

Gary Alexander and Coach Kincaid look back on the 1989 state competition

By Dominik Stallings

Tuscola last went to the state basketball competition 33 years ago in 1989. Back then, there were a lot of differences. There were fewer classes and small schools like Tuscola would compete against larger schools.

Some things that haven't changed is the feeling of going to state, standing on the court of a large arena and even the way teams need to come together to succeed.

Superintendent Gary Alexander was one of the players on the court 33 years ago.

"It was exciting just because we were playing at the U of I basketball court," said Alexander. "Back then, the basketball team was really good. You knew the names on the lockers. As an 18-year-old kid, it was exciting."

Alexander said he and his team were there for a reason. They were very focused on playing their best.

"My favorite part about being on the team was being with the guys I grew up with. We played for one another. Kind of like this year's team," said Alexander. "What I saw from sitting in the stands, was that they didn't care who scored, didn't care about newspaper recognition, they just wanted

to get together and play and win games."

The Warriors ended up winning third place in the 2022-2023 1A state competition.

Alexander noted that there were a few more similarities from 30 years ago. In the 2021-2022 season, the Warriors lost in the Super-Sectional. The Warriors also lost the Super-Sectional in 1988, a year before going to state.

"It's just weird how things are similar, but I finally got my medal," said Alexander. As superintendent, he received a medal this year along with the coaches.

Alexander's favorite memories from his season weren't at state; they were from the super-sectional game. In 1989, the Warriors were down by 18 points in the fourth quarter, but they ended up bouncing back and won by two points.

"It was pretty exciting and we probably shouldn't have won, but we went out and did," said Alexander.

The Warriors sectional game in Altamont will likely be an excellent memory for many of the players and parents who attended with the Warriors going into a fourth overtime and eventually beating the Altamont Indians.

Alexander learned a lot of different things from his time in athletics.

"It taught me commitment. Sports teaches you how to work with one another. Everything is not fair. You win, and you lose. How you pick yourself up from losses is what makes you better. It teaches you so many different lessons. You will not always be the best and that is OK," said Alexander.

"Not only our boy's team, but our girl's team had a wonderful year. I just found out the Science Olympiad made it to state. Grease is going on right now; we have a ton of kids in that," said Alexander. "I appreciate that, and the community, and the support they get from the schools. We have good kids. They will make mistakes, but that's why they're kids. We have great kids and the community and the parents have a lot to do with that."

As the superintendent, he realized how much work went into sending the Warriors to state this year, and found a lot of appreciation for Mike Damer and his staff for all the work that they did in his day (Damer was principal in 1989). Alexander himself spent all day on Tuesday March 7, preparing for the state games.

"They had the tenacity that



SUPERINTENDENT GARY ALEXANDER, left, at the state playoffs, played for Coach Kerry Kincaid, right, in a 1980s yearbook photo, the first time Tuscola boys' basketball went to the Assembly Hall (now State Farm Center).

they showed as a group and listened to coach Bozarth. Coach and his staff did a wonderful job of keeping them engaged. They stayed together. They didn't point fingers. They trusted one another and their coaches," said Alexander.

Alexander found a lot of appreciation for his coach back in 1989, Coach Kerry Kincaid.

"I appreciated Coach Kincaid more today than I ever did. Coach Kincaid was a great coach and he held high expectations for us. He did a great job of putting us in situations

that allowed us to win," said Alexander.

When Alexander was fighting cancer, Coach Kincaid sent him a card with an article from the News-Gazette about Alexander.

"It wasn't about basketball. It was about relationships. At 18, you don't understand that," said Alexander.

"I loved playing for him. He wanted what was best for us."

Kincaid was head coach for 11 years and coached basketball for 18 years and volleyball for 17. Unfortunately, Kincaid

was unable to see both games and only saw the first game for a little bit.

However, he understands the difficulties the students face when they play for the first time in such a large arena.

"The backdrop is so much more different, it takes a bit for kids to get used to," said Kincaid.

He said he doesn't see a lot of the kids back from his coaching years. "But when I see them, it's good to talk with them," said Kincaid.

Kincaid said that he wasn't surprised when a lot of the kids he coached found success later in life. "They had good work ethic in basketball. They were pretty successful. You know that would carry over into the real world, so to speak," said Kincaid.

While he wants his kids to cherish the memories they made in sports, he also wants his kids to realize that there are many more things to experience later in life.

"I said this many times when I had good teams. Don't let this be the highlight of your life. You have a lot of things to look forward to. But there are a lot of good things to look back on and cherish," said Kincaid.

Celebrating a basketball season for the ages

By Mike Carroll

Records fell as this year's TCHS basketball program—girls and boys—created 63 wins against only 9 losses.

Justin Bozarth's boy's program (31-7) finished third place in the State tournament, the furthest any TCHS basketball team has advanced. Only one other Tuscola team has made it to the Assembly Hall: Kerry Kincaid's great 88-89 team which made it to the final eight. Tim Kohlbecker's powerful girl's program (32-2) won 28 games in a row, also a school record, as was their total wins.

Sixty-three wins in one season!!! That's a lot of wins for kids to celebrate and fans to cheer for. Such success creates role models for younger kids who are inspired by today's players. And it creates priceless memories for the players, not to mention lifelong friendships as well as invaluable life lessons.

I know about being inspired because that's what I was as a youngster. I remember in the late 50s shooting free throws on Christmas Eve at the old North Ward—two North Wards removed from today's school—with Jim Bailey. I shot at the basket on the playground—just an old rim without net on a rickety backboard; Jim shot them on a basket attached to a tree next to the ball diamond across the street from where Shorty Moran lived.

We were competing to see who would be the first to make 500 free throws, yelling out our running total as we chased the ball after each shot, trying to stay warm in the winter chill.

Looking back, it now seems a little dumb. But, at the time, we had dreams. Our heroes were athletes. My basketball idols at the time were Governor Vaughn at the Univ. of Illinois and Tom Mercer and Dave Thode at the high school. I wanted to grow up to be as good as them.

My high school basketball teammate, Bill Englehardt, remembers shooting outside in all kinds of weather to get better. He remembers shooting at his house on Buckner Street and behind Mike Moore's house, in the rocky alley, where you had to pick debris out of your leg when you fell down or dove for a ball. His heroes were TCHS's Ed Alexander and Bob Wyatt.

We both remember being inspired by others that played before us, then discovering, later in life, people saying they had been inspired by us. That's the way it works, sort of a hand-me-down tradition of being one small part of a larger tradition. These teams need to know that they have now become forever linked in our long black and gold chain of athletic excellence.

To Bill and me, the memories and friendships created



MIKE CARROLL, LEFT, and Bill Englehardt recount what Tuscola basketball means to them.

by this shared experience are life-long. To this day, we are close to all our teammates and just as close to those we played against. And we're talking almost 60 years ago.

The point is that we participated, just jumped in and gave it our best, and in that shared enterprise we

created a special bond with others. People who have experienced a shared enterprise—be it something as innocent as putting on a play or as deadly as a joint military exercise—where success depends upon hard work, selfless teamwork, discipline and sacrifice—know it's spe-

cial. They realize they have never felt more whole, more belonging, than when they were part of something worthy and bigger than themselves. I hope current players will find that their hard work and joint effort yields similar lifelong, life-enriching benefits.

And then there are the life lessons, perhaps the greatest justification for sports being a part of any well-rounded educational program. For one thing, sports reinforce the notion that hard work yields results. There's almost a one-to-one correlation between work input creating enhanced performance outcome.

Plus the success of selfless teamwork—putting the team and others ahead of one's selfish interests—creates the kind of invaluable citizen that society wants, that families need and that God calls us to be.

Even learning to lose is invaluable. Being part of a painful loss, and/or individually making a mistake that hurts the team or might embarrass you in front of others, always hurts. I'd like to say it goes away, but I still wince when I think of my personal goofs and

painful team losses that happened decades ago.

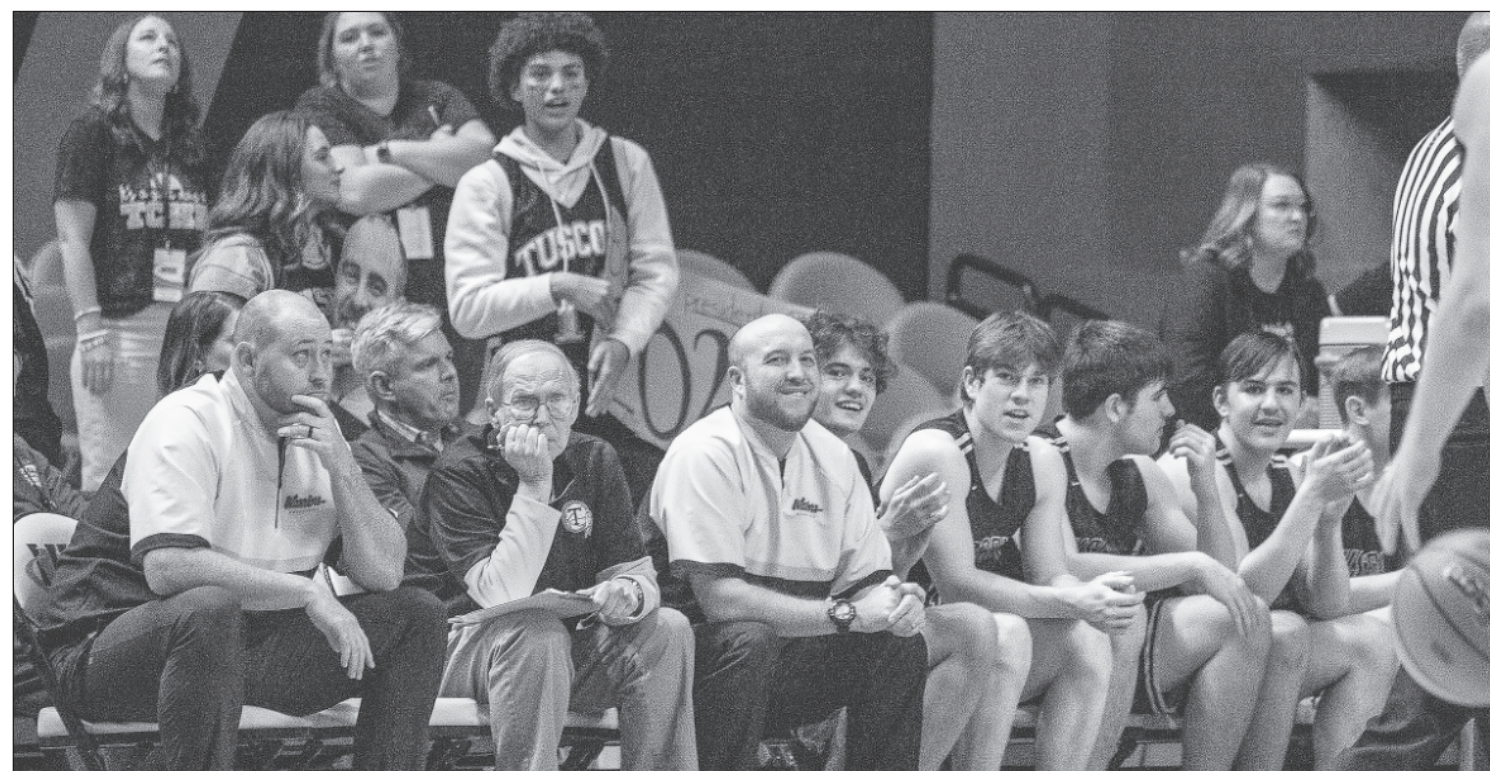
However, as former TCHS great Dick Helm ('51) says of God—God turns all evil to good—I add that life can turn all loss to gain. In my case, learning to deal with sports losses at an early age helped me deal with larger losses later in life.

Though players today might not realize it now, their painful disappointment now will later promote maturity and create coping skills that help deal with future tragedy.

Great coaches, teachers and administrators know of all these benefits and that's why, despite as much as they want to win, they want even more for their young charges to become fantastic grown ups: mature, caring and helpful; giving and selfless; dedicated and loyal; courageous fighters.

Tuscola has such folks in charge today and we are all the better for it. Thank you all for the memories and thrills and for giving us oldsters hope that our future rests in good hands.

mike carroll (with an assist from Bill Englehardt)



ASSISTANT COACHES Jacob Hilgendorf, Bob Taylor and Chase Reedy sit on the bench with varying emotions during the second game of the state competition March 9 with players Jackson Barrett, Colton Musgrave, and Andrew Spillman. Photo by Dominik Stallings.

2023 Tuscola Warriors

Coach: Justin Bozarth

No.	Name	Position	Height	Weight	Grade
Starters					
3	Kam Sweetnam	G	5-8	135	So.
5	Josiah Hortin	G	5-9	130	Jr.
15	Parker James	F	6-3	165	So.
23	Jordan Quinn	F	6-3	180	Jr.
55	Chris Boyd	C	6-2	230	Sr.
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4	Hunter Branca	G	5-8	135	So.
10	Colton Musgrave	G	6-0	180	Sr.
11	Jackson Barrett	G	6-0	150	Jr.
12	Logan Kurtz	G	5-10	145	Fr.
20	Andrew Spillman	F	6-0	190	So.
25	Boston Broady	F	6-1	180	Sr.
45	Sawyer Woodard	C	6-4	215	So.