

The World's Greatest Interscholastic

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Billed as the "World's Greatest Interscholastic" by its founder, Amos Alonzo Stagg, the National Invitational High School Basketball Tournament, played annually at the University of Chicago, showcased the game unlike any basketball event previously, including college and professional enterprises. Nor did any continuous sporting event incorporate such a broad section of the nation as did Stagg's tournament. All but two states, Rhode Island and California, were represented at one time or another during the years of the tournament, 1917- 1930. It began as a midwest regional affair with twenty-three private and public high school teams from 8 midwest states. By 1922 the tournament took on a national flavor. A year later, the "Interscholastic" hosted 40 teams from 31 states. Stagg set a new 5-day format for the tournament, and the prestigious Chicago Tribune carried banner headlines about various teams coming from small hamlets and about teams coming from far distances. Beginning in 1924, Herbert O. (Fritz) Crisler took over as permanent tournament manager. He expanded the size of the tournament and added, as well, a consolation play-off. Media continued to feature the tourney. Radio carried reports of the games. Well-known Tribune sport writers like Wilfred Smith and Arch Ward signed their by-line stories, often human interest features, about this increasingly popular annual event.

However, "The World's Greatest Interscholastic" aroused the ire of a small band of public schoolmen who believed that Stagg's control of interstate high school basketball took away the power that rightfully belonged with state organizations, especially the fledgling National Federation of High School Athletic Associations. Charles W. Whitten, executive director of the Federation, claimed that the educational aims of athletics were being blunted by colleges and universities in their self-serving sponsorship of interscholarship meets and tournaments. The struggle for control gathered steam over several seasons.

In the end, the University of Chicago bowed to the Federation's growing power and announced on December 9, 1930, that it would no longer hold the tournament.

The Midway Classic served as a catalyst for bringing to the forefront the question as to who would control high school athletics beyond the state level. The University of Chicago decision left the National Federation as the ruling body.



Discussing their latest research projects at the wine and cheese party were George Eisen, Dave Zang, Alar Lipping, John Schleppi, and Dave Wiggins.