

Remembering Bath County's "Dangerous" Dan Swartz

Noted Basketball Career Began At Owingsville High School

By Jon Mansfield - ©1999

The Owingsville Bobcats were 3-0 and ranked second in the state in November of 1950, when they traveled to Morehead to take on University Breckinridge. During this game their star center, Dan Swartz, collided with a Breckinridge player. The knee injury he suffered as a result, ended his high school career, as well as Owingsville High's hopes for basketball glory. Swartz would go on to have a stellar career in collegiate and professional ball, but he never quite lost the limp that resulted from that night's collision.

Dan Swartz was born in Olympian Springs in Bath County in 1931. One of 13 children born to Grace and Roosevelt Swartz, he spent much of his boyhood working on his family's farm. Though he was a natural at every sport he tried, it soon became obvious that Dan was born to play basketball. At six-feet-four, Swartz was a rugged rebounder and tough defender. It was, though, his uncanny shooting ability that made him special. Not only could he "fill it up" from around the basket, but he had phenomenal range, often stunning his opponents by raining in jump shots from 25 feet and beyond.

During his junior campaign in 1949-50, Dangerous Dan, as he came to be called, earned All-State honors by averaging 27.5 points per game, in leading the Bobcats to a 21-7 record. Though he missed virtually his entire senior season, Swartz was nevertheless heavily recruited by legendary University of Kentucky coach, Adolph Rupp. One story recently shared by Anthony Burns of the *Bath County News-Outlook* has it that Rupp even gave Dan a wristwatch telling him that every time he looked at the watch to be reminded that he was destined to play for UK.

Swartz went to UK on a full scholarship, but the marriage was never a happy one. At the end of his fresh-

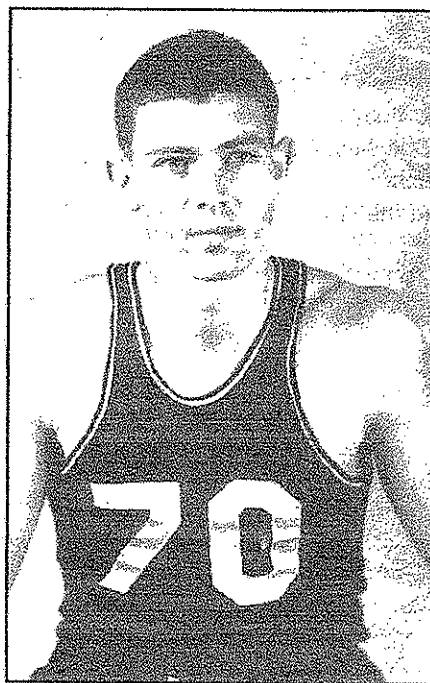
man year Dan, discouraged about his lack of playing time and, perhaps, a little homesick, transferred to Morehead State. It didn't take long for the new MSU coach, Bobby Laughlin, to realize that he had a bona fide star on his hands. Dan, arguably the greatest player in the history of the Ohio Valley Conference, earned All-American honors in 1955 and again in 1956. He capped off his magnificent career in 1956 by leading the Eagles to their first NCAA tournament appearance.

Morehead's record book is still replete with the name of Dan Swartz. He continues to hold 10 Eagle records, including highest scoring average for a season (28.6 in 1955-56), and highest scoring average for a career (27.5). He is the school's second all-time leading scorer, despite having played only three years.

The Boston Celtics selected Swartz in the fourth round of the 1956 National Basketball Association draft, but the Bath County native spurned the NBA in favor of the National Industrial Basketball League (NIBL), which operated under the auspices of the Amateur Athletic Union. The outstanding players of Swartz's era, who opted for AAU ball, did so for two important reasons; first, they could maintain their amateur status and remain eligible for the Olympic Games; second, many teams were sponsored by corporations which provided jobs for players, often at salaries comparable to what could be earned in the NBA.

Although, great players like Clyde Lovellette, Elgin Baylor, K. C. Jones,

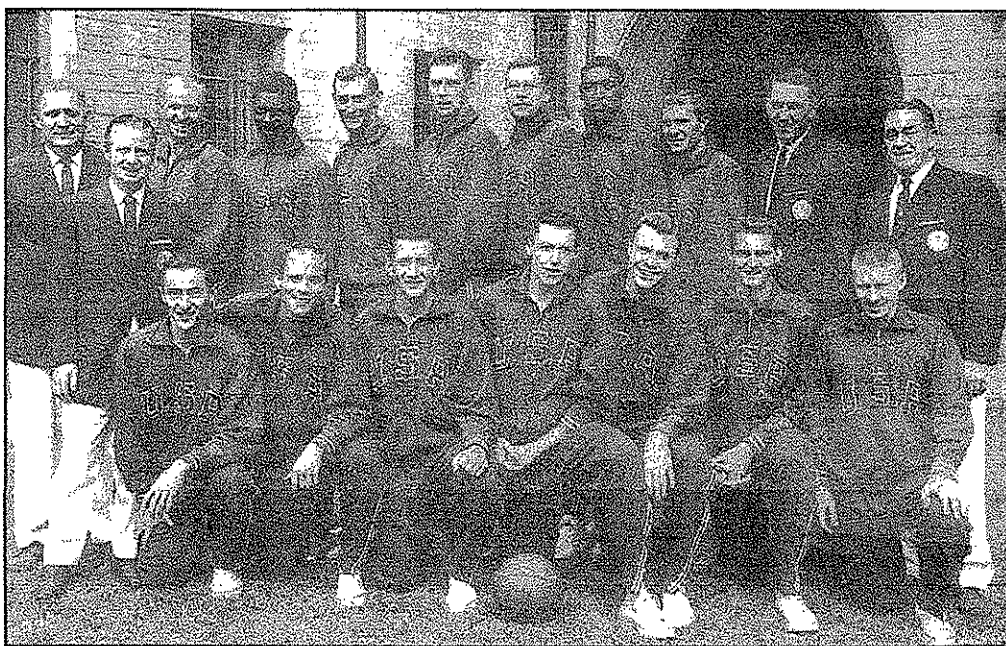
and Cazzie Russell played in the NIBL at some point in their careers, no one ever dominated the league the way Dan Swartz did. He earned All-League recognition while playing for the Wichita Vickers in 1958-59, and then went on to win back-to-back "Most Valuable Player" awards in 1959-60 with Wichita, and 1960-61, while a member of the Cleveland Pipers. Perhaps, the greatest moment of Dan's AAU career, however, came in 1959, when he was named



Owingsville High's "Dangerous" Dan Swartz was truly one of Kentucky's sports legends.

first professional league to employ a three-point field goal, and featured professional basketball's first African-American coach, John McClendon, of the Cleveland Pipers. Swartz, playing for the Washington Tapers (the team moved to New York during the season), quickly established himself as one of the league's most outstanding players. He averaged almost 25 points and pulled down 9 rebounds a game for the 1961-62 season. Showing the same sweet shooting touch that had made him a star at Owingsville High, Dan shot 42 percent from three-point range and over 90 percent from the free throw line, en route to earning first team All-ABL honors.

The following season, Swartz finally joined the Boston Celtics, which still owned his NBA rights. It would be a bittersweet year for Dan. Though, he would be a part of the team that won the 1963 NBA championship, his contribu-

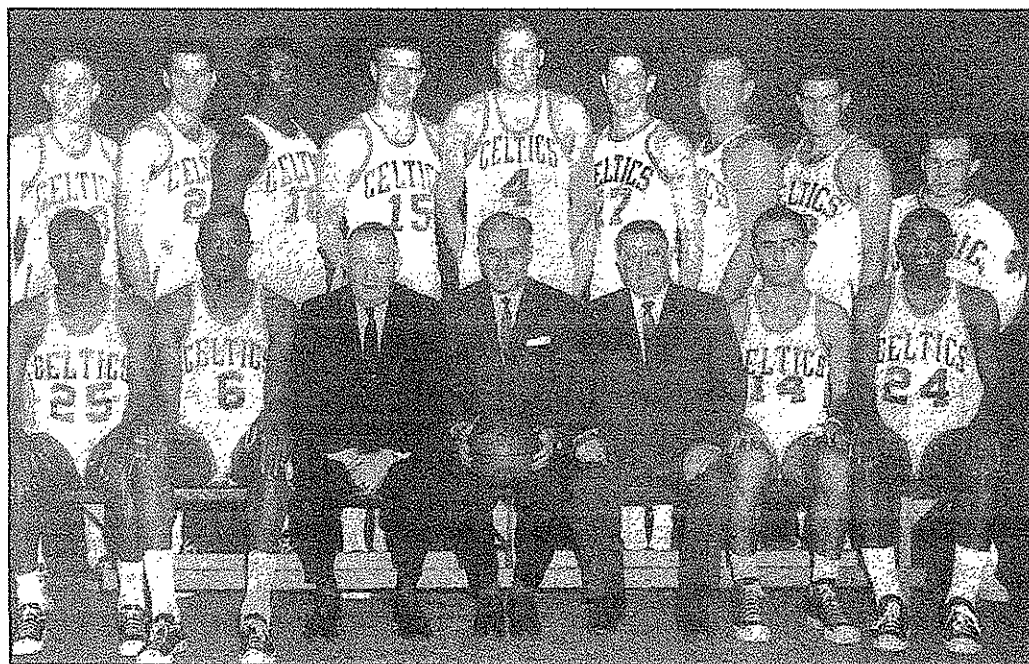


The 1959 U.S.A. Pan-American basketball team of which Dan Swartz was a member. Kneeling (L-R): William Evans; Adrian Smith; Leo Byrd; Robert Jeangerard; Richard Boushka; Jerry West; and Gary Thompson. Standing (L-R): Warren Womble, assistant coach; William Dye, manager; Jack Adams; Oscar Robertson; Donald Goldstein; Burdette Haldorson; George BonSalle; Robert Boozer; Dan Swartz; Fred Schaus, head coach; and Thomas Farrell.

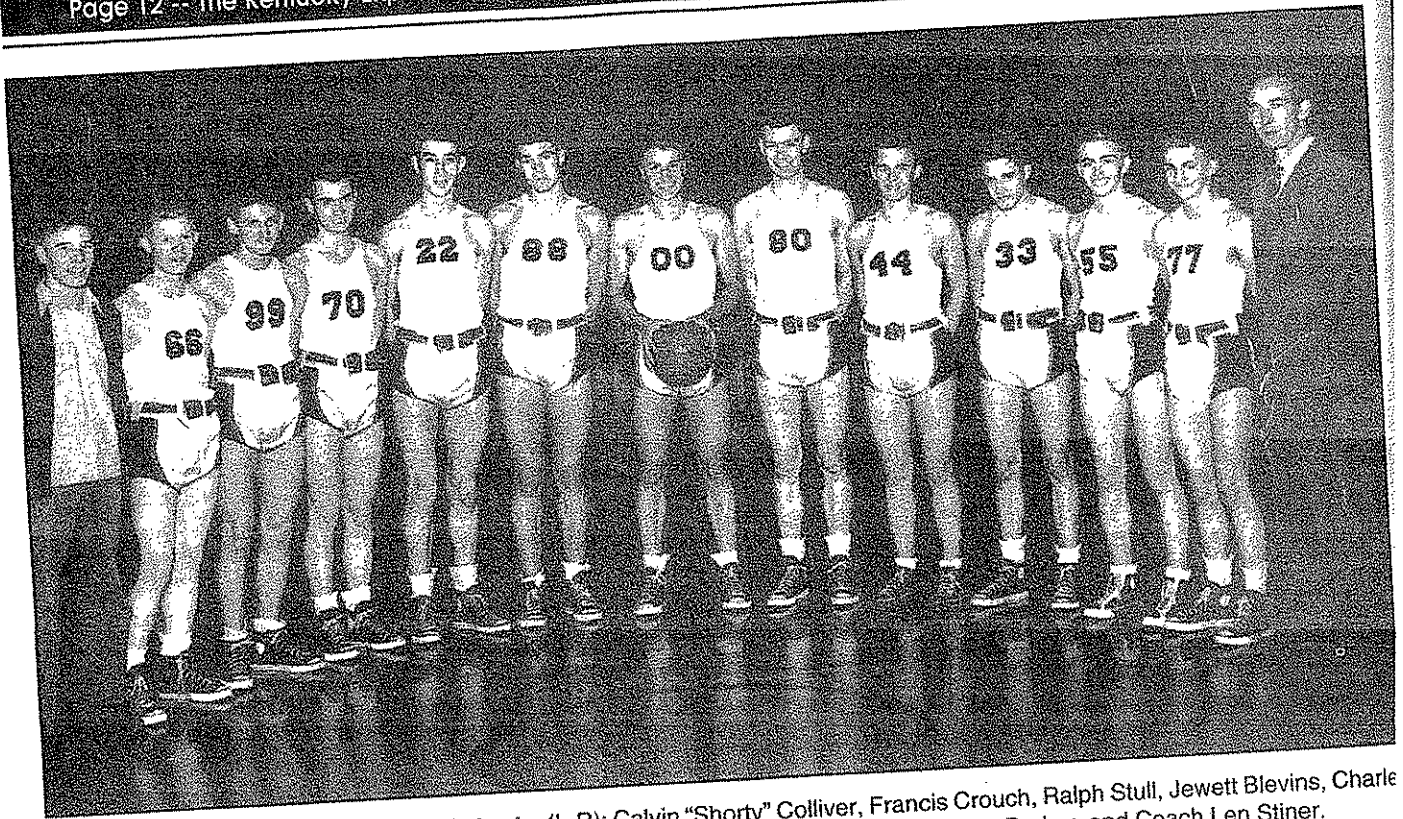
tion was severely limited by his ailing knee. Swartz's tremendous career is all the more remarkable, given the fact that he was in almost constant pain from the injury he had suffered in high school.

Dan retired after the 1963 season and returned to his native Bath County, where he became active in local politics. He served for many years as county sheriff, and acted as a field representative for Representative Scotty Baeslar from 1991 until his (Dan's) death in 1997. When my father told me of Dan's passing, his words struck me as a fitting eulogy for the man they once called Dangerous Dan. "He was," my dad said, "the finest ball player I ever saw."

Jon Mansfield, 1101 Iroquois Drive, Mt. Sterling, KY 40353, shares this story and photos with our readers.



Dan Swartz was a member of the 1963 Boston Celtics, the World Champions that year. Front row (L-R): K.C. Jones; Bill Russell; Walter A. Brown, team president; Red Auerbach, head coach; Lou Pieri, treasurer; Bob Cousy; and Sam Jones. Standing (L-R): Frank Ramsey; Gene Guarilia; Tom Sanders; Tom Heinsohn; Clyde Lovellette; John Havlicek; Jim Loscutoff; Dan Swartz; and Buddy LeRoux, trainer.



The 1950-51 Owingsville High School Bobcats. (L-R): Calvin "Shorty" Colliver, Francis Crouch, Ralph Stull, Jewett Blevins, Charles Harding, Dan Swartz, Jimmy Davis, Sammie Donohue, Earl Roberts, Frank Lyons, Sonny Barker, and Coach Len Stiner.

to the team to represent the United States in the Third Pan American Games.

The 1959 games were held in Chicago, marking the first time that the United States had ever hosted the event.

Swartz averaged 10.2 points per game, as the U. S. team cruised to a 6-0 record and a gold medal, winning their games by an average margin of nearly 40 points. The only other double figures scorers for the U. S. team were a couple of young fellows named Oscar Robertson and Jerry West. Dan's best game came in a 114-46 pasting of Cuba, in which he scored a game-high 19 points.

Swartz gave up his amateur status in 1961, when he joined the upstart American Basketball League. The league was founded by Harlem Globetrotters owner, Abe Saperstein, as a rival league to the NBA. The ABL attracted a considerable amount of talent, which included a number of former MBL players, a handful of

NBA converts, and several stars blacklisted by the NBA for perceived transgressions while in college (including Bill Spivey, of Kentucky, and Iowa's Connie Hawkins). The ABL was nothing if not innovative. It became t



The 1950-51 Owingsville Bobcats were cheered on to victory by (L-R): Ollie Virginia Richards, Mary Louise McVey, Dorothy Myers, Donna Gail Dotson, June Donohue, and Mary C Richards. (All photos courtesy of the author.)

...and know the love of the parent, until we become parents ourselves. --Beecher

Former Bath Sheriff, Celtics player dies

By JENNIFER HEWLETT

HERALD-LEADER STAFF WRITER

Dan Swartz, a field representative for U.S. Rep. Scotty Baesler and a former Bath County sheriff, died yesterday, apparently of a heart attack. He was perhaps best known in his younger days as "Dangerous Dan" because of his talent on the basketball court.

Mr. Swartz, who was 65, lived in Olympia. He was pronounced dead at Mary Chiles Hospital in Mount Sterling.

He had been a field representative for Baesler for the last several years. Mr. Swartz was Bath County sheriff during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

During the 1950s, he was a two-time basketball All American at what is now Morehead State University. Mr. Swartz went on to play for the Boston Celtics, and was a member of Celtics world championship teams in the 1960s. He also played on other professional teams.

Mr. Swartz, a Bath County native, also had been an outstanding player on the Owingsville High School basketball team. He played basketball at the University of Kentucky during his

freshman year of college, before transferring to Morehead.

"I think he got homesick and went back home to play for Morehead," said former UK All-American and Boston Celtics player Frank Ramsey of Madisonville. "He was a great player. He came to UK and was doing well and just got homesick."

Ramsey said that Mr. Swartz, who was only about 6-foot-4, wasn't big for a forward, but he was a tough individual.

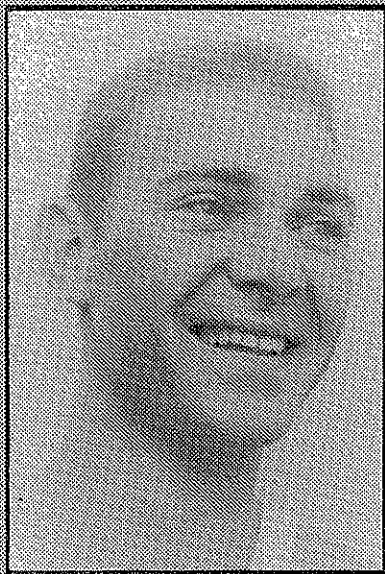
Mr. Swartz was a member of the Morehead State University Athletic Hall of Fame.

"He was a wonderful person. He was a true Kentuckian," Ramsey said.

Mr. Swartz is survived by his wife, Peggy Swartz; four sons, Scott Swartz and Mike Swartz, both of Owingsville, Mark Swartz of Winchester, and Chris Swartz of Fort Wright; a daughter, Tamie Cameron of Winchester; a sister; seven brothers; and seven grandchildren.

Funeral arrangements were pending at Richie Hunt Funeral Home in Owingsville.

MSU star, Celtic Swartz dead at 65



Dan Swartz

throw and field goal records set in the 1955-56 season, when the 19-10 Eagles went to the NCAA Tournament.

Swartz scored 1,925 points in his three-year MSU career; a school record that stood for 23 seasons and is still the second-highest.

He went on to play for the Celtics, and was a member of their NBA championship teams in the 1960s. He also played on other professional teams.

Swartz was sheriff in his native Bath County during the late 1970s and early 1980s. He had been a field representative for U.S. Rep. Scotty Baesler for the last several years.

Swartz, who lived in Olympia, was a member of the Morehead State University Athletic Hall of Fame.

record for most points in a season (828 in 1955-56); highest scoring average for a season (28.6 ppg. in 1955-56) and career (27.5 ppg. in 1953-56); and several other free

Forgotten; Dan Swartz will be remembered as a basketball great

ional Industrial Basketball League (which later became the National Basketball League). In the NIBL, Dan played an era with greats such as Oscar Robertson. This was the only team of its era to be defeated while touring Rus-



Ken Metz

signed by the Boston Celtics in 1952 and played with the team until 1957. Along with Cousy, Bill Russell and Sam Jones, Metz was one of the best players of his era.

Most of the details are vague about his early career, but his tremendous accomplishments in his legendary athletic career are well known. His talent matched or surpassed that of any of the big-league players of his era.

Metz played professionally with the Los Angeles Lakers, and was later drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates. He also played against the famous Harlem Globetrotters and was a member of the

Wichita Vickers. He was named the Most Valuable Player in the NIBL in both 1960 and 1961.

These are simply a few of the highlights of his incredible career recounted with the help of his son, Chris, the only other athlete in Bath County to play ball professionally. Dan never was one to brag, and many of the only vivid memories that Chris has today, are from prying stories out of his dad while they worked together on the farm.

"As the youngest, I didn't have the luxury of being around when dad was playing, so I had to ask him about all the things he did when I'd get a chance," explained Chris.

When the Swartz family home near Mudlick burned several years ago, the hundreds of trophies, medals, plaques, ribbons and certificates from his and his sons careers in athletics, were destroyed. All of these would be a priceless heirloom to his family today.

"I will always remember Dan for his quickness on the basketball court," said Frank Lyons, who played alongside Swartz at Owingsville High School. "He was quick as a cat and even with three opponents, could not be stopped," he said.

Lyons said Dan, who was 6' 4", was a tough opponent but was sensitive to other people's feelings. "He was deep," said Lyons.

He said the 1949-50 team placed 6th in the state that year. The team consisted of Lyons and Jimmy Davis as guards, Swartz at center, and Charley Harding and Elwood Maze at the forward positions.

Lyons said that on senior night, Rupp was there to recruit Dan and presented them Bulova watches.

"Dan paid me the ultimate compliment. He told me he'd tell them he'd come to UK, if I could come with him. That told me how he felt about me," said Lyons.

"I told him 'nothing doing' because he might jeopardize his scholarship. I'll always remember him for that," said Lyons.

Had he been paid like some top athletes today, Dan would have been a wealthy man. But he didn't play for the money. He participated in a sport he loved, with an ability that was born from hard work and character.

Had he made it in the big leagues, I somehow doubt it would have changed him much. He would still be the same gentle, quiet-mannered fellow who was proud of his roots. And often as he could, he would still probably be found not far from where he grew up, most likely sitting on the bench in front of the store at Mudlick with a "chaw" in his mouth, a smile on his face, and laughing about the way it was in Mudlick in the "good old days."

One of best ever

Dan Swartz's jersey among eight to be retired, hung in the rafters at MSU

Anthony D. Burns
News-Outlook Staff Writer

Last week, Morehead State University retired Dan Swartz's old basketball number at the All-American banquet and half-time celebration.

Swartz, who passed away in 1997, was among eight people to have their numbers retired and their jerseys hung in the rafters by the university. All retired members had to be All-American basketball players while playing at Morehead.

Allen said, "He was one of the best to ever play the game. You had to see him to believe it."

Throughout the evening, Coach Sonny Allen, told of personal experiences about each of the players. One of the stories involved Swartz, and how he (Swartz) was talking with a player from Murray prior to a game. The Murray player asked how many Swartz thought he would get that evening during the competition. Swartz casually said about 30.

Another player on Murray's squad, a freshman, wondered how could Swartz just say he would get those points. The older player told him to watch out because Swartz would get his points and then some. By the way, he got his 30 points that evening.

The room on the night of the retirement was filled with ex-players, mostly all-stars from previous outstanding basketball squads. Family, friends and MSU administrators moved the evening along. Current coaches Laura Litter and Kyle Macy, who remarked about the achievements made by these phenomenal athletes, were in attendance as well.

After dinner, there was a presentation of plaques from the vice-president of Student Life and Director of Athletics, Mike Mincey. Randy Stacy, head of Sports Information, read off the names on the plaques and

Coach Sonny Allen, who was among the names retired, gave a little history of each of the athletes.

Peggy Swartz attended and accepted the award for her husband. Chris Swartz, who is said to possibly join his father as a retired All-American for MSU and would make them the only father-son duo with retired jerseys, was also in attendance as well.

After participants received their plaques at the banquet, they were also honored during half-time of the men's game against Eastern Kentucky University. There was also a celebration in the Glen Miller room of the Athletic-Academic Complex on MSU's campus.

Born in Olympian Springs in 1931, Dan Swartz was the fourth of 13 children born to Grace and Roosevelt Swartz. He grew up in the small farm community doing chores around the home.

However, he also had a proficiency when it came to the art of playing basketball. The talents he had, gave him some press and stardom during his high school days at Owingsville High School. It also earned him the nickname 'Dangerous Dan.'

Prior to entering college, UK's coach Adolph Rupp came to visit Swartz in Owingsville and awarded him a wrist watch. Rupp told Dan every time he looked at the watch to be reminded he was meant to play for UK.

As a junior in high school, Swartz made the all-state selection for his first of two appearances. He was the only junior to make the all-state selection that year. Fourth in the voting, Swartz had made more points than anyone else who made the team.

He was highly recruited by Morehead, UK and the U of Louisville. In 1951, he went to UK on a full scholarship, but later decided on More-

head College because it was closer to his native area.

While at Morehead, he led the team to two NCAA appearances and was named All-American twice. Swartz holds the MSU record for most points in a season, and the highest scoring average for a season and career. He met his wife Peggy, and in May of 1954 they were married.

From 1956 to 1963, Swartz played for several professional basketball teams. Drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates, he played for teams in Cleveland, Los Angeles, Wichita and Boston.

During this time he was named Most Valuable Player of the National Industrial Basketball League in 1960 and 1961. He also played with an elite group of basketball stars who would represent the US in the 1959 Pan American games. The team, which consisted of Oscar Robertson and Jerry West, commanded a gold medal in the games. The team traveled the world, and gave Swartz a chance to display his basketball prowess.

The pinnacle of his basketball career came when he won a NBA World Championship with the Boston Celtics in 1963. Later, he moved with his family back to Bath County.

The next forty years, Dan served the community in various ways. He was involved in politics and law enforcement, and held positions as county patrolman, deputy sheriff, high sheriff and Owingsville city policeman. From 1991-1997, he served as field representative for Scotty Baesler.

While holding this position he formed the "County Store Network". The network was designed to help understand the issues and concerns of the farming and small town communities in Kentucky.