

# Red hot Wildcats roll into State Tournament on 12 game winning streak

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on March 11, 2013)

Jack Bailey began this series on the history of Oak Ridge High School basketball last week and brought us from a state championship in 1961 to the State tournament in 1963. In this concluding article, Jack provides us insight into the drama of the winning of a second championship in three years. Enjoy the memories:

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In Oak Ridge's opening test at the state tournament, they faced an outstanding Franklin team. Before an "almost delirious crowd of 6000" at the Vanderbilt Fieldhouse in Nashville. Kenny Campbell nailed two free throws with five seconds left in overtime to win the game, 48-46.

Defenderfer led the team in scoring with 19 points. Defenderfer hit late field goals at the end of the first, second and third quarters to keep the game close. He also hit a short field goal at the end of regulation, but the buzzer had barely sounded so off they went into overtime. No one scored in overtime until Campbell made his two free throws with five seconds left.

Oak Ridge advanced to the state semi-finals by winning over Kittrell, 53-45. Oak Ridge, with its trademark tough defense, held Kittrell to only 31% on their field goal attempts. Edwin Connelly had perhaps his finest game of the season with 8 rebounds, 12 of 13 free throws and 18 total points for the game.

Oak Ridge then handily defeated Memphis Overton, 44-35, to set up the championship game against Murfreesboro. Murfreesboro sported a 33-1 record and was a slight favorite in the finals.

In a magnificently played and thrilling basketball game, Oak Ridge defeated Murfreesboro in overtime, 38-36, to claim its second state championship in three years. There were 7,400 fans on hand at the Vanderbilt Fieldhouse, with an estimated 2,000 Oak Ridgers in attendance.

Many fans described it as "a perfect game." Oak Ridge only turned the ball over twice and the Murfreesboro Tigers lost the ball only three times. Only four fouls were called against Oak Ridge and just six fouls against Murfreesboro, which indicated just how good the defenses were for both teams.

However, the Tigers did not have an answer for Senior Guard Kenny Campbell, who had a game for the ages. He scored 29 of his team's 38 points. Murfreesboro had come back from a 33-28 deficit with less than four minutes left in regulation and managed to tie the score with only 46 seconds to play.

The score was tied at 36 all when Bud Defenderfer, "like he was jumping for his life," according to one account of the game, grabbed the opening tip of overtime. He then passed the ball to Kenny Campbell, who then weaved in and out of the Tiger defense for nearly the full three minutes of the overtime period.

With less than 10 seconds to play he moved into position and hit a game-winning short jump shot with only three seconds left on the clock. Murfreesboro missed a last second attempt and the Oak Ridge Wildcats were State Champions---again!! Oak Ridge finished with a 16 game winning streak and a final won-lost record of 27-4.

"The little guy" mentioned at the beginning of this story, now stood as the "tallest 6-footer in state tournament history," according to reporter Bob Gilbert. His "exploits Saturday night rendered useless the adjective 'sensational' as he led Oak Ridge to the 1963 crown.

In that same article, Coach Ira Green said, "Campbell was on. He's the team's floor leader and he called on himself. If it had been another player, Kenny would have called on him to shoot." Asked if he ever thought the Wildcats were in trouble during the game vs. Murfreesboro, Campbell smiled and simply said, "Nope."

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Coach Green said Murfreesboro was “absolutely the best team we faced all year.” Perhaps the key to victory was a change Coach Green made at mid-season. He switched to a suffocating zone defense and reeled off 16 wins in a row and won the state.

In addition to the capacity crowd at the game, it was also televised on a Nashville TV station. Larry Munson, who was at Vanderbilt at the time, called the game.

He later gained fame as the voice of The Georgia Bulldogs for more than 40 years. One of his radio partners at Georgia was Bob Yongue, the play-by-play announcer for WATO radio in Oak Ridge from 1958-’63, who left soon after this game to take his new position in Athens, GA.

The Wildcats received a tumultuous welcome back to the city when they arrived in Oak Ridge Sunday afternoon, March 17, 1963. A motorcade of an estimated 250 vehicles formed a mile-long motorcade to escort them to the ORHS gymnasium.

According to The Oak Ridger edition of March 18, the electric moment for the 2,500 fans jammed into the gym was when Coach Ira Green prefaced his introduction of the team by saying, “...and these are not boys, they are men!”

Green went on to introduce Team Captain Bud Defenderfer, noting that he had been a real leader. Defenderfer, in his remarks, said “I have spent six years with some of these boys and three years with the others, and that time could not have been spent with a better bunch of boys.”

Green then acknowledged “our exceptionally fine center, Bill Ramsey---that dandy little guard, Billy Atkisson---the biggest post man in Tennessee if measured in guts, Ed Connelly—and Kenny Campbell, who had recently picked up a new nickname of “Spider.”

The Oak Ridger editorial on March 19 praised the Wildcats for their victorious season, noting that, “squeaker after squeaker,” the Wildcats won. But theirs was no fluke state championship.

Champs are what the Wildcats are...unexpected, unheralded, unranked...but also unbeaten. The wire services have holes in their polls.”

Clifford Smith, a long-time teacher and Coach at old Jefferson Junior High School, is now retired and still living in Oak Ridge. He reminisced recently about the boys who were on the 1963 team. He first met some of them when he taught an art class at Pine Valley Elementary School, which was the last period of the day.

He then worked with some of the boys on basketball fundamentals, proper warm-up drills, etc. He later coached many of them when they were in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Jefferson in the 1958-59 basketball season. He spoke of them very highly, “they were all good kids and it was a good team to coach.”

Smith coached 14 years at Jefferson and this team was probably his best team. They compiled a 14-1 won-lost record that season, with their only loss coming to Christenberry JR. High School by two points. Ron Widby, who is mentioned elsewhere in this article, scored 19 points to almost single handedly beat Jefferson.

Another interesting story from Clifford related to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade team. After they had such a great season, he told them, “you are going to win a state championship someday.” He attended the final game when ORHS was victorious in 1963 and saw the team after the game and THEY reminded him that he had predicted they would win a state championship someday.

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Seven members on the 1963 team played for Smith at Jefferson, including four starters; Defenderfer, Campbell, Ramsey and Atkisson. Reserves Bob Cantrell, Charles Tye and Larry Robinson also played on that 8<sup>th</sup> grade team.

In many regards, Smith helped lay the groundwork for the outstanding ORHS State Championship teams of 1961 and 1963.

Bud Defenderfer is also still a resident of Oak Ridge and he was asked for his thoughts about Coach Green. He smiled and said "there certainly were not very many humorous moments around Coach Green.

He was very strict and they had a very disciplined team and style of play...protect the ball, careful passing and look for a good, open shot. It was very quiet on bus rides to away games. Coach wanted us to be very focused and concentrating on the game we were about to play."

Coach Ira Green was named Coach of the Year by The Chattanooga Times. Oak Ridge won the Litkenhouse Ratings state championship in football in the fall of 1962.

The 1963 ORHS tennis team, with Kenny Campbell and basketball reserve Bob Cantrell included, captured the state tennis crown. That gave the ORHS Class of 1963 a remarkable three state championships in one school year.

ORHS won Basketball, Track and Football state championships in the calendar year of 1961 but this was a first for any class, perhaps in the state of Tennessee, to claim three state titles in one school year.

It also was the end of a golden era in ORHS sports.

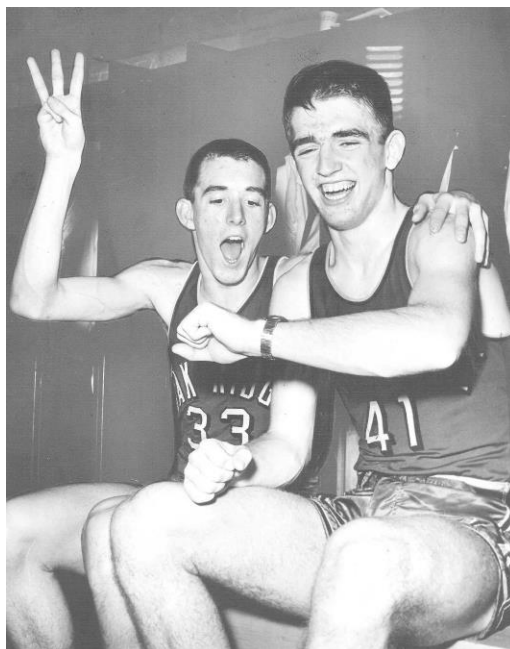
From 1952-1963, Oak Ridge won State Championships in Track in 1952-53, 1956-58 and 1961-62. They won Football in 1956, 1958 (and a mythical National Championship), 1961 and 1962. They won Basketball in 1961 and 1963 and capped it off with the Tennis State Championship in the spring of 1963. A remarkable 14 state championships in twelve years. They would not win another state crown in any sport until 1975.

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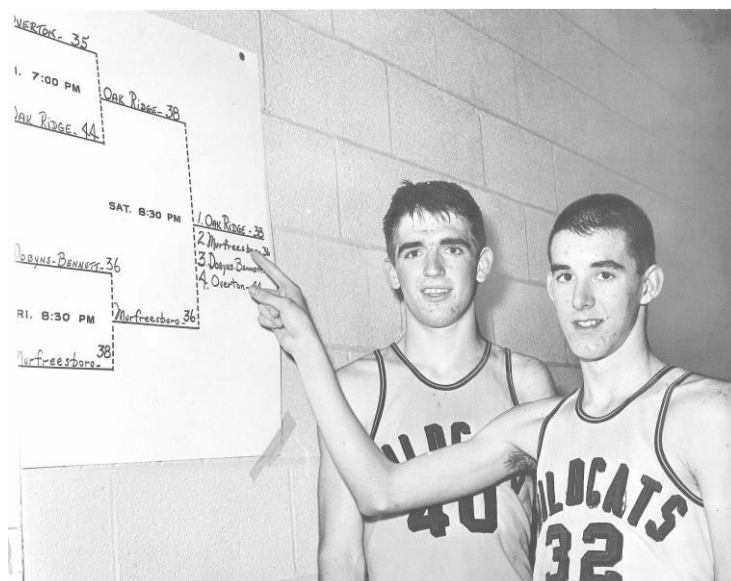
Thank you again, Jack Bailey, for an exceptionally well written account of an exciting time in Oak Ridge High School history.

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Kenny Campbell and Captain Bud Defenderfer. Kenny is holding up three fingers to signify that Defenderfer made field goals just before the buzzer to end the first, second and third quarters of the game versus Franklin High School in the first game of the State Tournament.



Defenderfer (left) and Campbell after they won the state championship game versus Murfreesboro in overtime. The picture shows the completed tournament bracket with the game results. Campbell scored 29 of Oak Ridge's 38 points that night including the game-winner with three seconds left in overtime. Campbell later was a star on Vanderbilt's basketball team. Defenderfer signed with Georgia Tech.