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Posted on Fri, Jan. 13, 2006

1961 Trojans stir up memories of unmatched feat

BOYS BASKETBALL: Duluth Central is marking the 45th anniversary of its first state title with a dedication Saturda

BY RICK WEEGMAN

NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Terry Kunze's basketball travels included four years at the University of Minnesota, an NBA career with the St. Louis-Atlanta Hawks, an ABA stop with the Minnesota Muskies and a long career in Europe.

Despite all those wonderful memories, Kunze says nothing compares to when his Duluth Central team won the 1961 Minnesota high school boys state championship.

"Basketball is something you always remember," Kunze said earlier this week. "Of all the basketball I ever played, (the 1961 title) stands out.

"For that time of my life it was so important. It was unbelievable to win. I just really wanted to win the state tournament."

Those memories are sure to flood back Saturday when 10 members of that team and coach Jim Hastings are expected to be in attendance for Central's home game against Bemidji -- the same team it edged 51-50 for the one-class title 45 years ago.

Players and coaches are donating an enlarged team picture -- complete with engraved team results down the side of the frame -- to the Central High School Heritage Committee. The picture then will be displayed outside the school's gymnasium.

The Trojans went 27-0 that year to win the first of their three state titles. Hastings' teams also won in 1971 and 1979, while the 1986 team finished second.

But the 1961 team is the only time a Duluth school finished the season undefeated.

"It's very special," said Hastings, who coached for 31 years at Central. "They achieved something that nobody has ever achieved here in Duluth. It never happened before and who knows if it'll ever happen again."

Hastings splits his time between Superior and Grand Marais these days, while still working in public relations for Como Oil. But several others no longer reside in the Twin Ports area and only get to see their classmates at reunions.

That includes Kunze, who runs an independent insurance agency in Brooklyn Center, Minn. After his playing days, Kunze coached at several levels, including head coach at Mora High School, an assistant at Minnesota and head coach of the Minnesota Fillies of the first women's professional league. Kunze says that passion was fueled by Hastings.

"Jim was a real big influence on me," he said. "We were scared to death playing for him. More than anybody else, he made me want to play."

Roger Hanson was Kunze's backcourt mate and later a standout at Minnesota Duluth. Hanson, who works at Swenson Anderson Financial Group, is organizing Saturday's activities.

"I've had a lot of people mention that team, including coaches from other teams, who say that the guard tandem of Kunze and Hanson was the best they ever saw in the state of Minnesota," Hastings said.

The talent pool was deep on that team. Chet Anderson, a sophomore in 1961, went on to play football at Minnesota and later in the NFL, while Dan Howard played baseball for the Gophers.

"I don't think anyone's had four kids that went on to play at another level like that team did," Hanson said.

STAT OF THE WEEK

Mountain Iron-Buhl junior guard D.J. Winfield scored 29 points Tuesday night in an 80-79 victory over AlBrook to give him 1,009 for his career.

Winfield's exploits helped keep the Class A third-ranked Rangers unbeaten at 10-0 heading into tonight's game at Chisholm. MIB travels to fellow unbeaten Virginia on Tuesday.

RICK WEEGMAN covers prep sports for the News Tribune. He can be reached at (218) 723-5302, (800) 456-8181 or e-mailed at rweegman@duluthnews.com

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