

A Town And Its Team: High School Basketball And Community Development And Decline In Nanticoke, Pennsylvania

Paul J. Zbiek
King's College, PA

With three state championships and domination in their local scholastic athletic district and league, Nanticoke High School (now Greater Nanticoke Area) has been a major force in Pennsylvania high school basketball. As often occurs in scholastic sport, the team took on a character that was a reflection of the community itself. This paper examines the fortunes of the Nanticoke High School basketball teams and discusses how these were interconnected with the city's social and economic development. It demonstrates the high degree of impact that scholastic sport has on a community, and it focuses upon issue of ethnicity, community identification and industry.

Regarding ethnicity, Nanticoke has been an ethnic mosaic during the past century. High school sport was an important part of the assimilation process in the coal towns of Pennsylvania. Consequently, the sport would be the first institution that gained mutual support from all the ethnic groups in the town. As interest in scholastic basketball grew in Nanticoke, the team became a focal point for the community and the games had a direct impact on Nanticoke's economic and cultural systems. However, national economic trends, and the rise and decline of a dominant industry, influenced Nanticoke high school sports. Nanticoke developed around the mining of anthracite coal. When that industry went into decline after World War II, there was an effect on the scholastic sports program.