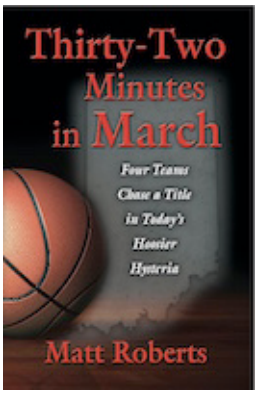
Thirty-Two Minutes in March

Four Teams Chase a Title in Today's Hoosier Hysteria

Matt Roberts



Since 1911, movies, books, and popular culture have romanticized Indiana high school basketball. But most of these versions are trapped in a time warp that ends in 1960. Thirty-Two Minutes in March takes the reader on a journey through today's Hoosier Hysteria, providing a frank and up-close view of four diverse basketball programs battling in pursuit of one goal - to play thirty-two minutes in March for the Indiana state championship.

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Chapter I - Introduction
Center Grove High School Trojans

The Road Less Traveled

"Did you see anything to *like* out there?"

It's November 10, 2014 and the Center Grove boys' basketball tryouts are underway. Coach Zach Hahn is running his first official practice as a head coach.

Most of the hundred-or-so kids in the gym won't be getting a Center Grove basketball jersey unless they buy one. Drills expose bad shooting form, slow-footedness, and lack of coordination or strength from players destined to be cut. But Hahn knows every minute of practice time is precious, and he cajoles, comments, and claps with mid-season effort. During a full court drill, he suddenly blasts his whistle.

"We've got six made shots and five turnovers". As he passes assistant coach Kevin Stuckmeyer, he says "We've got a long way to go, Coach. A long way."

Hahn watches the players intently, pacing, clapping, goading players to get on the floor after loose balls. You wouldn't necessarily pick Hahn out of a crowd as a former NCAA Division 1 basketball player. He's not much more than six feet tall, with an average build. You'd maybe spot him as a middle infielder in baseball, a hands guy who hits for average.

But as he paces the floor, he walks with the bent knees and slightly crouched lope of a guy who spent thousands of hours bent at the waist, guarding quicker, stronger players through effort and determination.

*****

Hahn lived a Hoosier boys' basketball dream. He grew up in New Castle and played his high school ball for the New Castle Trojans. His home games were held in the largest high school gym in the U.S. – Chrysler Arena, with over nine thousand seats. The Trojans were led by long-time New Castle coach Steve Bennett, who first noticed the spindly guard in middle school.

"I heard about him in the Optimist League," Bennett says. "He wasn't very quick on defense, but he was really quick with the ball because he had such good handles. He never rested. He'd take advantage of people resting (on the court) all the time.

"As a freshman he played a little bit. But when he was a sophomore, I basically handed him the keys to the team for the next three years."

When Hahn was a sophomore in 2005, the Trojans went to the final eight in the Class 3A state tournament before falling to Indianapolis Roncalli. One of his teammates was current New Castle coach Dan Cox.

"We knew him coming up through the system that he was going to be a player," Cox says. "I think he may have been even better than people thought. He wasn't all that athletic, or all that strong. But he was smart and could really shoot.

"In the first quarter of the elite eight game, I think he scored fifteen points. And he went for thirty or thirty-two against Marion (during the season). He played really well on the big stage."

The year after Cox graduated, Hahn and his teammates won the Class 3A state championship, 51-43, against Jay County. Bennett remembers a turning point late in the season

"We had lost three games in a row. And I basically told him 'I don't care if there are two guys on you; you gotta find a way to win the game'. He did and we never lost again (that year).

"He was happy as he could be as long as we won. Losing disgusts him."

Bennett loved his point guard's will to win. But he was amazed by his competitiveness and toughness.

"One game we were playing at Logansport, and he really got nailed. His lip got stuck in his braces and you could see the braces all the way through his lip. He just pulled it out; and on the next three baskets he either made the shot or assisted. I can't tell you how many times he was sick and played. He never took time off. He was relentless."

After Hahn graduated, he went on to play in two NCAA championship games for Butler University in Indianapolis. He didn't get many minutes in those games, but his will to compete never waned.

"(Butler player) Matt Howard told me that all of the open gyms at Butler were heated because of Zach," Bennett says.

"It didn't matter to him (that it was just an open gym). He wanted to win.

"He's such a competitor. A lot of guys like to compete, but they don't like guys competing against them. With Zach, the more you compete, the better he likes it."

*****

At the end of Center Grove's practice, Hahn calls over point guard Anderson McCoy.

"How do you think practice went?"

McCoy shifts his weight back and forth, sweating, still animated and breathing hard from sprints, looking around, calibrating his response.

"Not too good."

"I don't think so, either," Hahn says, putting his hand on McCoy's shoulder. "You got to realize they're going to follow *you*. It's not what Mike (Benkert) does, it's not what Sam (Hendershot) does, it's what you do, OK?"

McCoy nods, says "OK", and runs to the locker room.

Hahn is not impressed with the team's focus or intensity. He had to spend more time than he would like on defensive positioning fundamentals. For the past several years, the Trojans played a match-up zone under former coach Cliff Hawkins. Hahn wants to play mostly man defense. For the past three seasons, Hahn was an assistant to veteran Indiana high school coach Mark James at Ben Davis. He's heard that Center Grove practices were essentially scrimmages with little

attention to skill development or teaching basketball fundamentals.

Prior to the season, Hahn will ask the players what their goals are for the team. “Do they want to just run around and have fun playing basketball, or do they want to achieve something?”

What if their answer is the first one? Hahn allows himself a tight smile.

“Then we’ll talk about *my* goals.”

Danville Community High School Warriors

The Barber Shop

If you drive west of Indianapolis on U.S. Highway 36, and it’s not between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., you’re going to run into traffic. If it’s rush hour on a weekday or anytime on a Saturday afternoon, it’s like the entire highway is blocked by a parade route or bike race. You can sit there for an hour, squirming, fidgeting with the radio, trying to figure out a way around the blockade.

And you don’t break free by leaving Marion County, either. At the Hendricks County line you enter the maw of Avon, indistinguishable from suburban Indianapolis. Miles upon miles of strip malls, fast food outlets, big box stores, gas stations and grocers. But if you can get past State Road 267**,** which takes you north to Brownsburg or south to Plainfield, the scenery changes to rolling hills, housing tracts with minimal density, and the odd lumber store or furniture outlet.

After six miles, you start the slow grade up a hill to the town square of Danville.

The Hendricks County courthouse stands in the middle of the square surrounded by title companies, county offices and a few local restaurants. On the north side of the square, The Mayberry Café packs them in on Friday nights, showing *The Andy Griffith Show* episodes on a continuous loop while serving up Indiana comfort food like fried chicken and meatloaf.

Brian Barber has served as head coach at Danville since 1999. In that season he won the school's first sectional title since 1964, and went on to win the Regional. To be fair, that was only the third year of class basketball in Indiana. But in the prior year, the Warriors had managed a record of only 8-13. Since then, Danville has won another Regional (in 2010) and five more sectional titles. Barber has suffered only one losing season at Danville.

In early November Barber, his staff, and the team are in the locker room, watching video of the prior day's practice. The assistant coaches stand in back, arms folded, watching the screen and the players. It's a cramped space, with players seated in folding chairs in front of a big projection screen, eyes glued to the silent images as Barber quietly provides commentary.

"Stop tippy-toeing….don't be tentative….we gotta be aggressive….a zone is a mental defense, make them think something's open when it's not…."

After the players watch the video, they go out to the floor and stretch, then start length-of-the-floor dribbling drills, two-on-ones, eight-on-five, practicing outlet passes.

Barber is not a screamer, but he's serious and focused during practice. In the empty gym he doesn't have to shout to get his points across. He says "Stop" and the players stop, turn and look. The only noise is their panting.

"Challenge yourselves to be perfect in these drills. That's how you get it done."

The team moves into full court four-on-four with players allowed only one dribble. It's a good tool to teach movement without the ball and spacing. But after several trips the players are gasping for air. Barber eventually sees a lack of effort. He stops them again. This time, there's more annoyance in his voice.

"The same guys loafing out here now are going to be the ones bitching when I take you out. And your parents are going to be sitting there with their arms folded saying 'Why is he taking him out?'"

*****

Barber played his high school basketball at Avon but, by his own admission, wasn't a great player. He played some JV as a junior**,** then as a senior got to play a few varsity games with his younger brother Greg, who now serves as an assistant coach at Danville.

"I've known I wanted to be a coach since eighth grade," he says. "My eighth grade coach, John Disney, taught

science, and I had lunch right after that. But I'd stay after class all the time and talk about basketball and coaching. I probably drove him crazy.

"When I was in college, Tates Locke was the head coach (at Indiana State). I had him in a coaching class, and he'd let me come to practices and watch. I learned a lot from him. He's a very good practice coach. And towards the end of college I coached junior high at Riverton Parke."

After two years, Barber was hired as the Riverton Parke varsity coach at the age of 26. He took over a team that was 0-21 the prior year and posted a 13-8 record.

"Our first game was against Turkey Run in the Banks of the Wabash tournament. We beat them, but they had an open 18-footer from the corner. If the kid makes that shot at the buzzer we lose, but he didn't. We were 1-0 and you'd have thought we just won a sectional.

"I often wonder, though, if that kid makes that shot and we lose, are the kids like 'Here we go again'? So we started out 5-1 that year and it just kind of snowballed. When you look back on it, there are two or three things every year where you either move forward as a group or move back. I just wonder.... if that shot goes in, where do we go from there?

"We went 13-8 that first year, then 14-5, and the next year we made it to the final game of the sectional. But I was frustrated. I was having trouble getting guys to open gyms over the summer. If they would have been showing up for workouts, I don't know if I would have left.

"I had a chance to help out at a couple of small colleges, and I could have stayed at RP. But I knew the principal (at Danville) real well and I interviewed for the job and ended up taking it. I thought I'd be here a few years and move on. But I've been here 16 years now. Hard to believe.

"I like the kids here, like the community."

Barber's thoughts turn to this team, this season, and this year's challenges. He speaks quietly in the empty gym under a banner that reads "The Barber Shop".

"We have to get tougher. But I guess every coach says that.

"I just don't know if we're tough enough."

Rockville High School Rox

"Tradition Never Graduates"

If you turn left out of the Danville High School parking lot, head west on U.S. 36 and drive for 55 miles, you end up at the Illinois state line. Ten minutes before that, you'll pass through Rockville, Indiana, the Parke County seat.

Along the way you'll drive through farm land and one-stop-light towns. U.S. 36 cuts through the middle of Rockville on the north side of the town square, and traffic slows to Avon speed and worse for two weeks in October. That's when the Parke County Covered Bridge Festival blankets the area like an occupying army, selling out the small family owned hotels and crowding the restaurants.

For two weeks, fall smells like popcorn, grilled ribeye, cinnamon, and apple butter. The courthouse lawn is smothered with rented canopies, housing vendors selling apple butter, raw honey, customized wall decals, wood carvings, painted saw blades, bird houses, Christmas ornaments and rock candy. People come from as far as Chicago to buy cattails spray-painted gold or silver.

And the tourists leave plenty of gold and silver behind. It's impossible to get an accurate tally of the money spent since there's so much activity at the yard sales, food vendors, and corn mazes on private property leading into town. But various estimates of visitor traffic by Purdue University and local officials run between one and two million people for the ten-day event.

All the tourist traffic provides a major boost to the struggling local economy. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Parke County reported the seventeenth lowest median income of Indiana's 92 counties. In 2012, more than half of all Parke County schoolkids were receiving free or reduced-price lunches.

After the manic bustle and snarled traffic of October, the out-of-town vendors leave, county employees repair the damage to the courthouse grounds and Rockville returns to its regular station in life: a small Indiana town living life one day at a time.

*****

Rockville head coach Ryan Luce didn't come to Parke County to coach basketball. He played in high school at South

Vermillion, about halfway between Rockville and Terre Haute. He won a scholarship to the University of Southern Indiana, where the head coach was current Auburn University coach Bruce Pearl. His career was cut short in his junior year when he suffered injuries to his knee and ankle. After that, he started thinking about coaching as a career.

"In Evansville we had a program where you'd go to six different schools just to see different aspects of education.

"During the summer we used to referee youth basketball to make money. Somebody said 'Hey, we need somebody to coach a team on another floor', so I got into it from there."

After college, Luce took a teaching position at South Vermillion and got the head coach's job at age 23, replacing Dave Mahurin. His first team went 1-21, followed by teams that were 9-14, 12-10, and 8-15. After the first seven games of the 2006-2007 season, he left his alma mater to take the athletic director's position at Rockville

"I had no intention of coaching when I came to Rockville. I came here as an athletic director and assistant principal when my uncle (the prior AD) passed away.

"Then our girls' varsity coach left four days before the first game. I was the only one on staff who was willing and had the experience to do it."

Luce coached the girls for two seasons, and then joined the boys' varsity staff as an assistant.

In 2003, Mahurin became head coach at Rockville. His two sons, R.J. and Lane, were mainstays of Rockville teams

that went 165-81, won five sectionals, two regionals, and made it to the state finals in 2012.

“Then kind of the same thing happened with Coach Mahurin,” Luce says. “He had coached the team all summer and late in September he decided he didn’t want to do it anymore. I think he had coached his kids for eight years straight and he didn’t have a lot of fun over the summer.”

Mahurin took the rest of the year off to watch his sons play college basketball at Indiana Wesleyan. R.J. Mahurin played his first three years at Indiana State in Terre Haute. In 2012-2013, he started 25 games for the Division I Sycamores. But R.J. left Indiana State to play his final college season with his brother Lane at Indiana Wesleyan. They ended the 2013-2014 season with an NAIA Division II national championship.

“He (Dave Mahurin) probably caught almost all of the home games, and he went on the road with them all the time,” Luce says. “I think he really wanted to watch his sons play that last year together. I think he made the right decision for him.”

After graduating college, R.J. took a job with a local bank and is an assistant coach at Rockville. He still doesn’t look like he has to shave every day. As he jokes with the players and walks around the floor in street shoes, you could almost picture him as a high school senior. Married now with a baby on the way, he’s not in any particular hurry to get into the grind of coaching. He had an opportunity to play professionally overseas, but eventually decided to come back to Rockville.

R.J. looks out onto the floor as the players scrimmage in the old brick and wood elementary school gym. Banners commemorating county championships won by pre-war era teams hang alongside team photos from the 1930s and 40s. There is a huge wall hanging on the visitor's side of the bleachers that reminds the players "Tradition Never Graduates".

"You know," R.J. says, "I got the chance to do a lot of neat things. But nothing beat playing here."

Crispus Attucks Medical Magnet High School Flying Tigers

#NoNames

Crispus Attucks Medical Magnet High School convenes in a building constructed in 1927. The campus is tucked into a corner of downtown Indianapolis, wedged between the Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis and a hospital complex. Due to declining enrollment, it was closed as a high school in 1986 and used as a middle school. In 2006, it re-opened as a magnet school within the Indianapolis Public Schools system.

Prior to 1927, black students in Indianapolis attended one of three high schools; Shortridge, Manual, or Tech. But with the rising influence of the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, the school

board elected to segregate the secondary schools and created a new high school for blacks only. [1]

When the board opened the new school, they chose to name it Thomas Jefferson High School. In his book "Hail to the Green, Hail to the Gold", Dr. Stanley Warren describes the reaction of the black community to naming a school for African-Americans after a white slaveholder:

"Controversy over the name and the method for choosing it erupted immediately. Soon after the name was announced, a petition from several noteworthy black citizens objecting to the name was received by the Board. The list was impressive. The Board recognized the tenuous nature of their position and the resolve of the petitioners…"

"After dealing with several pieces of correspondence about the issue and conferring with the 'Colored P.T.A.,' the Board changed the name of the school to Crispus Attucks High School."

Despite operating as a magnet school, the student body remains 67% African-American, at least partly due to the school's history and location. Another 27% of the students identify as either Hispanic or multi-racial.

Led by Hall-of-Famer Oscar Robertson, Attucks won the first of two consecutive state championships in 1955. In those days, state champions were allowed to hold a victory parade around the War Memorial monument in the center of

[1] "Hail to the Green, Hail to the Gold", Stanley Warren, Ed.D and IPS Crispus Attucks Museum., 1998 Donning Company Publishers

downtown Indianapolis. According to newspaper accounts at the time, the city declined the opportunity to Attucks due to concerns about rioting.

Attucks assistant coach Tommie Davis was a student at Attucks in the 1950s. He says that he's already called Indianapolis mayor Greg Ballard and demanded that Attucks be allowed their ride around the circle if they win state in 2015.

Head coach Phil Washington conducts his practices in a gym seating fewer than 2,000 fans. He's forced to schedule around girls, junior high and grade school games and practices.

The Attucks weight room is a floor above the court with a few universal machines and free weights. There is no shooting gun that returns balls to players practicing jump shots. No weighted basketballs for ball-handling drills. No second gym to warm up in before games while the junior varsity is playing.

"I've got seven basketballs to practice with," he says quietly. "On a good day."

Despite the lack of resources, Washington doesn't make excuses.

"I told them on Saturday, the weather is bad….. but whatever gym time we do get, we have to appreciate it. When we play on Friday night if we don't show up, nobody's going to say 'Well, if they had practice time, or if they had more balls to practice with…'

"I tell the kids, I want to be a college basketball coach, so I'm going to play my role as if I already am one of those coaches. I can't bring a resume and say 'Well, we did this and that at Attucks, but we could have done more if we had more money.'

"At the end of the day, nobody wants excuses….. We still have to produce; we still have to show up.

"We don't have a track, and nice weight room, and people stretching us, and a separate facility for working out. But we have outside. We have rocks. We have that hill in back. We have cement bleachers that are not going to move when the wind blows, and we have some hurdles. And I put them through hell, but we probably have one of the best conditioned teams in the state."

Attucks practices are full speed. They start with full court layup drills with alternating hands and continue with "Two-twenties", where every player – post, guard or wing – is expected to run the length of the court four times within twenty seconds. Washington is animated, pacing, yelling at players to give maximum effort.

"You're not practicing like a championship team! I'm going to hold you accountable just like you hold me accountable!

"We have to make sure every starter is going as hard as possible!"

Lapses in effort or concentration result in push-ups. No whining about fouls is allowed either. When Washington sees it, he stops the action.

"YOU'RE NOT – GOING – TO GET – CALLS!! If I see you do that during a game, I'm going to go crazy and get a tech!"

Washington embraces adversity for the team. The "us-against-the-world" mantra is the most overused motivational tool in sports. But it may have more application to an inner-city high school basketball player than an NBA millionaire. Washington mentions that one of his players made a two-week trip to a basketball camp with a total wardrobe of two pairs of underwear, two shirts and a pair of shorts.

Last year, a local reporter wrote an article that described the team as a "bunch of no-names". He probably meant it in a complimentary way to describe them as over-achievers. But the Attucks program took it as motivation.

Washington and his players began sending tweets with the hashtag "#NoNames", and it now adorns banners, T-shirts, and other social media.

Washington faced down adversity in his own career. After playing high school basketball at Anderson (Indiana) Highland, he went to Southern University on a basketball scholarship. After his freshman year there was a coaching change and he left the team, but stayed at Southern to finish his coursework. Upon graduation, he came back home to Indiana and took an eighth grade coaching job in Anderson.

His team finished undefeated but he lost the job. According to news reports at the time, some school board members thought he was running up the score on opponents.

Some members of the community thought race played into the decision.

But long-time Anderson coach Ron Hecklinski took Washington on to his staff and, after two years, Washington took the girls head coaching position at Indianapolis Arlington High School. He replaced a veteran coach who left the talent cupboard bare and the team ended up with a record of 1-17**.** The final game was a forfeit due to a lack of available players after a brawl during a game against Indianapolis Manual.

Nevertheless, Washington applied for the Attucks job and was hired in 2012. His first team was 9-12. In 2013-2014 the Tigers went 13-10 and made it to the regional semi-final, where they lost to eventual state champion Park Tudor. The sectional title was the first for Attucks since 1973.

Washington constantly refers to winning a state championship when addressing the players. Attucks is a 2A school, but the regular season schedule includes six 4A programs and traditionally strong powers in other classes.

“We think whoever wins our region is going to win state,” he says.

“I just want them to stay hungry with a point to prove. We want to win the conference, we want to win the city, and we want to win the state.”

Chapter II -
But in Indiana….

"Basketball really had its origin in Indiana, which remains the center of the sport"

Dr. James Naismith

Indiana High School basketball is rich in achievement, history and passion. Many of the most notable names in NBA and college history are rooted here.

John Wooden, winner of eleven NCAA championships as coach at UCLA (Martinsville High School, Class of 1928).

Oscar Robertson, Naismith and National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Famer, who still holds NBA records despite retiring in 1973 (Crispus Attucks High School class of 1956).

Larry Bird, Naismith Hall of Famer, three-time NBA MVP (Springs Valley High School, Class of 1974).

In the years 2005-2015, the first round of every NBA draft included at least one former Indiana high school player. In 2014, former Carmel High School basketball player Mike Ludlow published an analysis of the high school roots of NBA players and coaches *("Why Indiana is the Center of the Basketball World",* Mike Ludlow, 2014). He found that Indiana had the highest concentration of NBA players and coaches of any state in the U.S, (based on the number of players and

coaches per million residents). At 31.84 NBA players per million, Indiana's proportion was half again as much as New York (20.835) and three times that of Texas (10.82). In the same year, four of the 32 NBA head coaches had played Hoosier high school basketball, along with five assistant coaches.

Outside the state lines, the popular perception of the Indiana high school game is based on the 1986 movie *Hoosiers*, a story very loosely based on the state championship won by tiny Milan High School in 1954. When Milan won, Indiana awarded only one state championship trophy. Winning a championship required facing all of the other schools in the state, regardless of school size or population.

In 1997, the Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) bent to the will of small-school principals and administrators, and separated schools into four classes based on student population. For the first time, Indiana crowned four state high school basketball champions. Though this structure was already common in most other states, the public outcry in Indiana was loud and emotional.

Critics blamed political correctness. They blamed declining work ethic and moral decay. They said it didn't reflect the realities of life that high school is intended to impart, that everybody has to meet challenges where they are outspent, undermanned, outgunned. They said avoiding uphill challenges was no way to build character. Some whispered that racism played into the decision, that small, rural, mostly-white schools were avoiding competition from majority-black schools in urban centers.

At one point, the state legislature even proposed a bill to require a single-class tournament; but that didn't go anywhere. The IHSAA member schools had decided. Over time, almost everybody moved on. There is no longer any real effort to return to the old system. Many of the coaches and fans who have been around for a while quickly genuflect at the altar of single-class basketball, but only when they're asked about it. It's easier to be in favor of something when you know it will never happen.

In the Milan days, a kid went to the high school closest to his parents' house. That rare student who went somewhere else had to pay tuition. But in 2009, the state legislature passed the Indiana Open Enrollment Law. For the first time, students could choose to attend any public high school in the state, regardless of their county or town of residence. According to data from the IHSAA, athletic transfer requests have risen by almost 22 percent since the advent of open enrollment. During those years, the state population rose by only three percent. And, though U.S. populations are generally more mobile today, from 2009-2013 there was no statistically significant difference in the number of Hoosiers who moved in the prior year.

The number of transfers doesn't even tell the whole story. Typically, any athletic transfer has to be reviewed and approved by the IHSAA. But if a student makes the decision early enough, he or she can choose a school without incurring an IHSAA athlete transfer review.

Sandra Walter, assistant commissioner of the IHSAA, explains it this way:

"As an eighth grader, an incoming freshman, we don't care where they came from; we don't care where they live…. (students) can decide to go anywhere (they) want, if the school accepts out-of-district kids."

*****

During the summer months, most basketball players participate in Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) programs, shoe-company sponsored travel leagues, school-based summer programs, and open gyms at their local schools. The basketball season never really ends for the best players. At least for top college prospects, summer basketball programs have assumed an importance far beyond what the 30-day season in July might imply.

Although most summer leagues compete in AAU tournaments and are AAU-sanctioned, more and more programs are separating themselves and playing in tournaments created by shoe companies. But any summer basketball program is typically referred to as "AAU", whether they are actually operated under Amateur Athletic Union rules or not.

"AAU is not as dominant as it once was," says Matt Denison, chairperson of Indiana AAU Basketball. "The big tournaments, like the one in Vegas, are either independently run or operated by the shoe companies (Nike, Adidas, etc.). The best of the best play on the shoe company circuit. Some of the shoe-sponsored teams will play AAU events, but some won't.

"Nike really got it all started through Sonny Vaccaro, but then he left and went to Adidas. Nike put the money in first, then Adidas, then Reebok and now Under Armour. But then the shoe companies re-tooled what they were doing, and created their own tournament circuit."

Added to AAU and shoe company events, independently-operated tournaments spring up like weeds when the weather warms. As usual, when adults get involved in youth sports, some of the motivation is profit.

"Most of the time, when somebody wants to host a tournament, they don't even go through AAU," Denison says. "Everybody wants to have a tournament, so the market is watered down. People are looking to make money off of it without first worrying about how to create good, organized opportunities for kids to play and be seen by coaches. So they ask 'What's the cheapest way I can host a tournament'? It used to be that by sanctioning a tournament through AAU, you'd know the event had liability insurance and that every kid and coach was an AAU member.

"Now, you *hope* they have liability insurance, but you don't really know."

Center Grove Assistant Coach Brian Keeton has a foot in both camps and a unique perspective on the effects of summer basketball on the Indiana high school game. He's been an assistant at several upper level programs, and coached along with Hahn when both were on Mark James' staff at Ben Davis. During the summers, he coaches an elite AAU team for the EG10 Allstars Basketball Program,

sponsored by NBA player and 2007 Indiana Mr. Basketball Eric Gordon.

"I'm one of the very few guys that do both (high school and AAU)," he says. "I like the summer stuff better because I'm picking my own players. We do a lot of traveling and it's a fun environment. We have high-level kids playing against high-level competition.

"The way AAU is set up is that we're all on these circuits. You're not playing any bad teams. Every team you play has Division I caliber players on it.

"I don't think it hurts (the high school game). When AAU first really got started, I was going through it. I came back as a better player, so I think it's a win-win."

He understands the antipathy that some high school coaches hold toward summer basketball, though he doesn't agree with it.

"A lot of older high school coaches are set in their ways," he says. "They've won, and they've done it their way, so they don't want to change. A lot of guys knock it because they don't think you're trying to develop players. They think that we just roll the ball out and let them play. That's NOT what we do on high level teams. You've got to be organized; you've got to be together.

This is not to say that Keeton doesn't see the sordid side of summer basketball programs.

"The negative part of AAU is that there are a lot of guys in it for the wrong reasons," he says. "A lot of guys out there are

trying to get a college job, trying to use a kid for what they can get out of it. I see it and I know it happens. We're lucky here; I don't think a lot of programs do that in Indiana.

"But I have seen it in other places. It's a rat race for kids. The shoe companies are giving the program money based on what kind of talent they can attract.

"There's a lot of BS involved. A lot of these high-level kids have handlers hanging around, pushing them to go to prep schools."

Keeton tells a story about an elite player that not only jumped from high school to high school, but from AAU program to AAU program.

"It's ultra-competitive (between AAU programs) for players. We're really lucky because we have EG sponsorship, and we also have Adidas. We don't get a lot of Adidas money, but we play in every Adidas-sponsored event. But you're given money as a program based on your talent. They don't mind investing money in grass-roots programs, because all they (the shoe companies) need is for one guy to make it. One LeBron James, one John Wall, to sign with Adidas. And then they make billions of dollars from that shoe contract."

Whatever the problems with summer basketball, Keeton thinks the genie is now out of the bottle. College coaches aren't going to travel to southwestern Indiana on a freezing January night to watch a player, unless he's a difference-maker for the program.

"You don't see many college coaches going to high school games. Partly because they're in the middle of the

college season. If they go to a high school game, they're going to watch one, maybe two kids. In AAU you're going to have six or eight on just one team. They're probably recruiting twenty other kids, and they're all in the same place. So the coach can stay for one weekend (at a tournament) and watch twenty or thirty different prospects. And when the kids get out there and compete against other high-level players, you get a better gauge as a college coach."

Despite all the advantages of AAU, Keeton believes there are certain aspects of the high school game that can't be replicated in the summer.

"You get to be part of a team and practice every day. It's more like playing in college. It's different when you're playing under the lights on a Friday night. All your peers and parents are in the stands. You're hearing the crowd. You don't get that in AAU basketball.

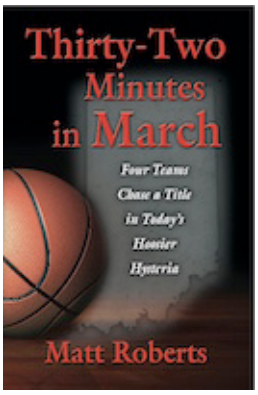
"I've talked to college coaches all over the place, and they'd rather come to Indiana high school games than anywhere. The coaching is better, there's structure, and there are people in the stands."

The ability of an athlete to choose his or her summer coach makes choosing a high school coach seem normal. Players work with their AAU coach over the summer and naturally develop an affinity. The close contact may end with the summer coach enjoying an outsized influence with the player, sometimes even influencing decisions about where to go to high school.

One high Division I prospect attended Attucks through eighth grade, but on the first day of high school was found enrolled at a 4A school in suburban Indianapolis. When the player's name was mentioned to Keeton he immediately responded with "Yeah, he's an Attucks kid."

But at least that player had to make an early decision, or submit to an IHSAA review. Keeton points out that prep schools unaffiliated with the IHSAA don't even have those hurdles.

"La Lumiere, Huntington Prep, Findlay Prep – a lot of these schools don't even have a governing body. There are no rules for them. These guys are recruiting at AAU events. An NCAA coach is limited in contact during dead periods, but (prep school coaches) can go up to a kid right after a game, they can sit with his parents in the stands, 'Hey, come on up for a visit'. Those guys are like vultures, man. They're all around. That's how they get players, and how they get funding, too."



Since 1911, movies, books, and popular culture have romanticized Indiana high school basketball. But most of these versions are trapped in a time warp that ends in 1960. Thirty-Two Minutes in March takes the reader on a journey through today's Hoosier Hysteria, providing a frank and up-close view of four diverse basketball programs battling in pursuit of one goal - to play thirty-two minutes in March for the Indiana state championship.