

SPORTS

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107-2 BEYOND THE SCORE

Is it possible there is more to a high school girls' basketball game than what the scoreboard says?

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The final score sounded impossible: 107- 2. It was one of the most lopsided outcomes in the history of Indiana high school girls' basketball. Bloomington High School South, a perennial contender, went into the game last December on a 7-game winning streak. Arlington Community, a much smaller Indianapolis school that had struggled for years against academic woes and student flight, had only won one game in two seasons.

Ebony Jackson, the losing team's coach, played so well for the Arlington Golden Knights that she was named an Indiana Girls' Basketball All-Star. As she watched her team go down against BHHS, the game seemed to play out in fast-forward. Afterward, she told a reporter the way the opposing coach handled the game wasn't okay. Bloomington South had come out strong in a press, scoring breakaway layups and running a man-to-man defense. She looked down at the other bench only once, she said, to see if they might slow down. Her team's only points came from free throws.

Larry Winters, veteran coach of the Bloomington South Panthers, said he wasn't trying to run up the score. He said telling his players to hold back would have embarrassed the other team. They didn't hold back — they scored an average of two points every 45 seconds. 107-2.

News of the game sparked a visceral reaction around the country. "Apparently, Bloomington Coach Larry Winters mistook this prep game for the Battle of Bunker Hill," espnW blogger Jane McManus wrote. "He decided to go full-throttle on a team that hasn't won in 23 games."

"To the adults at B-town South," Indianapolis Star Columnist Matthew Tully tweeted, "thanks for trying to crush the spirits of kids living in a neighborhood you wouldn't spend five minutes in."

Critics were quick to blame Bloomington South's coach. But the final score was about more than basketball. It was about two schools and their respective histories, the way one was reduced to a shell of its former self while the other continued to shine. This game was lost long before the opening tipoff. 107-2.

The outrage sparked by the game made those who were there reluctant to speak. Arlington's players appeared on television only once, on CNN's "Starting Point" with Soledad O'Brien. They smiled into the camera as their coach said they were shocked by how decisively the Bloomington South players trounced them. "They'd played longer than most of us," one player told O'Brien, "and they worked very hard, and we just haven't played before, and it was probably really hard for all of us." Arlington officials responded carefully as well. Though media attention was largely sympathetic to their team, the officials became wary of the impact further coverage would have on students. When asked what their team learned

from the loss, Coach Jackson said perseverance. "No matter what it is," Jackson said, "you just gotta finish it." The parents of the Bloomington South players agreed together not to speak to reporters. School officials treated the game like ancient history. "Everybody's moved on," said J.R. Holmes, Bloomington South's athletic director. "It's out of the news, and we don't even discuss it anymore." The extreme loss touched a nerve. It raised questions. What do players learn from losing so badly? Can a defeat like this one really be considered a victory?

These teams hadn't faced each other in eight seasons. The last time they had played, in 2004, Bloomington South won 52-42. Back then, Arlington's enrollment in seventh through twelfth grades was around 1,500 students. This year, unofficial numbers provided to the Indiana High School Athletic Association place it at 422. Bloomington South's enrollment last year was 1,699. This season, Arlington was by far the smallest school on Bloomington South's schedule.

The December game between them was far from typical. Holmes said Arlington asked Bloomington South to play them when Arlington needed to fill a hole in their schedule. Both sides, he said, were aware of the teams' differences. "They knew it was going to be a mismatch," Holmes said, "but they wanted their girls to experience playing against good teams." Arlington asked. Bloomington accepted.

Arlington's gym is filled with testaments to the school's former glory. State championship banners for wrestling, baseball and girls' track hang on the walls, evoking a time when the school's athletics were strong. Another banner honors the school's former Indiana Girls Basketball All-Stars, including Ebony Jackson. But Coach Jackson attended a wholly different school. When Arlington was ranked last year by the State Board of Education, it received an F. In the same year, it enrolled 1,224 students in grades 7-12. The school had a 74.7 percent graduation rate. Before last school year, the school was designated a "Turn-around Academy." After six consecutive years on the Department of Education's probation, Indiana schools can be turned over to private operators that specialize in school improvement. Arlington, once handled by Indianapolis Public Schools, was put in the hands of turnaround operator EdPower. "It was in pretty serious shape in terms of its academic perfo-

BLOOMINGTON HIGH SCHOOL SOUTH

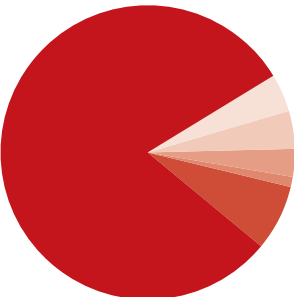
ISTEP + Passing rate

2006-7	74.6%
2007-8	73.2%
2008-9	73.0%

Free/reduced lunch

Free	348 (20.5%)
Reduced	80 (4.7%)
Paid	1,271 (74.8%)

Diversity



ARLINGTON COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL (INDIANAPOLIS ARLINGTON)

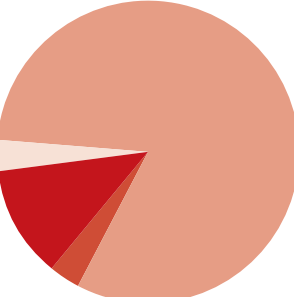
ISTEP + Passing rate

06-07	20.6%
07-08	17.7%
08-09	20.7%

Free/reduced lunch

Free	774 (63.2%)
Reduced	57 (4.7%)
Paid	393 (32.1%)

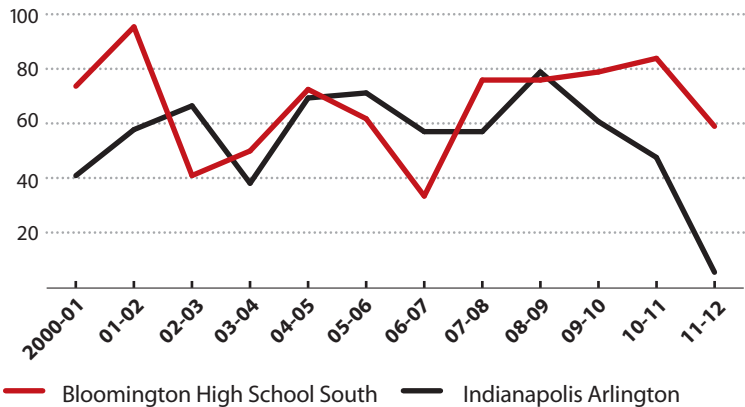
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Source: Indiana Department of Education
GRAPHICS BY MATT CALLAHAN | IDS

GIRLS' BASKETBALL WINNING PERCENTAGE

Shrinking enrollment has taken a toll on Arlington's athletic program



Source: John Harrell's Indiana High School Basketball

mance," EdPower's Director of External Relations Beverly Rella said. "And so a lot of what we've done this year has been around setting the standards and the culture so that those kids can continue to learn and perform better."

The school EdPower took over could be an intimidating place. "You had teachers who were afraid to open their doors to the hallway during passing periods," Rella said.

Bringing Arlington back would require a total restart and a buy-in from parents. But the school had been bleeding students for years. The depletion sped up when word of the takeover spread. Athletes left along with everyone else, headed for magnet or boundary or even private schools that wouldn't be changing leadership. Last summer, Rella said, they weren't sure how many students would return in the fall — or whether they'd even have enough to field a girls' basketball team.

"If you don't know how many kids are necessarily gonna show up at your school by the end of August," Rella said, "you're sure not sure what kind of basketball teams you're gonna have."

Most players on the team this year had no varsity, if any high school, basketball experience.

The team won one game last season. When they took on Bloomington South, they had lost 22 in a row.

What remains at Arlington is a program focused on academic success. Administrators have restored order to the hallways with monitors and patrolling police officers. They're so eager to place college in the forefront of students' minds that outside ever teachers' door is a paper showing the logo of their alma mater.

As Arlington places a new emphasis on academics, athletic achievement has become secondary. Bloomington South successfully juggles both.

Last year the high school enrolled 1,699 students in ninth through twelfth grades. The school had a 90 percent graduation rate and was given an A rating from the State Board of Education.

Basketball is big at Bloomington South. In 2009, when IU's starting guard Jordan Hulls was a senior there and named Indiana's Mr. Basketball, the team took

home a state championship and was ranked third in the nation by USA Today. The girls' basketball program has nine sectional and two regional championships.

Girls' Basketball Coach Larry Winters is in his 14th season at the school. Courtney Ladyman, who played for Winters and later coached the school's freshman team, remembers him as tough but fair. Basketball season stretches through the winter, but she remembers spring and summer workouts. Winters took the game seriously, Ladyman said, and so did his players.

"If you didn't make that commitment," she said "you didn't play."

Arlington's athletic director, Bob Wonnell, said he called Bloomington South's athletic director before the game.

A typical outing includes first a junior varsity and then a varsity game, but Arlington only had enough players for a single team. Bloomington South should only bring their varsity players, Wonnell said.

So Winters brought his best, the product of years of coaching and teaching and training, to face up against Arlington.

"He's not the kind of coach that would just cream a team just for the sake of doing that," Ladyman said, noting the inexperience of Arlington's players. "It's hard to play against players like that."

She wonders what else her former coach could have done.

"Do you just stop the game and not play? Or do you keep going?"

The game was Tuesday evening, December 11. They played in the Arlington gym. Bloomington came out strong in the first half, running a full-court press and man-to-man defense. Coach Jackson, interviewed recently by the Indiana Daily Student, described Bloomington South pouring in layups while Arlington struggled to keep up.

By the end of the first quarter, Arlington hadn't put any points on the board. The Golden Knights didn't score until a shooting foul brought a player to the free throw line in the second quarter.

At halftime, the score was 60-1.

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