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September 23, 2024

Dear Hall of Fame Committee:

Earlington High School, with only 225 students in the top four grades, is one of the smallest schools, if not the smallest, in Kentucky history to win the State Sweet Sixteen Championship. They won the final game against a much taller Covington Catholic team. With only 6 seconds remaining, the Yellowjackets were behind by one point. Following a time out, Justin Sharp took a shot from near center court. While the shot missed, the rebound went to Earlington's Tyrone Hopson who scored a basket giving the Yellowjackets a 54-to-53 victory! (News article No. 1) A video of the last minute of that game is provided and can be accessed at the link: <http://youtu.be/vvGW2GYcidE>

Our nominee for the Dawahares/KHSSA Hall of Fame, Justin Sharp, led the Yellowjackets to a 38-1 record with the only loss to Louisville Male by 4 points at the Louisville Invitational Tournament. Justin's personal story and his statistical accomplishments are attached. The Yellowjacket's 1966 - 1967 schedule with scoring details of each game is also provided. The information presented in these items and the submitted recommendation letters strongly support our nomination for Justin's inclusion in the Hall of Fame. However, the uniqueness of this team deserves a narrative that explains how this undersized group of players was able to achieve such outstanding success.

The hallmark of this team was 2001 KHSAA Hall of Fame Coach Bob Fox's 1-2-1-1 full court press that was applied for the entire game. Most teams upon scoring a basket retreat to the other end of the court to set their defense. In contrast, the Yellowjackets immediately applied a full court press. In their only loss of the year to Louisville Male by 4 points in the LIT, Male Coach Rendek called Earlington's press "the toughest we've faced - and we've met several this season" (News article No. 2). After watching Earlington beat Russell in the Kentucky High School State Tournament, UK Coach Adolph Rupp called the Yellowjacket press "the best high school press I've ever seen" (New articles No. 3 and 4). Two examples of the impact of the press were during games at the Sweet Sixteen Tournament. Earlington's press against their second game

opponent, Louisville Atherton, created 29 turnovers leading to an 85-64 victory (News article No. 5). Their third opponent, Breathitt County, had 23 turnovers. The turning point in the game came when Breathitt had 12 turnovers in a 12-minute stretch (News article No. 6).

Another characteristic of this team was their ability to create substantial early leads. Their margin of victory for the season was 26 points as shown on the game schedule included. Therefore, Justin was taken out early in many games. Otherwise, his point and rebound totals would have been much higher. As an example, against West Hopkins on March 3, 1967, Earlington forced 27 turnovers. With 4:57 remaining in the third quarter, the Yellowjacket's lead was 50-14 and the starters were taken out for the rest of the game (News article No. 7).

A few concluding comments:

- Justin was in remarkable physical condition. In the 1-2-1-1 press, Justin was one of two forwards at mid-court. He not only had the stamina to run the full court press the entire game, but he also had the mental and physical strength to contribute to the offence. One of his references points out that not only was he a prolific scorer but also a "defensive stopper". He was also a strong rebounder as evidenced by him setting a school record with 31 rebounds against Hopkinsville on January 6, 1967.
- Justin was a team first player. I asked him how he felt about being taken out of games early which limited his total points achieved. He went into detail about how important it was that the substitutes got more game time. He said that when Greg Martin, the team playmaker, was injured in the first game of the Sweet Sixteen Tournament, Lonnie Burgett, a sophomore, was able to step in to take over the playmaker position. The important role of the Yellowjacket substitutes during the Sweet Sixteen Tournament was documented in Madisonville Messenger sportswriter Jim Walker's "In My Opinion" column (News article No. 8). That column also mentions the significant role Justin played in the Championship game by calling time-out immediately after Covington Catholic took the lead by one point with only 6 seconds remaining. A one second delay in stopping the clock would not have allowed the last second basket which won the Championship.
- Justin was a team builder. His sophomore year, the Yellowjackets had a 30-3 record but lost in the regional finals. The next year, he was the **only returning starter** and assumed the team leader role. Earlington High and Million High had integrated the previous year. Therefore, the other starters came from the Junior

Varsity team and many of the players had only played together for one year. Their record was 29 - 7 and they went to the Sweet Sixteen Tournament but lost the first game. The next year, he led the team to a 38-1 record with the only loss to Louisville Male by 4 points at the LIT. This time, they went to the Sweet Sixteen and won the Championship!

- Another example of his leadership is evident in the 1967 Championship game. The last minute of that game can be viewed at the link: <http://youtu.be/vvGW2GYcidE>. The game was won on a last second goal. However, there was a critical event that could have cost Earlington the victory. With 46 seconds remaining in the game, Earlington was ahead by one point and had the ball. Arthur Johnson, Earlington's guard, made an "over-and-back" violation. As shown in the video, Johnson dropped his head feeling that he had lost the game. Justin immediately ran to Johnson for some "on the court" coaching to get Johnson's head back in the game. The next time Earlington had the ball, Johnson got an assist on a shot made by Sharp. Tyrone Hopson made the last second, winning basket but had Sharp not immediately responded to Johnson's turn over, the outcome might have been very different.

Justin Sharp was not a flashy player. He was not just an outstanding scorer and rebounder. He was a work horse and a team leader! His commitment to physical fitness, his mentoring of younger players, his personal sacrifice of playing time and his "on-the-court" basketball IQ led a small school and town in Western Kentucky to a State Championship!

I grew up in Earlington and graduated from Earlington High School. I have watched Justin Sharp in high school, college and as a teacher and coach in Louisiana. He has been a leader at all levels and made significant contributions both on the court and off. It is my honor to submit this nomination for his inclusion in the Dawahares/KHSAA Hall of Fame.

Sincerely,

LeeT. Todd

Rick Thorp [rick.thorpe1@icloud.com](mailto:rick.thorpe1@icloud.com)  
2014 Bayview Drive  
Madisonville, KY 42431

March 1, 2024

Dear KHSAA Hall of Fame Committee:

Earlington High School, Earlington, Ky. in 1967 became Kentucky's version of the movie "Hoosiers." A small school with nearly 200 students, won the 1967 State Basketball Championship. The coach was the principal, Bob Fox. The team record was 38-1. All five starters gained all state recognition. One player, Justin Sharp, in this writer's opinion, was their best player, having led the Yellow Jackets to back-to-back appearances in the state tournament.

Justin Sharp was comparable to the best the 2nd Region ever produced, including Earlington's 1958 Kentucky Mr. Basketball, Harry Todd; Princeton Dotson's Dwight Smith and brother, Greg Smith; Bird Averitt of Hopkinsville; and Travis Ford of Madisonville, to name a few. I played against Justin three times in 1967 when I was a guard for the West Hopkins High School "Rebels" basketball team. I never saw a better player, maybe with the exception of Billy Ray Cheatem, Christian County High School, in 1968. Sadly, he had some trouble in school and never played again.

Justin Sharp is still a legend in the Western Kentucky Coal Fields. He had humble beginnings in Earlington and has accomplished much in his lifetime, including playing ball at Louisiana Tech, teaching and coaching basketball in high school, and winning two state championships in Louisiana. The people of Earlington still hold him in high regard for leading the town to a state championship, but mostly the man he became, a credit to his family and the town of Earlington.

Rick W. Thorpe

John Thorpe  
P. O. Box 631  
Mortons Gap, KY 42440

Date: March 1, 2024

Dear KHSAA Hall of Fame Committee:

Justin Sharp, Earlington High School "Yellow Jackets" 1967 Kentucky State Champion basketball team, was without question, the very best high school player I ever guarded. He was impossible to defend. His career included being on the varsity for five years, playing alongside Gary Gamble, University of Kentucky 1966 National Championship game, and Wesley Coffman, University of Tennessee.

Justin scored 1950 points and 1680 rebounds during his career. He was All-District 1965, 1966, 1967; All-Region 1966, 1967; MVP All-Region 1967, All-State honorable mention 1966; All-State first team 1967; played in East/West All-Star game 1967; All-State tournament team 1967; all Western Kentucky 1967; Honorable Mention All-American 1967.

Justin Sharp played college ball with Louisiana Tech. After college he taught high school and became a coach, winning two state championships. Later, he coached small children in a church league. There has been none better as a player, coach, and role model, regarding the game of basketball than Justin Sharp.

John C. Thorpe  
West Hopkins High School  
1964-1968, Rebel basketball player

Jim Beshear  
(Retired) Assistant Principal, Hopkins County Central High School  
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April 30, 2024

Dear Hall of Fame Committee:

I am writing to wholeheartedly endorse Justin Sharp for induction into the Kentucky High School Basketball Hall of Fame. As a former player (County Rivalry) from West Hopkins High School, and as a friend for over fifty plus years I have had the honor of witnessing Justin Sharp exhibit extraordinary talent, dedication, and sportsmanship throughout his illustrious career in basketball.

From 1962 to 1967 Justin Sharp demonstrated exceptional skill and leadership as a five-year starter for the Earlington High School "Yellowjackets" beginning his varsity career in the 8th grade. Justin had the complete skill set: prolific scorer (1950+), rebounder (1680+), assists (773), and "defensive stopper" while playing multiple positions. In 1967 Justin was named All District MVP, All Region MVP, All Western Kentucky, All State, All Sweet Sixteen, plus Honorable Mention All-American. His remarkable career record of 141-25 is a testament to his unparalleled talent and dedication to the sport. Notably, Justin Sharp played a pivotal role in leading his team to victory in the 1967 KHSAA State Championship game, securing a state title. He continued his education at the collegiate level, playing basketball at the Louisiana Tech University, winning the Southland Conference title all four years of his collegiate career.

After his playing days, Justin Sharp seamlessly entered coaching, where he enjoyed remarkable success over a span of 14 years. His coaching career, highlighted by a remarkable record of 378-65, is a testament to his leadership, strategic acumen, and ability to inspire excellence in his players. Notably, Justin Sharp led his teams to 10 district championships and secured two state titles, further solidifying his legacy as one of the most accomplished coaches in the history of Louisiana basketball.

It is without hesitation that I recommend Justin Sharp for induction into the Kentucky High School Basketball Hall of Fame. His extraordinary achievements as both a player

and a coach, coupled with his unwavering dedication to the sport of basketball, make him a truly deserving candidate for this prestigious honor.

Thank you for considering Justin Sharp for induction into the Kentucky High School Basketball Hall of Fame. If you require any further information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jim Beshear