

Coalgate Record Register

Volume 136 Number 3 COALGATE, OKLAHOMA 74538 Coal County (USPS 120140) 50¢ Wednesday, MARCH 27, 2019

2019 Premium Sale Exhibitors



COAL COUNTY JUNIOR LIVESTOCK SHOW GRAND CHAMPION — Natalie Washburn, Coalgate 4-H, with her Grand Champion Barrow. The auctioneer is Gary Coffee.



COAL COUNTY JUNIOR LIVESTOCK SHOW GRAND CHAMPION — Rainey Davidson, Coalgate 4-H, and her Grand Champion Doe. More pictures and story pages A-2, A-7, B-2 and B-7.

Most outstanding boys basketball team in school history — the 1958-59 Coalgate Wildcats!

—By Steve Hudson

In the fall of 1958 in a little sleepy town in

southeastern Oklahoma, a basketball giant was being conceived. The small community of Coalgate was about to unleash a tremendous basketball team that would propel itself to the state basketball tournament in Oklahoma City.

This team would go down in the 106-year history of Wildcat basketball as the best EVER. The record of 30-2 has stood the test of time and still has old timers recalling the memories of stardom. That team was coached by Joe Leone, a 1950 graduate who came home to rally the troops.

The 1957-58 season saw Coach Leone lead the girls team to the promised land of the Oklahoma girls basketball state

tournament. Now, it was the boys' turn — and did they ever march through southeastern Oklahoma — like William Tecumseh Sherman did on his march to capture Atlanta, Georgia in the Civil War! The Wildcats blistered through their schedule with convincing victories night after night in steamrolling opponents all the way to the bright lights of Oklahoma City.

The onslaught continued as they upset highly ranked Taft with All-Stater Willie Murrell 57-45. That win gave

the good guys their 30th cherished victory and had hoop fans talking all over the state about the giant slayers from Coalgate. Unfortunately, the amazing run came to an abrupt halt in the semi-finals against eventual state champion Waynoka 49-34.

What a great run it was for the boys from Coal County as they won the hearts of basketball fans across the state. Who were these guys that caused the coal mining

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Lehigh municipal election April 2 — Early voting begins March 28

Lehigh voters on Tuesday, April 2, will decide three municipal offices.

Early voting will be Thursday and Friday, March 28 and March 29, from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the Coal County Election Board office, 18 N. Michigan Street, Coalgate.

The offices at stake are:

Mayor: Candidates Tony Allen Airington, Jerad Shane Gearhart, Billy Wayne Smithart.

Councilmember, Ward 3: Jackie Cooksey, Bobbie Maurica Franklin, Larry Marvin Hensley, Denise Rae Rector.

Councilmember, Ward 4: Sally Calvert-Finch, Vera Loretta Stevens.

As a reminder to voters, the Lehigh voting precinct is now the Choctaw Community Center in Lehigh. The center will be open from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Election Day. Anyone in line to vote at 7:00 p.m. will be allowed to cast a ballot, Salmon said.

Anyone who needs to look up their polling place, verify their registration information, or view a sample ballot can do so online. The Online Voter Tool can be accessed on the Oklahoma State Election Board's website: www.elections.ok.gov. Those who vote by

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Livestock Board annual meeting April 3

The annual meeting of the Coal County Livestock Board is scheduled for Wednesday, April 3, 6:00 p.m., at the Coal County Fair Barn.

The meeting will include an election of officers plus changes in livestock show rules.

Senior High Boys' Basketball



THE 1958-59 WILDCATS — From left (front) — Floyd Campbell, Jesse Yother, Lester Berryhill, Joe Vechnak, Elvin Sweeten; (back) — Melani Gallimore, scorekeeper, John Linton, David Lacy, Louis Maggia, Donald Mayer, Donnie Pope, Coach Joe Leone.

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1958-59 Coalgate Wildcats!

Continued from Front Page

town to follow these kids to an historic campaign?

Following are the characters in this play that ran four months in the winter of 1958-59.

Here is what these men had to say about their journey down "the yellow brick road."

Joe Leone, Head Coach — He was the ringleader of this group of ten young men that won the respect of fans everywhere. Coach Leone knew that he had the potential to have a great basketball team in the era of Sputnik 1 that the Soviet Union had launched into space the year before.

Now, with the likes of smooth Elvin Sweeten, a 2014 Coalgate Hall of Fame inductee; Lester Berryhill, a dynamic freshman who was a tremendous athlete; Floyd "Noodle" Campbell, a burly center who developed an unstoppable hook shot long before Kareem Abdul Jabbar; Joe Vechnak, the steady long-range bomber; and Jesse Yother, a ball handling wizard and point guard, the Wildcats were ready to go!

Backups on that team included former Coalgate Superintendent John Linton; Donald Mike Mayer, another 2014 Hall of Fame inductee and former Wildcat football coach; David Lacy; Donnie Bill Pope; and sophomore Louis "Tony" Maggia.

"I was very fortunate to have had the opportunity to coach these young men," stated Coach Leone. "They were so dedicated to being the best they could be and their efforts were rewarded with an astounding season. These guys all got along with one another and did what we asked them to do on and off the court."

"It has been 60 years since this accomplishment and it thrills me that these gentlemen are being inducted into the Athletic Hall of Fame for this basketball success."

Lester Berryhill — "Coach Leone was a great coach for the team. Each player had an individual role on the team. Elvin and Joe were the scorers. Floyd, Jesse, and myself played stout defense and rebounded the ball.

"There were three things that I remember about the state tournament. First, on the trip to the city, a wolf ran across the highway in front of our bus. WOW! What was that to mean? Secondly, we stayed at this big hotel, The Skirvin, that was downtown. Most of us had never stayed in a 20-story hotel and we felt like stars. Thirdly, the tournament was in the Oklahoma City Municipal Auditorium and the gym floor was raised about three feet above the main floor. Very different, we had never seen that before."

Floyd Campbell — "What a fun ride that was in making the state basketball tournament.

"I remember early in the season that Coach Leone sat us down and said, 'It's up to you if you guys want to make the state tournament.' We had the talent, he said, but it was going to take a lot of hard work to get there.

"We had a wakeup call when we played Hugo in the semi-finals at the Durant tournament and lost by two when we were about 18-0. That was a big motivator and we got back on track.

"However, we almost got upset by Stonewall when we played in the district tournament. We were down by one with 15 seconds to go and Coach Leone called a timeout. Everyone always called me "Noodle," but Coach said to get the ball to Floyd inside, so we knew he meant business.

"Sweeten was our best shooter, but Coach felt that I had a higher percentage opportunity down low.

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Most outstanding boys basketball team in school history — the 1958-59 Coalgate Wildcats!

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Fortunately, I hit my patented hook shot and got fouled. I made the free throw and we won by two. Boy, we were all relieved.”

Elvin Sweeten — “Wow, that was 60 years ago!! What a tremendous season and great teammates.

“All of us were so ecstatic when we beat Bokchito in the regional finals to qualify for state. Don Tidwell was the star for them and we did a good job on him. He later became my teammate and good friend at Southeastern where we were on the basketball team.

“Next, we upset Taft with All-Stater Willie Murrell 57-45 in the quarter-finals. He was a phenomenon and we were fortunate that he didn’t have a big game. We were ready for the semi-final match up against Waynoka, but 6’6 Max Shuck was just too much for us.

“It was a wonderful experience for all the players to play in the state tourney and it seemed the whole town was there to watch us play.”

Joe Vechnak — “I had a great time playing on that team as we had a great deal of talent. Coach Leone was a real disciplinarian and kept us on the right path.

“I was a pretty small guy so I didn’t play football. Coach Leone would let me shoot baskets during the athletic hour in the fall and that is where I developed my outside shot. I can remember when I was in junior high my basketball hero was Jimmy Standridge. He was a fantastic player and took me under his wing. We used to talk basketball a great deal and he had a car and would give me a ride home often.

“Sweeten, Berryhill, and Campbell were very talented and my main responsibility was to hit the outside shots as most teams played a zone defense against us.”

Tony Maggia — “I really enjoyed being a part of that team and all ten of us got along really well. Most of us didn’t have much money, so basketball success was really important for us.

“I was a reserve, but we were made to feel important by Coach Leone. He told us often that we were responsible for the team’s success. We took pride in pushing the starters in practice.”

John Linton — “Sixty years have passed since the 1959 Coalgate Wildcat boys basketball team represented CHS at the state basketball tournament in Oklahoma

City.

“The team was just that... a team in the purest sense of the word. There was no slacking in effort, and a burning desire to win was shared. Coach Joe Leone took raw athletic talent, developed it, applied his coaching expertise and molded us into a state contender.

“The Wildcats’ loss in the semi-finals of the playoffs was to the eventual state champions, Waynoka. The hours spent running laps, doing side straddle hops, fingertip pushups, defensive drills, and shooting free throws really paid off.

“Coalgate fans enjoyed watching lots of exciting play that season. I know how exciting it was...I watched the majority of it from a front row seat warming the bench.

“It was an honor and privilege to be associated with such a fine group of young men, Coach Leone, and assistant coach Joe Packnett. They expected us all to work hard, do our best, and conduct ourselves as gentlemen while representing Coalgate.

“We were taught to be good sports, but NEVER to be good losers. Should a loss occur, we were taught to learn from the mistakes and work harder to improve. When we were victorious, we were taught to be gracious. These traits, coupled with a concept of team effort, provided valuable life skills.

“Many happy memories were stirred as I viewed

our team picture. Yet, at the same time sadness creeps into my mind as I think of those who have gone forth from this earth. David Lacy, Donnie Bill Pope, Jesse Yother, and Donald Mike Mayer. May God bless us all.”

Assistant Joe Packnett — “I was overjoyed when I heard that the 1958-59 boys’ basketball team was going into the

Hall of Fame.

“It was a real pleasure working with Joe Leone as he developed good teams with the boys’ and girls’ programs. My wife, Marguerite, and I were in Coalgate for five years and loved the students and athletes in the school.

“It was a wonderful community and we felt blessed being a Coalgate Wildcat.”

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