

# Legends of the Games

## Kalamazoo Central stunned the prep hardwood world with a 1949 Class A title, then proved it was no fluke with crowns in 1950 and 1951

The first school to ever win three consecutive Class A MHSAA Boys Basketball titles, the Kalamazoo Central teams of 1949, 1950 and 1951, will be honored through the Michigan High School Athletic Association's "Legends Of The Games" program at ceremonies at halftime of the Class A championship game this Saturday, March 24.

In its fourth year, the Legends program promotes educational athletics by showcasing some of the great teams of past years. At least 23 members of those teams are expected to be in attendance to receive commemorative plaques and a banner to display at the school during the ceremony.

**K**alamazoo Central made basketball history when it became the first school in Michigan High School Athletic Association history to win three consecutive Class A state tournament boys basketball championships.

The Maroon Giants, coached by Bob Quiring, won Class A titles at Michigan State University's Jenison Field House in 1949, 1950 and 1951, which also happened to be the first three years of Quiring's tenure as head coach.

In becoming an MHSAA Legends of the Game group being honored this year, Kalamazoo Central actually qualified as a legend in prep sports annals with its 1949 Class A state title run. The Maroon Giants compiled a so-so 10-5 season record that included a reversal by forfeit of a game lost on the court as the result of a player ineligibility ruling.

To make Kalamazoo Central an even greater darkhorse at tournament time was the fact that its top player, 6-8 center Jim Wenke, had graduated in midyear, leaving Quiring without his top scorer and rebounder in a lineup that included three juniors and two seniors.

But Quiring, who died in May, 1983, brought his young team closer together after losing Wenke and it won its final three regular-season games against Lansing Sexton, Muskegon Heights and Jackson.

The unit made up of seniors Al Suter and Garth Stickney and juniors Bob Topp, George Heinrich and Dick Noble kept going from there. It beat Grand Rapids Central and Benton Harbor in regional play and then moved past Grand Rapids Ottawa Hills and Ferndale to make it to the championship game.

Waiting for the Maroon Giants was Saginaw Arthur Hill, unbeaten in 21 games and led by All-American Paul Hinkin. If ever there was a mismatch this was to be it.

Kalamazoo Central players, however, were non-believers. The Maroon Giants took an early lead and built upon it for a runaway victory over a team rated unbeatable by most. Heinrich led the way with 21 points, but it was a team effort all the way.

After the memorable tournament run in 1949, the road to two more Class A state championships proved easier.

The 1950 team, with Topp, Noble and



*The newspaper clippings might have faded over the years, but the memories ring sharply for those who were part of the Maroon Giant title run. The 1949 upset of Saginaw Arthur Hill was the most unlikely in the string of three straight, and set the stage for more thrills in 1950 and 1951.*

Heinrich as holdover starters and Ron Jackson, who played in the 1949 title game as a sophomore, and Sam Grow filling out the starting lineup, breezed to a 20-1 record that included a 64-50 finals victory over Port Huron.

Kalamazoo's only loss was to Benton Harbor by a 28-22 score, but the Maroon Giants recovered to close the season with 13 wins in a row.

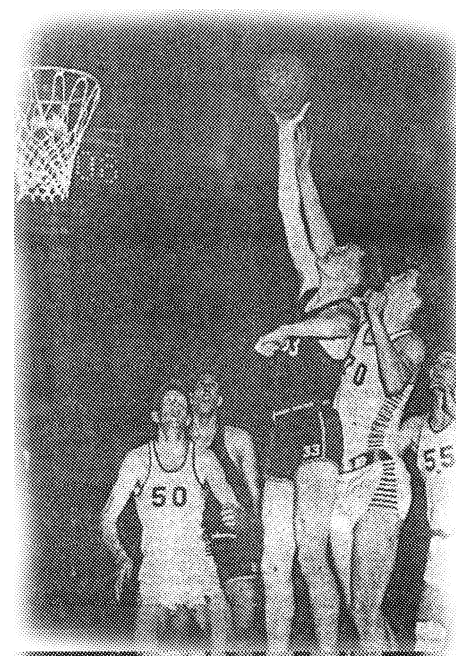
In 1951, Jackson, who went on to play baseball as well as basketball at Western Michigan University and then

into major league baseball with the Chicago White Sox, was the only holdover starter and was joined by Bill Stuijbergen, who also was a Legend of the Game honoree a year ago, as assistant coach on the 1959 Lansing Sexton state championship team, Bob Parks, Jim Bishop, H.B. Gardner and Gar Toornman in a rotating lineup of starters.

But Kalamazoo posted another 20-1 record, losing only a 57-56 overtime decision to Muskegon as a field goal by Jackson at the buzzer was not allowed.

The Maroon Giants had their most difficult finals game of the threeppeat in March, but finally prevailed over Highland Park, 50-47.

The amazing Kalamazoo Central



*Central's Bob Topp gathers in a rebound during the 1950 title win over Port Huron.*

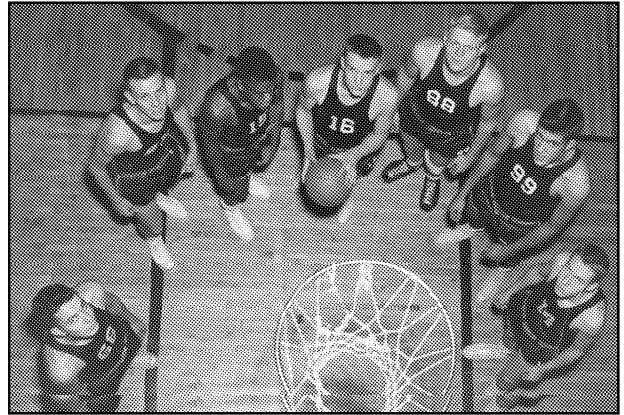
Class A title run ended in 1952 with a 40-35 regional finals loss to a Holland team it had beaten twice during the regular season.

"It was a great run," said Quiring. "I think we put Kalamazoo Central in the record book with indelible ink."

The Kalamazoo Central squad list from the threeppeat included Stickney, Terry Nulf, Keith Jones, Suter, Ron Dillingham, Topp, Tom Brennan, Noble, Heinrich, Grow, Bob Henry, John Gideon, Jack Doyle, Dale Steeby, Louie Jones, Bob Casler, Tom Reiger, Jackson, Terry Husband, Ron Harder, Ron Sines, Tom Herr, Stuijbergen, Gardner and Terry Nye.

Members of the Kalamazoo Central team that fashioned the state championship repeat have scattered around the country and enjoyed careers that

ranked from Air Force pilot (Heinrich) to physician (Topp) to coach (Stuijberger) to professional baseball player (Jackson). But many of them will regroup on March 24 to be honored as true Legends of the Games.



*The 1951 team had lofty standards to reach after two straight championships. Above, from left: Bob Parks, John Gideon, H.B. Gardner, Gar Toornman, Bill Stuijbergen, Ron Jackson, Jim Bishop. That group and the rest of the Maroon Giants were up to the task, as they were able to celebrate a third Class A trophy after downing Highland Park in the 1951 Final (below).*



## GLORY DAYS

Scheduled to be present at the ceremony are:

**John Quiring** - Son of Head Coach Bob Quiring  
**Garth Stickney** - 1949  
**Terry Nulf** - Guard, 1949  
**E. Robert Topp** - Center, 1949-50  
**Tom Brennan** - Center, 1949-50  
**Richard Noble** - Guard, 1949-50  
**George Heinrich** - Guard, Captain, 1949-50  
**Sam Grow** - Guard, 1949-50  
**Robert Henry** - Student Trainer, 1949-50  
**Dale Steeby** - Guard, 1950-51  
**Louis Jones** - Sixth man, 1950-51  
**Robert Cassler** - Guard, 1950

**Jim Bishop** - Guard/Forward, 1950-51  
**Gar W. Toornman** - Guard, 1950-51  
**Jack Bowen** - Forward/Center, 1950-51  
**Robert E Parks** - Forward, 1951  
**Terry Husband** - Forward, 1950-51  
**Ron Harder** - Center, 1951  
**Tom Herr** - Forward, 1951  
**Bill Stuijbergen** - Forward, Captain, 1950-51  
**H.B. Gardner** - Guard, 1950-51  
**Dave Fitzpatrick** - Manager, 1949-50  
**John Johnson** - Manager, 1951