved frenzy.

Tears were shed, hugs were exchanged, and for the first time since 1954, the Indians climbed the ladder to claim their piece of basketball twine, a longstanding tradition in Indiana that represents, and signifies, a champion.

And for many, both players and community members, it’s a dream come to fruition.

“I can’t put it into words,” Asbury said. “67 years – it’s just an unbelievable feeling. And the fact that we did it together, and on our home court, is just amazing.”

The Indians will travel to New Castle this coming weekend, where they will face off against Leo in the second regional semifinal.

“The goal was never just sectionals,” Reed said. “The goal was to win sectional, win regionals, and find out who can play with us. We are still on that path. We are going to enjoy this, but on Monday, we are going to come back in, fresh and ready, and give it another week.”

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Deaths

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Mary Virginia Bothwell
1928-2021

A private graveside service will be held at Grant Memorial Park.

Mary Alice Ancil
1940-2021

Funeral services were held at Needham-Storey-Wampner, Storey Chapel, on Wednesday, March 10 at 1 pm. Burial followed at Grant Memorial Park.

Charles F. “Barney” Barnhart
1935-2021

Funeral services were held at Armes-Hunt Funeral Home, Fairmount, on Friday, March 5 at 2 pm. Burial followed at Park Cemetery.

David M. Gerdes
1955-2021

In accordance with Gerdes’ wishes, cremation will take place.

William D. “Bill” Horn
1963-2021

There will no visitation or funeral services, and cremation will take place.

Jack David Poole
1955-2021

Funeral services were held at Raven-Choate Funeral Home, Marion, on Friday, March 5 at 1 p.m. Burial followed at Gardens of Memory.

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