

Tony Fields – Kentucky High School Hoops, Facebook site: ‘This was written by Larry Kihney, coach at Pleasure Ridge Park High School, about Billy Joe Burton, great PRP player in the 1960’s and also the subject of a recent post by me on Kentucky High School Hoops . This post is one of the reasons I love this site and our basketball history!’

Unlike today, in 1965 we did not have social media, or cell phones. Travel was restricted to a ten-mile radius of our home, and our heroes were the people we knew first hand. In the small neighborhoods of Pleasure Ridge Park, the Vietnam war had propelled it to one of the fastest growing communities in the entire United States. Families were flooding to the area and houses were being built as fast as possible. All the while, a new high school named for the area, Pleasure Ridge Park, was just ten years old and looking for an identity.

A small boy who lived on Jonquil Drive, just a short walk from the school, had no idea that he would fulfill not only the role of hero, but would give the school an identity that is still in place today, 53 years later.

Billy Joe Burton had played eighth grade basketball for PRP. He watched the older players before him, with close attention being paid to a senior guard, Danny Manning, and University of Kentucky forward Larry Conley. Manning and Conley’s hustling, reckless-style and unselfish-play, inspired young Billy. Billy was small and wiry and the lessons he learned from watching Manning and Conley, helped him survive against taller, stronger players during his freshman season.

PRP had a young innovative coach in Gary Schaffer and heading into Billy’s sophomore season, he decided to go with a young group of sophomores on the varsity level in hopes of establishing a foundation for the future. This move would prove pivotal in Billy’s development.

Burton had grown a little but it was still difficult to battle the stronger, older players. He earned their respect with his tough-play, and his leadership skills began developing. The team won only two games that season, but Schaffer’s plan worked as Burton and his teammates gained valuable experience.

As a junior, Burton had grown, and the once wiry boy was now a tough hard-nosed young man. His style of play was simple: out work the opponent and do what it takes to win. Burton was a star in the making as his ability to master all levels of the game, just like Conley at UK, helped guide PRP to 22 wins, and the basketball team won the first post-season championship trophy!

Burton was voted All-Region by the opposing coaches. When the 1968 season rolled around, Billy had taken care of the school’s identity: it was winning basketball. Everyone in the community had a new sense of pride, and they packed the gyms to see their Panthers defeat all comers. Burton was now a 6’3 senior, and like his team, Billy was set to take on all comers and he led his team with that same-mental toughness.

As the Panther’s win-total began to pile up, Burton’s all-around game began to separate him from other players in the state. While he was not his team’s leading scorer, it was obvious who PRP’s best player was.

PRP entered the regional tournament with a 22-1 mark and a top 10 ranking. Their first-round opponent was top-ranked Shawnee. The Indians came out and jumped on PRP. The lead swelled to 23 points by half-time. While most teams and individuals would have folded, Burton's toughness and leadership was on full-display. Down 19 points with six minutes left in the third, Billy and the Panthers cut the lead to one with ten seconds to go. After a tie-up on a rebound, it was time for a hero to become a legend. Burton positioned himself near the basket on the lower part of the jump circle. Shawnee's 7'1" Tom Payne was close to him, more than likely placed there to provide a defensive stopper for the Indians. As the ball was lofted into the air, PRP's Rusty Lunsford tipped the jump ball to Burton and he scored over Payne's out-stretched hand. PRP won 92-91 and Burton was crowned the "Hero of PRP" on the front page of the *Courier-Journal* the following day, and was carried off the court after the win over Shawnee.

Burton was named All-State, and the Panthers finished 23-2. While there have been countless players that averaged more than Burton's 18 points a game or be honored All-State, what separates Burton from others is the fact that he not only helped his team become one of the state's best in 1968, but that he inspired a basketball program who, after 58 years, still ranks among the state's best.

In the summer of 1968, Burton was named an alternate on for the Kentucky All-Star team, meaning he could only play if another player got hurt. During the team's first practice, Burton promptly told Coach Hardin McLane, from Elizabethtown Catholic, that he wanted a chance to play. He ended up being the sixth man on the team, the first one coming off the bench.

His greatest accomplishment may be that he united a young growing community in the state's largest city. He gave this rural area an identity, a past time, and a hero in a time when they had none of the three.

Burton would go on to do the same things at Eastern Kentucky University, as captain of his team. He was named all-conference and led the Colonels to the NCAA Tournament at a time when you had to win your conference to qualify.

From there Burton was selected by the Pacers of the ABA, completing the dream of everyone who plays this game we all love so much in Kentucky.

An amazing career for a little boy who used to dribble a basketball down Jonquil Drive, chasing a dream.

Sincerely,

Larry Kihnley
Basketball Coach
Pleasure Ridge Park High School

Nomination For Billy Joe Burton to be inducted into the KHSAA Hall Of Fame

Pleasure Ridge Park High School has a state-wide reputation as one of the best high school basketball programs for many years It all began in 1967-68 when PRP had its best season ever, and sparked a tradition that continues today.

All these accomplished could not have happened without great coaching and team play, but a team must also have a point guard, a floor general to make it all happen and Billy Burton was not only the point guard but the team leader who made the team click. Burton's leadership and success earned him all-state honors, and he was selected for the Ky All-Star team and led the team to both home and away victories over the Indiana all-stars - a record that may very well stand today.

Following his incredible high school career, Burton accepted a scholarship to play point guard for the ECU Colonels from 1968-72, where he guided them to an Ohio Valley Conference championship and advanced them to the sweet 16 in the NCAA tournament, which is the best performance in ECU history in tournament play. Very few Ky high school players find themselves eventually drafted by the NBA, however, because of his outstanding success in high school and college, Burton was drafted by the Indiana Pacers in 1972.

As a former PRPHS teammate, I witnessed firsthand how Burton lead our team night after night with his outstanding skills, abilities and leadership to victory. The entire team looked up to him as our team leader who always took on the job of stopping the best player on the opposing team. That's what leaders do, rise to the occasion when the game is on the line.

Former Teammate and Friend,

John Osborne, PRP Class of '68

Vice President, retired

Western Kentucky University

From: Osborne, John <john.osborne@wku.edu>
Sent: Thursday, May 31, 2018 2:09 PM
To: Larry <larry.conley@comcast.net>
Cc: Julie Burton <julieburton@bellsouth.net>
Subject: Re:

Larry

Thank you for your letter of recommendation. Billy Joe is very deserving of this honor and we are delighted to have you included as a supporter

Sent from my iPad

On May 31, 2018, at 10:11 AM, Larry <larry.conley@comcast.net> wrote:

Sent from Mail for Windows 10

John, Julie asked me to submit a recommendation to the KHSAA for Billy to be inducted into the KHSAA Hall of Fame and to send it to you. After reading what coach Strong said so eloquently about Billy, I think he would have been a great teammate to have played with during those years. Please send a copy of this to Julie.

Larry

Billy Burton (Pleasure Ridge Park H.S)

I am writing this letter to recommend Billy Burton for entrance into the KHSAA Hall of Fame. From all of the articles I have read about his play I feel he personified what the team player truly was. He did what was asked of him and utilized the skills he possessed to make his team better. He was an excellent passer, a lockdown defender, and scorer when needed as shown by his 18 PPG his Senior year in 1968. He scored 861 career points in his 3 years at PRP and was an instrumental part to the successful seasons while playing at PRP.

He was 2nd team All State, played on the Ky. Team in the Ky./Ind. All Star Game, and played on the East team in the Ky. East/West All Star Game. He was an unselfish player who placed his team first and his personal ambitions behind his team's goals. Billy went on to play for Eastern Ky. and carried with him that same determination and drive that had made him and his team's winners at the high school level. His affection for Ky. high school basketball and his team's at PRP only adds to his being seriously considered as a top candidate for entrance into the KHSAA Hall of Fame.

May 31, 2018

Dawahares/KHSSA Hall of Fame
2280 Executive Drive
Lexington KY 40505

RE: Billy Burton

The purpose of the letter is to endorse the nomination of Billy Burton to become a member of the KHSSA Hall of Fame. I became acquainted with Billy over forty years ago when we became roommates/teammates on the Eastern Kentucky University basketball team. Previously to that I had followed his high school career through my high school coach, Joe Harper, who had coached Billy in the 1968 Kentucky-Indiana All-Star basketball series. Coach Harper was a big fan of Billy's, highly complimentary of his athletic ability and excited that Billy and I were both going to ECU. Coach credited Billy as being instrumental to the two victories that the Kentucky All-Stars achieved over the Indiana All-Stars that year.

Billy's many athletic achievements have been documented for the committee and reflect that he was one who got the most out of his abilities. I, however, would like to speak to Billy's character, his competitive nature and dedication to team and teammates. Billy is a very successful businessman who is actively involved in civic and church activities in his current hometown of Norcross, Georgia. Billy has always been a leader on and off the court as he was elected co-captain of our 1972 ECU team.

I have never played basketball with anyone who was more competitive than Billy Burton. He was driven to make himself, and all those he played with, achieve their highest potential. He took pride in his defensive skills and always was matched up against the other team's best player.

He was the ultimate teammate as he was always willing to do anything that would make his team better and successful. Billy did not care who scored the most points or received the recognition, as long as his team played to their potential. This dedication to team and teammates is reflected in the winning records of Pleasure Ridge Park High School and Eastern Kentucky University during Billy's time at each institution.

Thank you for consideration of this nomination. Please contact me if you have any questions or require additional information.

Daryl Dunagan
104 Oxford Place
Frankfort KY
dldunagan@yahoo.com

Monticello High School (1964-1968)
Eastern Kentucky University (1968-1972)

RECOMMENDATION FOR BILLY BURTON TO BE INDUCTED INTO THE KHSAA HALL OF FAME

I was the head basketball coach for the Kentucky All Star team in the annual games against Indiana in 1968. The series has been played over a period of 60 years, and being chosen to play is one of the greatest honors in Kentucky high school basketball. Billy earned that honor.

Kentucky teams have won both games only 7 or 8 times in the history of these games. We won both games and Billy Burton proved to be the most valuable player in these two wins.

After being an outstanding player on his high school team, he proved to be equally outstanding on the all star team with his hustle and determination to win.

Billy Burton was a take charge type of player who was invaluable in any situation where a hero was needed. If I am in a foxhole, I want Billy by my side. In 1993 I was inducted into the KHSAA Hall of Fame and I would like nothing more than to have Billy by my side there also.

I humbly request that Billy Burton be inducted into the KHSAA Hall of Fame.

Hardin McLane

From: Guy Strong <gastrong30@att.net>

Date: May 27, 2018 at 8:21:43 PM EDT

To: "JOHN.OSBORNE@WKU.EDU" <JOHN.OSBORNE@WKU.EDU>

Subject: [??SPAM??] BILLY BURTON

Reply-To: Guy Strong <gastrong30@att.net>

IT IS A PRIVILEGE AND PLEASURE TO RECOMMEND BILLY JOE BURTON FOR THE PRESTIGIOUS DAWAHARE/KHSAA HALL OF FAME HE EPITOMIZES THE TERM STUDENT-ATHLETE AND EXEMPLIFIES THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CONDUCT, LEADERSHIP, COMPETITIVE ZEAL AND MORAL CHARACTER. HE MADE HIS TEAMMATES BETTER BY HIS UNSELFISH PLAY AND ABILITY TO CREATE OFFENSIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEM. HE WAS AN EXCEPTIONAL DEFENSIVE PLAYER, DISRUPTING THE OPPONENT'S OFFENSE AND ALWAYS GUARDING THE OPPONENT'S BEST PLAYER. HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN PLEASURE RIDGE PARK UPSETTING SHAWNEE HIGH SCHOOL, THE #1 TEAM IN KENTUCKY IN THE 7TH REGION TOURNEY IN 1968. HE WAS ALL REGION AND ALL STATE IN 1968 AND PLAYED FOR KENTUCKY IN THE KY-INDIANA ALL STAR GAME THAT YEAR. HE WENT ON TO BECOME A STAR AT E.K.U. AND WAS THE STARTING POINT GUARD ON THE 1972 TEAM WHICH WON THE OVC THAT YEAR HE WAS THE FIERCEST COMPETITOR I COACHED IN MY 35 YEARS OF COACHING.

THANKS, GUY STRONG
FORMER COACH AT MADISON HIGH, MALE HIGH, VA. TECH, KY. WESLEYAN, E.K.U., OKLAHOMA STATE AND CLARK CO.

PRP's Billy Burton

Burton was one of Kentucky's outstanding guards who played high school basketball in the late 1960s, starting varsity ball as a sophomore and growing into an All-State player as a senior during the 1987-68 season when Pleasure Ridge Park was the last team in the state to lose a regular-season game/ The Panthers only lost twice that winter while competing in the tough Sixth Region.

PRP had a big center in Rusty Lunsford and a sharp-shooting guard in Larry Carter, but Burton – the super quick point guard-- was the player who made the Panthers click. Burton scored in double figures many times but he also was the team's best defensive player. It was Burton who always guarded the opposing team's best offensive threat.

Burton, who grew several inches after his 10th grade year when the sophomore-dominated PRP team won only two games, was good enough as a senior to make the Kentucky All-Stars team and receive a scholarship to Eastern Kentucky University. At ECU, Burton not only led the Maroons to an Ohio Valley Conference title, but guided them to a berth in the NCAA's Sweet 16 tournament for the first and only time in the school's history.

That is why I wish to nominate Burton, now a highly successful businessman in Atlanta, for the KHSAA's Hall of Fame.

Thank you for considering Burton.

Bob White, former sportswriter for The Courier-Journal (1959-2000).

Bob White
502 898-1605 - cell phone
502 882-2332 - Land Line