

# The Cantymen

**How a small Connecticut high school and their  
legendary basketball coach defied the odds**

By: Joseph J. Lindley & David Santerre

This book is an account of James Canty and Tourtellotte Memorial High School boys' basketball teams. It is based on, newspaper articles, scorebooks, yearbooks, personal interviews, and many other sources collected during its writing. Any mistakes are ours (Joseph Lindley & David Santerre).

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In Memory of Joseph J. Lindley  
1955-2019

The Cantymen was researched by Joseph J. Lindley. Mr. Lindley, as I knew him, was commonly referred to as “Mr. Thompson”, even though Mr. Lindley was not born in Thompson, CT. Mr. Lindley devoted countless hours to the betterment of the Thompson community, especially to the Thompson Public Schools, the Tourtellotte Memorial High School Alumni Association, Tourtellotte Athletic Hall of Fame, Thompson Historical Society, and local athletes by coaching middle school baseball (I was one of his players) and girls’ basketball. Mr. Lindley repeatedly sacrificed his free time for the betterment of Thompson’s residents.

Despite Joe’s declining health, he formulated this book with the hope of passing on the true story of Jim Canty and the Cantymen. Unfortunately, Mr. Lindley’s health deteriorated to the point that he could not finish this book. In January 2019, I agreed to assist Mr. Lindley, not knowing if Mr. Lindley’s health would improve enough for him to conclude the chronicle. Sadly, Mr. Lindley passed away in October 2019. My hope is that you enjoy this book and give all the credit to “Mr. Thompson.”

Rest in peace, Coach.

-David Santerre

## PREFACE

### There's a New Sheriff in Town

In September 2008, the Tourtellotte Memorial High School announced that Connecticut Hall of Fame coach and former long-time Putnam High School basketball coach, Tony Falzarano, would take the helm of the Tourtellotte's boys' basketball team for the 2009 season. Tony had retired several years earlier from Putnam High School, under what many local sports enthusiasts called a less than desirable manner. Undeserving if one considers his many years of service to the town of Putnam and Putnam High School.

After 31 years as a coach, mentor and teacher, Tony, once the outsider, became one of the most popular figures at Putnam High School. Tony was known for his fiery personality and habit of speaking his mind, regardless of the topic. Eventually, philosophical differences between him and the Putnam High School administration, along with some health issues, encouraged him to retire early. During his time at Putnam, Tony stepped into a tradition of outstanding coaching that included two of the area's greatest - Jim Greenhalgh and George St. Marie. Over his three-decade tenure at Putnam, Tony amassed a 511 - 233 basketball record (68.7%) (CHSCA, 2008), won one state tournament title, as well as seven Quinebaug Valley Conference titles. His enthusiasm, for both the game of basketball and the school in which he taught, helped Putnam pack the gym night after night. Putnam, fired up by Tony's brand of coaching, banded together and created a group they affectionately called the Zoo Crew. This passionate group of fans would give Oakland Raider fans a run for their money.

Tony handled his retirement as well, or as poorly, as many in Northeastern Connecticut's basketball world expected and it was not long before he was out searching for another opportunity to coach high school basketball. Two needs, a vacancy at Tourtellotte Memorial High School and Tony's unquenchable desire to teach the sport he loved, converged in the office of Deb Spinelli, Tourtellotte's Athletic Director, in September of 2008 and she instantly sent her recommendation to hire Tony up the chain of command. Several weeks later, Tourtellotte Memorial High School had a new head basketball coach.

Soon after the news was released, a buzz quickly developed throughout the Town of Thompson and people, young and old, were talking about the prospects of winning the 2009 boys' basketball season and making the state tournament. In a matter of weeks, people at the local diner, barbershops, and library were discussing the Putnam legend coming to Thompson.

Through those discussions, it became clear that numerous local citizens, sports writers, and basketball enthusiasts felt that Tony set the standard for basketball coaching in the State of Connecticut. It was also clear that many former Tourtellotte cagers felt otherwise. One elderly individual and former Tourtellotte player offered this tidbit, "while Tony may be one of the State's best, he was not the coach who set the standard. He will certainly be coaching in the shadow of the one who did."

The coach this individual was referring to was none other than James Patrick Canty. He was a long-time coach, teacher, and mentor at Tourtellotte Memorial High School located in North Grosvenordale, Connecticut. The mark he left on the school and those he taught was extraordinary. During the creation of this book, both authors had the pleasure of interviewing men well into their seventies. They lived full rich lives and successfully carved a piece of life for themselves. These interviewees were businesspeople, teachers, company owners, and laborers. Many of which were also ex-warriors who had seen the worst of humanity in the carnage of the

Second World War, Korean War, and Vietnam War. Furthermore, most were in the twilight of their lives and had done their share.

Despite the years that have elapsed since their time as high schoolers, each spoke of “Mr. Canty” with extreme respect, admiration, and fond remembrance. Their shared description of the man they once called “Coach” is best left to one of Mr. Canty’s best players and students. George Dargati played for James Canty from 1948 to 1950. During that span, he was a key player on two State Championship teams. In 2004, shortly after Jim Canty’s death, George penned the following article about his former mentor.

## **COACH CANTY**

**By: George Dargati**

*James Patrick Canty, the legendary and beloved coach of Tourtellotte Memorial High School in Thompson, Connecticut, died August 2, 2004, at the age of 92. The man we called “Mr. Canty” out of respect and admiration had an impeccable reputation and an uncanny ability to teach young men the game of basketball and the game of life. By the time he retired from coaching, he was one of the winningest and most revered coaches in all of New England. His simple, honest values, his moral strength, and his ability to mold championship teams and build productive citizens set him apart from his contemporaries.*

*Mr. Canty was a sensational athlete at the high school, collegiate and professional level before distinguishing himself as a record-setting coach. He was born and raised in Thompson and excelled on the basketball court and baseball diamond during his playing days at Tourtellotte. After leading the Tigers to State basketball titles in 1927 and 1929, he attended The College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he continued to fulfill his athletic promise by gaining national recognition for his athletic exploits. He capped off an outstanding college athletic career by hitting safely in every game during the 1936 baseball season, setting a new college record. After graduating from Holy Cross, he signed a baseball contract with the Washington Senators and played professionally for four productive years before returning to Tourtellotte in 1941 to teach chemistry and coach basketball and baseball.*

*Although he was a highly successful baseball coach, he was best known for coaching the Tourtellotte boys’ basketball team. Under his masterful guidance, Tourtellotte won four state titles (1944, 1949, 1950, 1951). Many believe Coach Canty’s greatest team was assembled in 1950, when it went undefeated and, in the process, became the first Connecticut basketball team to post a 28-0 record. At the end of his career Mr. Canty made history once again when he became the first high school basketball coach in the State of Connecticut to reach the 500-win milestone. What made his coaching feat so remarkable is that they were achieved at a high school that had one of the smallest student enrollments in Connecticut. In fact, Tourtellotte senior boy’s student enrollment in 1950 was just 13. This clearly illustrates the difficult task he faced in building a capable team year after year. During the heyday of Tourtellotte basketball Thompson was a small mill town and the majority of the players came from*

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*the same close-knit neighborhood in the village of North Grosvenordale. We were known as 'Cantymen' and played with a unique grit and determination that brought a tremendous amount of pride and excitement to our small town. Revered by his players and respected by the community, Mr. Canty had an astute mind and was well ahead of his time as a basketball strategist. He utilized full-court press and multiple defenses to confuse opponents, and he favored an offense that featured an up-tempo, racehorse style of play. Coach Canty believed that basketball games were won and lost in practice. As a result, he emphasized hard work, preparation, and execution, and spent endless hours teaching offensive and defensive fundamentals in our practice sessions.*

*Over the years, Mr. Canty amassed impressive numbers and honors, including Hall of Fame inductions and coaching offers from colleges and universities. But his coaching genius was just part of this brilliant man. He was the beacon of integrity, honor, and class. He was caring and devoted family man and a father figure to hundreds of athletes who benefitted from his knowledge, compassion, and wisdom. A humble and quiet man, Mr. Canty always kept an even demeanor on the floor. He rarely raised his voice during practices or games. Yet he never failed to inspire and motivate his players and win their devotion and loyalty. He taught his players how to be good people, good sports, and fierce competitors.*

*One month before his death, a number of former players gathered at the Thompson Historical Society to discuss the life and legacy of James Patrick Canty. We shared our memories and views of the man that we all felt was the ultimate coach, teacher, and human being. Everyone gave an account of their personal experiences, and, by the end of the night, it was clear that, with the exceptions of our families, Mr. Canty had served as the single most influential person in each of our lives. The night stood as a testimonial to the durability of this special bond, which, for many, had lasted nearly 60 years. He connected with every single one of us because he genuinely cared about us as people not just athletes. He taught us how to be successful and provided us with guidance, support, and encouragement. He was a true gentleman in every sense of the word and proved that nice guys can finish first. His love for teaching and for his players and students was one reason I chose education as my profession. His impact on my life was so profound that I named my only son, James Patrick, after him. Mr. Canty will be deeply missed by his family and former players, but his powerful legacy will live on.*

*George Dargati,  
Tourtellotte Basketball Player  
1947- 1950*

Fred J. Post, Sport Editor for the Middletown Press, also had something to say about Canty and the accolades he rightfully deserved. In an article titled, Tourtellotte High's Canty Won More Than 500 Contests, written February 24, 1984, Fred offers:

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*In all the resultant publicity and hoopla about Jake Salafia winning the 400<sup>th</sup> basketball victory of his career, one former high school coach was forgotten.*

*When Safalia guided his team to a win over the Bolton Bulldogs, historians and newspapermen went to work digging up the past records of former and active high school coaches.*

*It was well known that Wally Camp had picked up 400 or more victories in Durham – and that Frank Crisafi had won more than 400 games at East Haven High.*

*Then came word that Connie Donahue of Torrington and Sam Bender of Hillhouse had registered more than 400 high school basketball wins.*

*Jim Canty brought his Tourtellotte Memorial Tigers out of Northeastern Connecticut to become the scourge of Class S basketball for many years. No one heard of the Tigers until tournament time- and then they became the teams to beat for state championship honors.*

*Canty's achievements were brought to mind by a letter from Mike Molinaro, a former TMHS athlete now residing in Rockfall.*

*Mike's letter started the Press sports department on a check of the records – and, sure enough, Molinaro was correct in his recollections of the records.*

*Ted Fatsi, a former pupil of Canty's and now principal of Tourtellotte, confirmed Molinaro's contention that Canty had indeed won more than 500 games.*

*Fatsi said he believed Canty won at least 503 games for us. And I can still remember the celebration we had when Canty reach his 500<sup>th</sup> career victory." Canty, who retired in the early 1970's, now resides in Southbridge, Massachusetts, told Jeff Hood of this department's staff that he had coached for 30 or 31 years – and remembers he won more than 500 games.*

*"That figure of 503 sounds pretty near right. I don't remember what the final total was," Canty said.*

*Canty, a gentleman of the first water has been overlooked by all state organizations handing out awards and spots in various institutions honoring such feats.*

*Canty was a self-effacing man who never sought the spotlight – and referees who worked for him in the state tournaments remember him as a man who never argued with officials over even the most controversial of calls. I remember a state tournament game in New Britain where a*

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*Tourtellotte player hit on a field goal shot from the corner at the buzzer to apparently give the Tigers the victory.*

*However, the official ruled the basket came after the buzzer. Canty made no protest, but after the game he went into the officials' dressing room and told the official: "You were right – the ball was still in my player's hand when the buzzer went off."*

*Now the big question is, "are there any other former high school coaches with 400 Or 500 career victories whose records are unknown because the parade has, wrongly so, passed them by.*

*It brings to mind Waino Fillback's statement to the 400 diners at the Connecticut Sports Writers Alliance Gold Dinner in New Haven a few weeks back.*

*When he became the oldest recipient ever of a Gold Key. Fillback told the people in attendance: "I had given up hope of ever getting this award."*

*Now maybe Jim Canty, gentleman coach, may soon get some of the awards he has deserved over the years.*

·NOTE TO READERS:

The date of the article was determined to be 1984 based on: "*It brings to mind Waino Fillback's statement to the 400 diners at the Connecticut Sports Writers Alliance Gold Dinner in New Haven a few weeks back.*" Waino Fillback was awarded a Gold Key in 1984 per Connecticut's Sport's Writers Gold Key Award Winners Page, found 8/16/08 at:  
<http://www.ctsportswriters.org/honorroll.html>

Mike Molinaro's letter, referred to above, was eventually located and became known as *The Letter That Found the Missing Mark*. Molinaro was a Cantyman during the early 1960's, and like many, was affected by the positive influence Mr. Canty left on so many. Mike sent this letter to the Press some 20 years later. It reads:

*Mr. Fred Post  
Middletown Press*

*Dear Mr. Post –*

*I have read with much interest recent articles in the Press about the three coaches who have achieved 400 or more victories in Boys' basketball. Last year, Coach Wally Camp received much deserved acclaim and publicity for his fine record of 400 plus wins at Coginchaug High School. Last week, Coach Jake Salafia of Cromwell also reached the 400-win milestone in another outstanding career. The Hartford Courant published a list of five coaches, including coaches Camp and Salafia, as having reached the 400-victory plateau in boys' basketball.*



*I am writing because another individual is deserving of the recognition rightfully given to coaches for 400 plus wins in a career. Mr. James P. Canty, retired, a fine gentleman and outstanding coach whom I had the privilege of playing for as captain of the 1963-64 Tourtellotte Memorial High School of Thompson, Ct., won over 500 games in the 30-year coaching career. To complete the local connection, Dan Chubbuck was an outstanding student-athlete at Tourtellotte in the 1920's. I found he also coached at Woodrow Wilson High school, where Jake Salafia was a player for him and upon whom coach Salafia says "... He made a very big impression."*

*Mr. Canty was also an outstanding athlete at TMHS in the late 1920's. In fact, he was on the boys' state championship team of 1929. Mr. Canty went on to attend Holy Cross College, where he was a particularly gifted baseball player. He began his coaching career, baseball, and basketball, at TMHS in the early 1940's and won the first of his five basketball state championships in 1944. His team won three straight championships in Class S in the early 1950's. The Tigers were the dominant basketball team in Northeastern Connecticut for most of his 30-year coaching career, despite being one of the smallest high schools in the state. In fact, he played and usually defeated several Massachusetts high schools with larger enrollments in their senior class than TMHS' whole school.*

*It is possible that you officiated a tournament game in which Portland High edged out TMHS in 1965 at E.O. Smith High school. I was at that game and 'make no comment about the officiating.' Mr. Canty retired in 1971 or 1972 with a career total of 503 wins in his 30-year career. His teams posted a winning percentage of over 75 percent in that time.*

*It is possible that I may be off slightly in my exact figures and dates, but the 500-plus wins are verifiable. You might contact Mr. Theodore Fatsi, Principal of TMHS, who in fact played on Mr. Canty's 1944 championship team.*

*Sincerely  
Michael F. Molinaro*

Joseph "Joe" Lindley, the author and main researcher for this book, graduated from Tourtellotte Memorial High School in June 1974. The co-author also graduated from Tourtellotte in June 2011. Like most Thompson teenagers who walked the Tourtellotte halls, both knew little about the historical significance of the 1909 brick and sandstone building, its benefactors, or the contributions those who graduated before made to our society and community.

Each knew little of the dusty trophies displayed in oak and glass display cases located in the school's main foyer. There, conspicuously stuffed behind more recent awards and plaques were the 1927, 1929, 1944, 1949, 1950, and 1951 Boys State Basketball Championship trophies. Even if the authors took the time to consider the trophies and their significance, they would never have been able to appreciate one of the more remarkable stories behind the dusty silver-plated cups and mahogany wood mounted plaques. A story that is unique to the school and Thompson community. A story that few involved with high school athletics can replicate.

As a grown man, Joe Lindley had the fortunate opportunity to play golf on a regular basis with several older Tourtellotte graduates. These graduates included: Ed Negip '59, Tasi Vriga '51, and Tom Hession '52. For years, he listened to these old warriors talk about their athletic prowess as young men, Tourtellotte's State Championship teams and their beloved coach, Mr. Canty. Although, after years of listening to these fascinating stories week-after-week from these old cagers, the real significance of the six championships failed to sink in. It was not until the formation of the Tourtellotte Memorial High School Alumni Association (TMHSAA) in October of 2008 that it all started to make sense. The formation of the TMHSAA gave alumni a safe place to donate their old records, trophies, newspaper articles, and reports. While Joe was carefully working to catalogue this information, one remarkably interesting and significant fact became very apparent. James Patrick Canty had something to do with every one of them. Some could also argue that he even had something to do with the 1987 State Championship under the leadership of Head Coach, Jim Naum, a former Cantyman himself. Being involved with six State Championships, and again, some could argue seven, is a milestone few in the game can boast.

Mr. Lindley met Coach Canty's son, Jim Canty Jr., in October of 2008 at the Thompson Public Library located in North Grosvenordale, Connecticut. Jim, like his father, is a quiet man whose noticeable politeness and pleasant persona make it easy to develop a positive opinion about him. After listening to stories about Mr. Canty's unassuming personality for years, Joe thought he was sitting with the Coach himself. It seemed that many of Mr. Canty's remarkable personal qualities were passed down to his son.

After several hours of discussion, both men packed up their notes and belongings. As they parted company, Jim left Joe with a statement that confirmed what was fast becoming the essence of this story and the reason it needed to be captured. He said to me, "you know, Joe, Dad would want this to be about the guys and not about him." Humility and unselfishness, items often discussed when talking about Mr. Canty, still go hand-in-hand when discussing the man many decades later.

In subsequent interviews with his former players, all men in their fifties, sixties and seventies, Mr. Lindley was amazed with how each of them, without exception, made the opposite appeal. "Joe, make this about Mr. Canty and not about us. He's the real story."

Long after his death, the impact Mr. Canty made on the lives of those he touched still reverberates through his son, and later his grandson. Joe found the impact the players made upon their coach is still remembered by those who were close to the man himself. Both in this mutual influence, and in the influence, they made upon our community is the story. We only hope we have the skill to properly capture and portray it.

#### NOTE TO READERS:

When conducting research for this book, Joe found a plethora of information available in the form of old newspaper articles, yearbooks, college archives, old school documents, and personal interviews. Several of the newspaper companies no longer exist and many of the articles from personal collections did not include dates and the name of the newspaper necessary for proper citation. While we are unable to properly cite many of the contributions, we have no doubt about the information's authenticity. We have made every effort to give credit where credit is due and apologize to those writers from yesteryear whose names have been obscured over time.

Also, the local newspaper writers of the day did more than just capture the scores and standings, they did a remarkable job capturing the excitement and disappointments felt by the coaches, players, and community of the day.

## About Thompson, Connecticut

New England during the industrial age was an exciting place to live and work. All over the six most northeastern states of America, wherever a river existed, the power source of the day, mills of all sizes were constructed. Some were no more than a small, one-room grist mill. Others, like the Amoskeag Mills located in Manchester, New Hampshire, became the largest manufacturing facility in the world. In Thompson, Connecticut, a town blessed with two major rivers, the French and Quinebaug, and numerous smaller streams capable of generating power, ten villages formed, and mills of all sizes were built. Outside the immediate mill areas, neighborhoods featuring small farming and residential communities developed. Many of these supported the families of those who worked in the mills and lived in the mill villages.

Workers of the day were mostly immigrants who came to America in search of a better life for themselves and their families. Most left dismal conditions in Europe or other parts of the world and few had the money to own anything besides the clothes on their backs. To accommodate the new workforce, mill owners were forced to build and provide company owned houses, stores, roads, public services, and a whole host of other necessities needed to support the workers, and ultimately mill operations. Even though stories of worker abuse abound, many who lived in these mill towns developed fond memories of the close-knit microcosms these environments encouraged. Thompson citizens who grew up in the row houses of Grosvenordale, North Grosvenordale, Mechanicsville, Quinebaug, and Wilsonville, along with those who grew up in the more rural areas of Quaddick, East Thompson, Quinebaug, West Thompson, Fabyan, and Thompson Hill, all developed cohesive communities. Each of these small communities developed unique social personalities, the remnants of which still exist to this day.

The one-way flow of immigrants from Europe usually began with a financially limited extended family pooling their meager financial resources to send their most able family member, or family members, to America in the hope of establishing a job and home front. Once a few dollars were saved in the United States, and living arrangements made, more family members immigrated. Before long, the community was filled with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Over time, ethnic-centric neighborhoods developed all over New England. Nationalities including: the Irish, Italian, French, Swedish, and countless others developed their own smaller versions of their hometowns here in the U.S. In the mill villages of Thompson, areas, such as Three Rows primarily comprised of French-Canadians, Greek Village mostly comprised of Albanians and Romanians, and Swede Village developed.

By the mid-1800s, laws were enacted to ensure every child had the opportunity to learn and Thompson was no different than other towns in building schools and providing a basic education to all. Limited transportation and severe winter weather, though, made travelling to one centralized school out of reach for a geographically spacious town like Thompson. As a result, Thompson constructed local school districts, which covered each far-out village. These districts accommodated grades one through eight. Many of the children, upon graduating from eighth grade, would then join their parents in factories or on farms. A select few would have the opportunity to move on to secondary education. Francis Fitzgibbons, a life-long Thompson resident of nearly 90 years, said the mills were often referred to as "the Brick College."

It was not until the early 1900's that extracurricular activity, especially athletics, in schools grew. Typically, beginning at the high school level, few academic experts of the day saw any connection between scholarly and physical activity. Children of that time worked harder physically than most do today.

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Conversely, large mill owners of the time understood the benefits of keeping their workers and families happy. In response, many provided company sponsored recreational activities. These recreational outlets helped to further cultivate the cohesive neighborhoods, which were rapidly developing. Seasonal activities, such as soccer, basketball, and baseball, became the main source of enjoyment for many mill workers and their children. These teams quickly became a source of pride for the players, fans, and, in some cases, owners. Many owners even hired young men because of their athletic abilities to bolster team rosters and records.

It was into this social environment that many in this story were born.

## A Brief History of Tourtellotte Memorial High School

Education in the Town of Thompson during the 1800s was a very traditional affair. Each of the villages of the town sent their children to one of six school districts. These districts featured a primary education facility that was open to children in grades one through eight. Many schoolhouses were one to three-room facilities built on a small lot, oftentimes, staffed by one to three teachers who taught one to three grades.

Throughout the early 1800s, those fortunate enough to attend high school or secondary school would have to travel to schools scattered throughout the area. Many attended schools outside of town. This made a high school education a rare commodity among the working class living in the New England mill towns.

Seeing a need, and with several benefactors, a young scholar, Thomas P. Green, opened Thompson High School in 1837 on Thompson Hill. Understandably, to service the wealthiest families. It quickly became a renowned secondary school for both boys and girls. The *1838 Catalogue of Thompson High School* showed that during its second year in operation, the school enrolled 92 students, many came from as far away as Providence, Rhode Island (p. 5). Mr. Green was an obvious scholar. Attendees thought little about athletics, which was evident to those of the immediate community. In an undated article, most likely written by Ellen Larned, it was stated that the education at Thompson High School was "...undiverted by athletic interests, they (the students) gave their minds to public affairs." Five years after it opened, in 1843, Thompson High School was devastated by an epidemic that swept through the area. The school was unable to recover and closed in 1843. This left Thompson without a secondary school.

After the Civil War and Spanish-American War, education was critical to America's rapidly growing economy. Several towns at the turn of the century looked for viable secondary school alternatives. In addition, the proliferation of the automobile made it possible for people in rural or otherwise remote areas to travel more efficiently. This made a centralized high school a more reasonable option for towns that could afford a school. Towns that could not afford to build a high school, off the backs of the taxpayers, looked to the generosity of the town's more prominent citizens.

In an example of extraordinary philanthropy and generosity, Jacob Francis Tourtellotte, along with his wife Harriet, agreed to fund the design and construction of the town's first free public high school. The construction of the four-story brick, stone, and steel building began in 1906. The ground floor housed a boiler room, an all-purpose gymnasium, and was completed in 1909.

Harriet took an especially keen interest in all aspects of the school's site selection and construction. She strongly believed that the fourteen-acre site, the current home of Tourtellotte Memorial High School, overlooking North Grosvenordale would be a perfect location for the school. Through her influence, and perhaps cajoling, she convinced the Grosvenor-Dale Company to donate the land. The Tourtellottes also built and donated buildings to house the school's teachers, janitors, and administrators. Moreover, they left the town with sufficient funds to operate and maintain the school for years.

The Tourtellottes, both natives of the Town of Thompson, moved to the mid-west after the Civil War where they eventually made their fortunes. Never losing their love for the place they called home, they donated the school because of an extraordinary commitment to a free education for the young men and women of Thompson. Then, they named the school Tourtellotte Memorial High School, not after themselves, but in loving memory of their two daughters who died in childhood.

Mrs. Tourtellotte was the daughter of a Thompson mill owner, William Arnold, a partner in the Masonville Mills, located in Masonville, CT, now known as Grosvenordale, CT. When Harriet completed her grammar schooling in Thompson, her father sent her to an out-of-town high school because Thompson did not then have a public high school. She was one of very few women given the opportunity to receive a high school education at that time and greatly appreciated the educational opportunity she was given. She believed that others should have an equal opportunity. During a visit to Thompson in the early 1900s, she heard numerous complaints about the lack of a public high school in town, and she quickly mobilized the town to accept the responsibility for a public high school if funds could be found to construct one. After some lengthy discussion, the town agreed. A deal was assembled, and the cornerstone was laid in December of 1907.

Upon completion in 1909, the influential Boston Globe newspaper claimed it was one of the most modern schools in America. Fitted with all the amenities, it included one of the first purpose-built basketball courts in the country. The Tourtellottes also created a splendid museum full of family heirlooms on the second floor of the school. Mrs. Tourtellotte spent many hours in the school, personally selecting furniture, and decorating the Tourtellotte family museum. Accounts of the day all indicate that the school and her philanthropic work were her passion following the death of her husband. Mr. Tourtellotte passed away in Minnesota and never saw the school he helped to fund. She set up a home for the superintendent of schools in North Grosvenordale. From the back window of this home, one could sit peacefully and gaze at the magnificent school high up on the hill that the Tourtellottes built. Some would argue that her greatest satisfaction was in knowing that for generations young men and women from Thompson would receive a free educational opportunity they would not have received without her and her family. She went to her grave knowing that she had changed the town for the better.

During the school's early years, athletics became a key part of Tourtellotte life. The Tourtellottes recognized the importance of physical activity for the youth of the town. This is evident by the construction of the purpose-built room in the basement of the school, one of the country's first. The room had a full basketball court and elevated track that circled the top of the gymnasium. This new high school and its state-of-the-art gymnasium helped to reinforce the already long athletic tradition established in the town during the mid 1800's. With the help of the village mills, especially the Grosvenordale Company, later the Cluett Peabody Company, and now the Tourtellotte Memorial High School, sports like baseball and basketball were becoming an extremely popular piece of the community.

## A Brief History of Basketball

Unlike the game of baseball, historians have little problem agreeing on the origin of the game of basketball. In 1891, Dr. James Naismith, under directions from Dr. Luther Gulick, head of Physical Education at the School for Christian Workers, was ordered to develop an indoor “athletic distraction” to keep the young men of the school busy during the cold New England months.

He began his quest by attempting to bring outdoor games, such as soccer and lacrosse, inside, but quickly found the games too physical and dangerous for the indoor restrictions under which he had to work. Remembering a childhood game that included two peach baskets, Dr. Naismith devised 13 rules and developed the game of basketball (Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, 2002).

The game’s popularity grew rapidly, and it was not long before high schools and colleges all over the country formed teams to compete in an interscholastic environment. Other social organizations saw the merit in this “athletic distraction,” which translated to amateur and professional leagues springing up across the vast United States landscape. In 1936, much to Dr. Naismith’s delight, basketball became an Olympic sport. Over the years, the game continuously evolved with the NBA and the WNBA becoming its pinnacle.

In the Town of Thompson, basketball was played wherever a parent could mount a basket on an available wall or pole. The proximity of the town’s mill villages, such as Greek Village, Three Rows, Swede Village, etc., made it easy for the children of the villages to meet at a common location and establish pick-up games.

Shortly after the construction of the Tourtellotte Memorial High School and its innovative gymnasium, the school formed junior high and high school teams. This helped to popularize the sport and assist the sport in speedily growing. The normal progression for those children who were lucky enough to play for the high school team was junior high school. Next, high school junior varsity (JV), and finally, the high school team.

According to Francis Fitzgibbons, the boys’ team was coached by Gustav Colby and Melvin Smith during the early years. It was not until the 1930’s when the school hired George Selig as their head boys’ coach that the game’s popularity in town grew. George, in 1938, seeing the possibilities for both the school and community, petitioned the Cluett Peabody Company to use their larger community gymnasium as the home court for the Tourtellotte boys’ and girls’ basketball teams. The court, while not as big as today’s regulation sized courts, was nearly twice the size of the basement Tourtellotte Memorial High School gym. More importantly, it could accommodate 700-800 fans, considerably more than the current gymnasium. With a Cluett Peabody agreement secured, George petitioned the Thompson Board of Education and secured permission to use the school’s two school buses to pick-up and drop-off town folks on game nights. With few other distractions in town, people from all corners of Thompson started to attend home basketball games. Some could argue that it was the games along with other school events that brought the villages of Thompson and its different socio-economic groups together.

Soon after it opened, the Cluett Peabody Athletic Club (CPAC), located several miles from the school, became a center of activity for the adults and children of Grosvenordale and North Grosvenordale. Children come to the gym daily to play with friends. Playing for Tourtellotte Memorial High School meant you were among the best in the town. For many boys this meant regular practices and long hours on the CPAC court practicing lay-ups, as well as jump shots (Negip, 2008). Showers, a luxury to those who lived in the row houses of the mill villages, could be obtained for 15 cents. This price included a towel and a small bar of soap. A cleaner child was and still is something appreciated by many parents (Sali, 2008).

## The Cantymen

In 1938, the children of Tourtellotte Memorial High School played their last official home game at the purpose-built gym in the basement of the Tourtellotte Memorial High School 1909 building. Players of the day regarded the new, larger gymnasium as a “palace” that would rival any other court on which they played (Svenning, 2008). The team, now equipped with a bigger and better court, soon regarded the old gymnasium as the “swimming pool” (Dargati, 2008). The old purpose-built court had served the students of Tourtellotte for 29 years and would be the first of four the school would call home. The present one, Jim Canty Gymnasium, would be nearly eight times the size of the first.

After graduating from high school, many of the older boys joined the mills teams. Local teams such as the Arrows, named after the popular shirts, produced by the Cluett Peabody Company, and the Peabody Five would host exciting games with other local quintets that would draw standing room only crowds. Others ventured further and played in men’s leagues throughout the area with some of the best playing in Southbridge, Massachusetts for teams like the Semi-Circles, the Stadium Five, The Southbridge Five, and the AGR’s. Some of the other boys went on to play basketball in college or the armed forces (Dargati, 2008). Some, including George Dargati, Jim Naum, and James Canty continued their involvement in the game by teaching it to the following generations.



## James Patrick Canty – The Early Years

*Quinebaug's favorite son came to us four years ago and appeared, at first glance, to be of the quiet, unassuming type of fellow. Taking all that came along with the same characteristic ease of spirit and tranquility of mind, Jim has been a soothing influence on us, throughout our more or less troubled scholastic careers.*

*Jim has ably earned for himself the title of the "Tris Speaker of Fitton Field." Patrolling the center garden, he showed such an uncanny sense of judging fly-balls that, at the crack of the bat, he was off at full speed, to halt and wait at the precise spot where the elusive pill was to come into his trusty glove.*

*As a student, he had the ability to take his studies in his stride. Not the plugging type, but the steady, resourceful scholar that he was, he always came out on top. These four years have been much too short, Jim, for merely to know you was to like you – "good luck to you in your chosen field of endeavor" is the sincere wish with which we send you off.*

Holy Cross Yearbook, 1936

James Patrick Canty was born to Irish immigrant parents on January 15, 1912. His father, James Joseph Patrick, was born on the west coast of Ireland in County Clare within a small coastal town of Querrin, Ireland on August 8, 1885. Jim's mother, Mary, was born on August 28, 1886, also in Ireland.

Jim's father, James, immigrated to the United States in 1905 and his mother in 1907 among the many thousands of Irish who immigrated during the turn of the century in search of work and a new life. It is likely that both had family members working here in the United States at area mills. James and Mary were married in 1907, settling in the town of Webster, Massachusetts. James worked as a laborer for the Worcester County Electric Company in Webster and later as a foreman at Intervale Mills in the neighboring town of Dudley, Massachusetts. The Intervale Mills were also a short distance from Quinebaug, Connecticut, which was where Jim Jr. was raised. His father finished his working life as a boiler tender or, as many called them, stationary fireman; something typical for the older folks wishing to work.

The 1930 United States census indicated that 18-year-old Jim Jr. worked alongside his father at Intervale for a time as a "mill hand." This was probably during the summer when seasonal work was available at the mills.

The Cantys had six children (Mary born in 1909, Gerald in 1909, James in 1912, John in 1918, and Robert in 1925). According to the United States census, the family lived in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1910. Sometime between 1910 and 1920, the family moved to Thompson, Connecticut. One presumes shortly after Jim Sr. accepted a position at the Intervale Manufacturing Company (Ancestry.com, 2008).

Jim's father died on December 21, 1972, at the age of 87 and his mother on September 16, 1976, at the age of 90. They, like many Irish who immigrated here, carved out a little piece of life for themselves and did well. This was something each immigrant earnestly desired when making his or her voyage to the United States of America. This is the desire that many immigrants strive for to this present day.

There is little formal information available on James Canty Jr. as a child. Early 1900s working class people who lived in places like Quinebaug or North Grosvenordale, kept few family records. Much of what was known was recounted through the stories that were handed down

orally from one generation to the next. Putting food on the table, paying your bills, and getting through life was an unending chore. A select few had time for the luxury of keeping family records.

Like many poor Irish who came to the United States seeking a better life, the Canty family, understood there was a direct link between education and opportunity. For hundreds of years, the Irish had an arduous time breaking the restrictive social barriers imposed upon them by landlords and English noblemen. Your parents, for the most part, established your lot in life and the path on which you would walk.

We do not know much about the education level of Jim's mother and father, emigrating from Western Ireland. However, it would be easy to assume the most they possessed was a secondary education. Most Irish quit after primary school. James Joseph Canty however seemed to have been a learned man. Whether formal or informal, he was, according to the Connecticut State Library, smart enough to have been elected as a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives from 1939 to 1944. If he did not have a formal and advanced education, then he certainly understood the vital importance of education to career opportunities. In other words, the foundation that helped to support an individual's desire for an improved and more prosperous life.

Until the construction of a middle and elementary school in North Grosvenordale, all children of Thompson during the late 1800s and early 1900s attended district schoolhouses. The 1940 Thompson Town Annual Report shows that in 1940 the Town of Thompson still listed independent grade schools operating in Mechanicsville, Wilsonville, Fabyan, West Thompson, Thompson Hill, North Grosvenordale, and Grosvenordale (p. 92). Young Jim Canty attended the Fabyan schoolhouse.

The Fabyan schoolhouse, now the Thompson Veteran of Foreign Wars, is located on what is now called CT Route 131 and the road is commonly referred to as Quinebaug Road. The schoolhouse was built in 1850. Jim and his siblings attended this school more than 60 years after construction. The Annual Town Report indicates there were 388 Thompson children in elementary school at the time. It is safe to assume that Quinebaug had no more than fifty. The school had seven grades taught in three separate rooms. Grades one, two, and three were in one room and had a single teacher. Grades four and five were in another room and had a single teacher. Grades six and seven were in the third room and had one teacher. Teachers at the time were paid a little more than \$1,000.00 per year and were expected to simultaneously teach several grades on a variety of subject matters. Most of these teachers lived in the community that they taught and became a meaningful part of the children's lives. In a small community like Quinebaug, it was difficult for a child to get away with much.

According to Francis Fitzgibbons, Jim Canty's cousin and a long-time resident of Quinebaug, playing baseball, swimming in the local creeks and ponds, and helping with the family chores kept the children of Quinebaug busy. Living in the country meant everyone had to contribute. Girls helped their moms, while the boys helped their dads. Children were expected to tend to family gardens, yards, and chickens. Many worked part-time at local farms during harvest and planting seasons. Francis reported that he and his friends would look forward to these times as they provided some diversion to their normal lives. Maybe playing around with the big tractors and equipment was enough to keep the boys interested.

Another small distraction on the sizzling summer days was the iceman. The iceman would come to town several times per week and the children enjoyed the ice chips that were a by-product of the iceman sizing or dividing the ice. "We would pick it up right off the street, wipe it off and enjoy it." Simple life – simple pleasures.

The boys, and some girls, played baseball all the time in the local baseball fields or whatever open space they could find. That usually included the unpaved, often busy streets, of

Quinebaug. Francis spoke of a hole the children wore out in the middle of the road that they used as home plate until the town decided to pave the road.

The children of Quinebaug played ball every Wednesday afternoon. The game usually lasted six innings and was called upon darkness. They also played on Saturday afternoons, but the big games were reserved for Sunday afternoons. Oftentimes, these games included the older boys on established village teams. They would play against local rivals, such as North Grosvenordale and Grosvenordale, CT, in addition to Webster and Southbridge, MA.

As children, Francis and other young members of his extended family would sit around after Sunday dinner and listen to "the uncles" talk about the old country. Francis could remember his cousin Jim, eight years his senior, telling the boys of his desire to make professional baseball his livelihood. Francis laughed and said, "we could not for the life of us understand how anyone could make a living playing baseball." To the children of Quinebaug, and other towns and cities across the country, it was just a game, but a game young Jim Canty wanted in his foreseeable and bright future.

Young boys in the modern era aspire to play professional baseball. Major league, and even minor league baseball talents, today can make a respectable living. In the early 1900s, however, it was much more challenging to make a living as a professional baseball player. Famous and heralded major leaguers of the time, such as George Herman "Babe" Ruth and Lou Gehrig, would travel around the world and play in organized pick-up games during their offseason to generate additional income. These "barnstorming" campaigns, though, allowed young boys the opportunity to witness professional baseball players in their neighborhood. Especially young boys in rural neighborhoods like Jim Canty in Quinebaug.

Upon graduating from the seventh grade at the Fabyan schoolhouse, Jim would make the five-and-a-half-mile journey via school bus to North Grosvenordale to attend Tourtellotte Memorial High School. This must have been exciting for Jim in many ways. The most important of which was Tourtellotte Memorial High School was the athletic pinnacle of town athletics. Their baseball and basketball teams were coached by the very able and innovative head coach, George Selig, no apparent relation to the former Major League Baseball commissioner, Allan "Bud" Selig.

Jim Canty entered the eighth grade at Tourtellotte Memorial High School in September of 1924. As an aside, Tourtellotte Memorial High School presently functions as a high school for grades nine through twelve. In 1924, the school was small and talent, academic or athletic, was difficult to hide. Under the skilled eyes of those who took the teaching and coaching professions seriously, a smart child or talented athlete would quickly be identified. Dexter Coombs, by all accounts, was a skilled coach and he would have noticed the naturally talented Jim Canty as soon as he saw him throw a baseball or shoot a basketball.

All information points to Jim playing JV ball while in the eighth grade and varsity for his last four years. Jim would serve as a key player of the varsity team in his last three years. He was an integral cog on a successful (21-3) 1926 team, as well as an undefeated (24-0) 1927 team. He and his teammates won the state championship in 1927, defeating Litchfield 37-15. Old-timers remember stories of a successful 1928 season and while they did not make it to the State Championship game, some remember them in the state tournament.

In 1929, the team repeated their 1927 achievement and won the 1929 State Championship. They were only one of three teams in the state at the time that had more than one state tournament win. The 1926 and 1927 teams even won 45 straight contests, which included an undefeated 1927 season. In 1927, they were the only team in the state to have their entire starting five selected for the "All-State" team. This feat was extremely rare at the time, as it is in the present day. The "All-State" team included: Jim Canty, George St. Marie, Dan Chubbuck, Edward Vito, and John Sherry. The balance of the 1927 team included: Romeo Poulin, Earl

Bousquet, Shava Condos, James Mangan, and manager Leroy Johnson (St. Marie Collection). The head coach for the 1927 squad was Dexter Coombs. The 1929 championship team included: Captain Jim Canty, Earl Bousquet, John Sherry, George St. Marie, Leroy Johnson, A. Lachapelle, manager; Ray Potter, with W.G. Colby occupying the head coaching duty.

According to Francis Fitzgibbons, Jim's success on the high school baseball diamond paralleled that of his success on the basketball court. There are scant Tourtellotte Memorial High School baseball records that date back to that time, but Francis remembered Jim playing baseball well enough to reinforce his desire, and potential ability, to play the game professionally.

Jim's father, according to Francis, also saw the possibilities in the game and his son. Encouraging his son to continue his athletic and academic development. They both seemed to realize, when Jim was a young man, that an effective way to a better life was through college and baseball.

When Jim graduated from Tourtellotte Memorial High School, he wanted the best college baseball in the area and that was The College of the Holy Cross (commonly shorted to Holy Cross). Unfortunately for Jim, the stringent academic requirements established by Holy Cross made it difficult for students from public schools with less than stellar grades to obtain an acceptance letter. To be accepted by Holy Cross would require another year of work at a school that specialized in preparing students for colleges as prestigious as Holy Cross. St. John's Preparatory School located in Danvers, Massachusetts was such a place.

St John's was, and still is, regarded as one of New England's finest private prep schools. St. John's had developed a good reputation with Holy Cross admissions and anyone doing well at St. John's had a good shot at securing a position in the first-year class at the college on the hill. Much like Holy Cross, St. John's has been known for their focus on athletics. During Jim's time at the Danvers preparatory school, a football stadium, track, and tennis courts were all constructed. All of which were overseen by headmaster Brother Ambrose.

Jim Canty did well at St. John's on and off the field and court. An undated newspaper article provided by Jim Canty's grandson titled "Wins Scholastic Honor at St. John's Prep," states that, "James Canty of Quinebaug was among thirty-one honor students who received a scholastic average of B or better at St. John's Preparatory School in Danvers, Mass. for the last school period. Canty is a graduate of Tourtellotte Memorial High School."

## **James Canty – The College of the Holy Cross (1933-1936)**

The College of the Holy Cross was established by Jesuit priests in 1843 and is the oldest Catholic College in New England. It quickly became known throughout the country for its exceptional educational and spiritual values. Students seeking a high-quality education and parents seeking the strict discipline of the Jesuit priests found Holy Cross to be an excellent postsecondary education outlet. An outlet that would test students in a multitude of ways.

In the 1930s, Holy Cross was also known throughout the northeastern United States, and for that matter the country, for one other major college activity - baseball. During the first half of the 1900s, playing baseball at Holy Cross, while pursuing a college degree, was the ultimate dream for a scholar athlete. At Holy Cross, the boys who wore the purple in the wide-open spaces of Fitton Field had the best of both worlds.

Many baseball experts suggest that the better college programs of that era could rival many semi-professional teams and low-level professional programs. The money paid to players in the early years is incomparable to today, and many great athletes pursued more lucrative careers that required a college degree. How many more Babe Ruths and Ty Cobbs could there have been had the money been better? Lou Gehrig, during the 1927 season, his fifth season as a New York Yankee, and arguably one of the game's best, only made \$8,000 (Baseball Almanac). The yearly salary translates to slightly more than \$100,000 in present dollars.

Holy Cross was placed among the best college programs in the game for one reason. They won games. One significant reason they won games was due to their baseball history. Prior to 1933, 51 former Crusaders had signed professional baseball contracts ([https://www.goholycross.com/fls/33100/sports/baseball/2020/HCBSBPros19.pdf?DB\\_OEM\\_ID=33100&\\_ga=2.94752922.785063913.1565042273-382773161.1565042273](https://www.goholycross.com/fls/33100/sports/baseball/2020/HCBSBPros19.pdf?DB_OEM_ID=33100&_ga=2.94752922.785063913.1565042273-382773161.1565042273)). A remarkable number indeed for a, relatively speaking, small collegiate program. One of the 51 players was a former Crusader shortstop named Jack Barry. Jack was the well-known, and highly regarded, skipper of the Holy Cross baseball program.

Jack Barry was born on April 26, 1887, in Meriden, Connecticut. After high school, and most likely prep school, he played for The College of the Holy Cross where his exploits as a player were good enough for him to be signed professionally right out of college at the age of twenty-one by the legendary Connie Mack. Connie "Mack" McGillicuddy, regarded as one of baseball's best minds, owned the Philadelphia Athletics and managed that team for nearly five decades. Among his many skills was his ability to quickly assess and recognize talent and there must have been something in the young Jack Barry that he highly sought.

Jack broke into the big leagues on July 13, 1908. The Holy Cross newspaper, the Tomahawk, ran an article on March 3, 1936, outlining Jack's break-in to the Majors. It was titled, "Coach Jack Barry Has Compiled Envious Diamond Record As Holy Cross Director – Popular Mentor Responsible For Crusaders' Rise to National Baseball Fame." The article reported, "for a couple of weeks he (Barry) sat on the bench and had a chance to get used to the surroundings in fast company. One day he had a chance to show his stuff when the regular shortstop was injured. He clicked immediately, and from that time on he had a regular position with the A's. His name will always be associated with the famous 'hundred thousand dollar/' infield" (p.8).

In total, Jack played for 11 years in Major League Baseball, playing over seven seasons with the Philadelphia Athletics and nearly four seasons with the Boston Red Sox. He played in 1,223 games, had 4,146 at bats, and had a .243 lifetime batting average. His .275 season high speaks volumes about how invaluable his defensive skills were to his lengthy career. Throughout most of his career he played shortstop, later transitioning to second base. He was known as one

of the game's very best defensive infielders of the time (<http://baseball-almanac.com/players/player.php?p=barryja01>).

At the helm of the Holy Cross sluggers, Jack had an impressive 561-150 win/loss record, made it to the NCAA Tournament six times, won the Eastern Intercollegiate Championship eight times, and was the NCAA National Champion in 1952. In a 2007 article, the Holy Cross Crusaders Athletic site referred to Barry as "the Knute Rockne of college baseball, (and) the winningest coach in baseball." All told, Jack had 40 seasons at Holy Cross and never endured a losing season. In 120 years of baseball at Holy Cross, Jack Barry remains the school's most successful coach. It was into this outstanding program that Jim Canty arrived at Holy Cross in 1932.

It is unclear how Jim Canty was selected for the Holy Cross baseball team. He attended St. John's Preparatory School, a common path for those wishing to attend Holy Cross. Like Tourtellotte Memorial High School, St. John's had a stellar baseball program, and it is likely that Jim was given the opportunity to try out for the first-year team at Holy Cross based on the recommendations of the St. John and Tourtellotte baseball coaches. The other, less inspired, possibility is that Jim attended a walk-on tryout and simply outperformed the other prospective players.

Like most new Holy Cross ballplayers, Jim, according to his yearbook, played one year for the first-year team (p.49) and his final three years as a varsity player. During his sophomore season, his break-out year, Jim instantly established himself as a ballplayer. He almost earned a starting nod as one of the Holy Cross' guardians of the outfield pasture. In a March 15, 1934, Tomahawk article titled, "Crusaders Defeat Three Opponents During Past Week – Winning Streak Now Stretched to Eight", the reporter wrote that young, "Jim Canty led the attack on three Columbia pitchers each having a brace of singles to his credit" (p.6). His brilliant play throughout his initial season with the Holy Cross team continued and local newspapers noticed that there was something quite special about the young lad from Quinebaug. On April 19, 1934, the North Adams Transcript, a newspaper some distance from Fitton Field and Worcester, took notice and reported that the Holy Cross centerfielder, "Canty played a fine brand of ball against the (Boston) Braves and looks like one of the most promising ball players to come from the hill in some time" (p.17).

A later Tomahawk article dated May 22, 1934, titled, "Clubbing Crusaders Rally After Losing Opener to Brown..." stated that team slugging leaders "Canty, Morris, Horgan, Britt, Couillard and Moriarty (were) hitting often" (p. 16). That same edition printed the batting averages, and they showed that centerfield sophomore Jim Canty, after 11 games, midway through the regular season, was batting an outstanding .419 (p.17). Rather astounding for a first-year varsity player and a mark that would have opened a few eyes.

More impressive than the few lines, which Jim received in the local papers was the fact that he was mentioned in the same sentence as the great Ed Moriarty. The significance of which would only be caught by the local Central Massachusetts baseball enthusiasts of the day. Being associated with such a Holy Cross legend must have been quite a thrill for the young sophomore. Ed Moriarty, class of 1935, was one of the greatest sluggers ever to come from Holy Cross. On April 23, 1934, Moriarty hit a 490-foot bomb off Boston Red Sox ace hurler, Lefty Grove, while Lefty was still in the prime of his lengthy 17-year professional baseball career.

The Red Sox went on to win that game 6-2, but the homerun must have made a life-long impression on the young Canty. The Crusaders finished the 1934 season with a record of 16-5. Upon graduating from Holy Cross, Ed Moriarty was immediately signed by the Boston Braves, and during the 1935 season, played alongside the great Babe Ruth. The Crusaders did not make the playoffs that season, but that would change during Jim Canty's last two seasons at Holy Cross. ([http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/holy/sports/m-basebl/auto\\_pdf/excellence.pdf](http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/holy/sports/m-basebl/auto_pdf/excellence.pdf) and

[year-by-year.pdf](#)). They did, however, finish their 1934 campaign on a positive note by defeating Casey Stengel's Brooklyn Dodgers on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 5-4 at Fitton Field (Mallaghan, p. 1). One can only imagine what the long ride home to Quinebaug must have been like for Jim after beating one of the game's elite teams.

From a team and personal performance perspective, the 1935 season began the way the 1934 season ended. The team was winning, Jim's personal performance did not wane, and he was once again selected as the starting center fielder for Holy Cross. With two newcomers on his left and right, the Crusaders needed the solid play that Jim brought to the field. There must have been apprehension on-campus and in the dugout with two-thirds of the outfield consisting of newcomers. One reporter for the Tomahawk took solace in the fact that "the only regular outfielder who is left from the 1934 season outfit is Jim Canty, the smooth-fielding center fielder" (March 15<sup>th</sup>, p.6). Those who knew Jim can easily imagine the soft-spoken veteran offering big-brotherly advice to the new additions in the outfield meadow of Fitton Field.

By the middle of April 1935, the team was racking up one win after another and by the 14<sup>th</sup> they had tallied eight victories in a row. Despite their impressive winning streak, the boys of Fitton Field tossed and turned the night of April 14, 1935. For many, the following day would be the most important day of their young baseball careers. On the afternoon of Monday April 15, 1935, the Holy Cross Crusaders would play the visiting Boston Braves.

When the umpire finished yelling "Play ball!" Jim Canty made his way to familiar ground in center field of Fitton Field before a packed house in Worcester. It is uncertain how many of the 5,500 fans were there to see the Holy Cross Crusaders play that day, but it is safe to assume most, if not all, came to see the Boston Braves' most famous player – the King of Swat – the Big Bambino - Babe Ruth. Babe, at the end of a storybook career with the Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees, signed with the Boston Braves for one final year. He still had a little left in his 40-year-old body and walking away from baseball, not to mention the New York Yankees, was a difficult thing. Maybe he hung on one more year in hopes of securing a manager's position with a professional team, preferably the New York Yankees. It was a job that he would never see.

The Crusaders battled the Braves valiantly and the following day the Tomahawk reported that Canty teammates Morris and Cusick led the team in hitting that day by each belting a triple and single, "... While Canty and Moriarty were struck by early-season hitting weakness, but performed admirably in the field." Jim Canty, hitting clean-up, went 0-4 against the hard throwing Bob Smith and Larry Benton, but, at the end of the long tussle, the Braves walked away with a 5-2 defeat over the boys who lived on the hill. The Babe started the game at first base for the Braves, went 0-1, and left the game somewhere around the third inning. Ed Moriarty so impressed the Braves coaches that he was signed several weeks later and played his first professional game for the Braves in late June of that year.

Playing baseball as a college kid against some of the game's best had to have been an incredible experience for the team. Although as incredible as that might seem, on April 15, 1935, 10 players from the Holy Cross Crusaders forever earned the right to say, "I played baseball well against the legendary Babe Ruth." A bragging right that few collegiate baseball players could share.

By the end of May, the Tomahawk reported the junior center fielder, Jim Canty, was having yet another outstanding season at the plate with 17 hits, batting .354, leading the team with doubles, RBIs, and number of at-bats. The team had just finished a 12-game sweep by beating the Providence Friars 13-7. Jim did his share to stave off a Providence rally deep in the game "...when his perfect peg to Cusick (the Holy Cross catcher) caught Collins at the plate" (Tomahawk, May 21, 1935, p.15). Eleven games later, the Crusaders finished the 1935 season as the Eastern Intercollegiate Champions with 22 wins and only one loss ([http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/holy/sports/m-basebl/auto\\_pdf/year-by-year.pdf](http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/holy/sports/m-basebl/auto_pdf/year-by-year.pdf)). This record

calculates to a winning percentage of 95.65%. Additionally, 1935 would become one of nine undefeated seasons for Holy Cross baseball at Fitton Field.

Like the 1935 season, the 1936 season started with a bang. The Boston Red Sox came to town and the May edition of the Tomahawk reported that “never has a team come to Worcester with such a colorful, expensive group of fence-busters” (p. 7). With the likes of players such as Jimmie Foxx, Joe Cronin, Doc Cramer, and Heinie Manush, the Red Sox were a formidable team for any opponent in the professional ranks, never mind a college team. The eventual loss to the Red Sox that day did little to deter the Crusaders spirits or abilities. By the end of May, just a few weeks before the end of college baseball season, Jack West of the Tomahawk penned an article, which reported that the Holy Cross baseball team was “blasting its way through the college ranks” (p. 12). At the end of May, the team had once again batted and fielded their way to an unprecedented nine-game winning streak.

Also, at the end of May 1936, Jim Canty, now the Crusader leadoff man and recognized as one of the team’s leaders was batting a solid .364. He finished the season setting a school record by hitting safely in all 22 games of the 1936 season. It is a record that proudly stands to this day. The Tomahawk reported that, “Jim’s fielding (was) so outstanding that it is taken for granted” (May 19, 1936, p.16). Not only had Jim contributed to a second Holy Cross championship with his ability at the plate, he also did so with his defensive prowess. Marcie Graber, a sports cartoonist of the Worcester Telegram and Gazette, reported in a June 2, 1936, column that, “they just can’t put them too far for this outfielder (Canty) to reach.” By the end of the season, the Crusaders were 18-2 and, for the second year in a row, were Eastern Intercollegiate Champions ([http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/holy/sports/m-basebl/auto\\_pdf/excellence.pdf](http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/holy/sports/m-basebl/auto_pdf/excellence.pdf)).

The 1936 Worcester Gazette season-end box scores reported that Jim Canty batted .362 going 38-104. He led the team in doubles with seven, triples at two, stolen bases with five, as well as 12 bases on balls. Holy Cross outscored their opponents 203 to 62 that season, outhitting their opponents with a .312 batting average versus .192 batting average. Al Banx, a cartoonist for the Evening Gazette, created a cartoon after the Holy Cross – Dartmouth game that expressed, “three on, two out, last of the 8<sup>th</sup>, Dartmouth is leading 11 to 9, count is two and three. BAM! Canty cleans the bases” (Canty Collection).

Most impressive was Jim’s hitting record. Holy Cross records and the Boston Post report that Jim Canty hit safely in every game of the season. Another Associated Press article written by Bill King dated June 12, 1936, reports, “Jim Canty. The center fielder, who hit safely in every one of the Crusaders’ 22 games, is said to be their most finished player...”. Another undated 1936, unidentified article supplied by Jim’s grandson states, “orchids for Jim Canty, Quinebaug boy who is believed to have established an all-time collegiate baseball record (Canty Collection). This is a milestone that very few in the game ever achieve. It is a record that stands to this day at the College of the Holy Cross.

Four years after he began, Jim Canty graduated from The College of The Holy Cross with a bachelor’s degree in philosophy. What the record books and school archives do not show is the amount of effort Jim put into his college education and Crusader baseball. Commuting the 22 miles from Quinebaug, Connecticut to Worcester, Massachusetts through the small towns and villages that lined Route 12, daily must have been an arduous affair that would have taxed even the most dedicated student. Jim persevered and flourished.

In June of 1936, Jim returned to Quinebaug with a bachelor’s degree from one of the most prestigious colleges in the country. He also returned with several professional baseball offers, including an offer from the Boston Red Sox. On June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1936, The Fitchburg Sentinel, reported “it is reported that... Jim Canty, outfielder with Holy Cross, will report to the Red Sox as soon as the college season closes this afternoon” (p. 8). Other articles from the Canty Collection reported that Jim had other offers from the AA Hamilton Club and the AA Gibraltar Team. Yet



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another titled "Jim Canty to Play Professional Ball – Ex Holy Cross Outfielder Will Bid for Berth at Winston-Salem," states "silent Jim Canty, for three seasons a regular on the Holy Cross nine, will get a tryout with Winston-Salem in the Peidmont League. Canty, a Quinebaug, Conn., resident, will leave for the Detroit Tigers farm today or tomorrow. He graduated last June and subsequently played with Burlington, Vermont (Cardinals), in the Northern New York League, a semi-pro-organization."

Another 1937 article from the Canty collection, titled "Receives Offer", states, "Jim Canty of Quinebaug, who starred during the past season with the Holy Cross College Baseball nine, and who recently ended a successful campaign with the Burlington, Vermont team, received an offer to sign with the Albany club to the International League recently...The Albany management mailed him a contract, which he now has in his possession, but did not sign yet. The Albany club owned and sponsored by the Washington American League baseball league. Canty, according to a reliable source, has scouted while performing with Burlington, and asked to join the Albany club at the start of the 1937 season..." The article went on to state the offer from Albany "was attractive" (Canty Collection).

## **James Canty – Professional Baseball and The Thomasville Orioles (1937-1939)**

How Jim Canty eventually landed in Thomasville, North Carolina in 1938 playing baseball for the Thomasville Orioles is unclear. An agreement by managers over a beer in a hotel lobby bar is all it took in those days for players to move from one team to the next. Family stories have Jim signing with the Washington Senators, and the Boston Red Sox after college. Evidence indicates Jim played in the New York League for the Burlington Cardinals in 1936. Then, in 1937, moved to Winston-Salem, North Carolina and played for the Winston-Salem Twins organization. Baseball Reference, a leading baseball data site for professional baseball, shows Jim Canty playing for the Thomasville Orioles during the 1938 season. It also indicated that Jim was still playing great baseball and led the North Carolina State League with 156 hits.

Baseball in the Piedmont Leagues was a serious affair in the 1930s and 1940s. Finch Field, home of the Thomasville Orioles, was located 70 miles northwest of Charlotte, North Carolina. It was constructed in 1937 and held nearly 6,000 fans. Bob Bailey was just ten years of age when he first saw Jim Canty play baseball in the North Carolina State League during the 1938 season. Bob was a local boy whose love of the game was unmatched. Many days he and his father would munch on hot dogs at Finch Field. Finch Field, located in Bobby's hometown of Thomasville, was a brand-new facility and a source of pride for the locals.

The North Carolina State League, when Jim was playing, was a Class D state league, but some old-timers have reported it was among the best baseball in the country. Seventy years later, in a telephone conversation, Bob Bailey, now of Bristol, Virginia, reported that, "the Thomasville boys really knew how to play ball." He particularly remembered Jim Canty and "Double Dare" Darr Shealy. The eighty-year-old Bob easily recounted his time as a ten-year-old lad watching the Tommies play with his dad. Bob retold his stories with a vividness that would lead anyone to believe the games took place the day before my conversation with him.

Over the years, the Thomasville team went through several transformations and different owners. Then, in 1939, the Orioles sold the team to the Brooklyn Dodgers. According to Greg Suire, current president of the Thomasville HiTops, the team, after the 1930s and 1940s, jumped from one league to the next until settling in the Carolina Coastal League. This is a summer league, which was established for college players to play against one another. In fact, this summer league is remarkably comparable to the prestigious Cape Cod League (<http://www.ballparkreviews.com/thomasville/thomas.htm>).

After the 1937 New York season, Jim returned to Connecticut and married his girlfriend, Adel, in Southbridge, Massachusetts. In 1938, he and Adel returned to North Carolina so he could play for the Thomasville Orioles. Jim was only 26 years old. He and Adel, now pregnant with their first child, wanted to give professional baseball one final swing. On September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1938, toward the end of the 1938 baseball season, Adel gave birth to their first child, Jim Canty Jr., in Thomasville. Like most Irish Catholics, he was baptized shortly thereafter in a Catholic church roughly ten miles from Thomasville in High Point, North Carolina.

Minor leaguers of the time made little money, and many took on odd jobs during the off-season to supplement their incomes. It is not a hard stretch to imagine Jim being offered a job with the Thomasville Furniture Company, one of the largest employers in the area, during the winter. Baseball fans are a tight-knit group and those from the area who saw a star player would do whatever they could to keep that player in town. The mills of North Grosvenordale, to a lesser degree, were doing the exact same thing.

Most likely, Jim sought part-time work at a local furniture company and with that came an opportunity to play basketball for the company team. While baseball was his primary concern, Jim never lost his love for the game of basketball he developed as a child. The five years he manned the boards of Tourtellotte's home court under the tutelage of Gustov Colby and Dexter Coombs made a profound impact on Jim. In the winter of 1938, the love of the game and an opportunity to play again met at Burlington, North Carolina and he joined the Burlington Men's Inter-City League playing for the Thomasville Chair Basketeers. The Burlington Daily Times-News Register ran the following article on November 30, 1938:

PIGGLY-WIGGLY CAGERS WIN OVER THOMASVILLE 42-23

Breaking loose a fast-scoring attack in the second and third periods, the Piggly-Wiggly five last night swarmed over the Thomasville Chair Basketeers in an inter-city match with a 42-28 victory. Jimmy Vining was the spearhead of the local attack as he bucketed 17 points during the top-heavy fray, connecting on leaping overhead shots from the floor seven times and adding three conversions from the free stripe, but he (had) plenty of help from his mates most of the way. Howard Walker, sub forward, hit for eight pints from the floor and added one foul to take second honors.

OUTSCORED TOWARD LAST

Only in the last quarter, when they had a long lead, were the locals outscored, going into that stanza at 38-12, the grocery men saw Dennis hit the bucket three times from well out, aided by two throws from Canty, while they were sinking only four points. It was 6-2 at the end of the first period as neither team was able to get the range consistently, but Vining got next to his specialty for fair in the second stanza to make it 23-6 at halftime (p. 6).

Now saddled with the additional responsibility of a child, Jim and his wife, Adel, had choices to make. They both understood that a career in professional baseball was a long shot and the money made at the Minor League level was insufficient to support a family. After what must have been a difficult decision, they returned to Connecticut shortly after the conclusion of the 1938 season in search of a different life.

When Jim returned to Quinebaug, Connecticut, he, most likely with the help of a neighbor or family member, secured a job at the Hyde Knife Company located in Southbridge, Massachusetts. Isaac Hyde had been part of the area's history for many years and many Quinebaug citizens had worked at his factory in Southbridge, Massachusetts. Hyde made, and still makes, some of the best quality purpose-built knives in the world.

Jim, his new bride, and infant son settled in Quinebaug establishing a home base from which to raise their family. Jim and Adel understood that working in a factory was probably not the best use of a philosophy degree from Holy Cross and he searched for other opportunities. The need to secure a more suitable future for the Canty family was intensified with the arrival of their second child, Betty, on July 10, 1939. Three years after their return to Quinebaug, in 1941, most likely at the recommendation of Frank Buckley, Superintendent of Schools, Jim was offered a job teaching science at Tourtellotte Memorial High School, a school that meant a great deal to Jim.

One is ever left to question how Jim Canty was qualified to teach science at Tourtellotte Memorial High School. As previously mentioned, he did not have a degree in education, but rather in philosophy from the College of the Holy Cross. In the present world, Jim Canty might not

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have had the opportunity to become a teacher at Tourtellotte Memorial High School on a permanent basis, at least not without additional education and a certification. Nevertheless, Mr. Canty was given this opportunity and his extensive career as a teacher began.

## The Start of a Long Career

In early September 1941, at the age of 29, Jim Canty made the five-and-a-half-mile trip to Tourtellotte Memorial High School. He had made the long trip hundreds of times before and he knew the route well. He had even walked to the school on more than one occasion, and he knew every house, every bump, and every turn along the way. This time, however, was different for the 1929 Tourtellotte Memorial High School graduate and former standout athlete. This time he was making the trip as a teacher and not as a student.

Jim had left Tourtellotte 11 years earlier to pursue a college education and a baseball career. During the drive to school that first day, Jim must have had difficulty understanding what might lie ahead. His only perspective of his new workplace was from that of a teenage student, a boy, not from that of an adult teacher trying to inspire, motivate, educate, and counsel. Jim had little experience in the daunting task that lay ahead. Apprehension must have been the sentiment of the moment, as well as an eagerness to succeed.

The school was small and acclimating to the unfamiliar environment would have been easier than it is today. Dr. Buckley and Jerome Ryscavage, Thompson's superintendent of schools and high school principal, knew Jim Canty as a former student, so all parties involved were beginning the process in known territory. Other teachers who knew Jim would have pitched in to show him the ropes and it is safe to assume, given Jim's polite and quiet personality, that before long Jim Canty the student was Mr. Canty the teacher.

## The 1930s

The story of the Cantymen began well before Jim Canty arrived at Tourtellotte Memorial High School in 1941 as a teacher. Tourtellotte boys' basketball, in 1927 and 1929, under the leadership of Dexter Coombs and Gustov Colby won the State Championship by defeating impressive foes. Jim Canty was on both teams. The 1927 team was the first team in the State to have all five starters picked for the All-State squad.

During the 1920s, the die had been cast and an athletic tradition that would last decades began. In a small, donated public high school in Northeast Connecticut, with little more than 100 students, the sport of basketball was king. The sport was held in such a high regard that many future Tourtellotte students practiced with the unceasing hope that one day he or she would play for Tourtellotte.

The 1930s was a tumultuous time for Thompson and the rest of the country. The stock market crashed in late October of 1929, right before the start of the winter basketball season, and despair reigned supreme. Black Tuesday set off a cascading effect that destroyed much of America's large industrial base sending millions to the street in search of work, and, in many cases, food. The Great Depression, which immediately followed, lasted more than a decade, and did not relent until the Second World War. The Town of Thompson, more specifically the people of the mill villages and surrounding communities, which were financially dependent upon the mills for their livelihoods, were in deep trouble. There were no social safety nets at the time, no Social Security nor Food Stamps. Many mill owners did what they could, but they had their own challenges and personal futures to consider.

Some historians suggest that people in small towns like Thompson fared better than those from the cities. A strong family, social, and religious network kept optimism alive and families fed. The churches did their part in rallying the spiritual nature of the town's residents. Many old timers from town told stories of the entire town pulling together for those less fortunate. Whatever they had was shared. These are qualities that, at times, appear to be lacking in the modern world. Hence, a lesson could be learned from these challenging times.

School activities also played a role in keeping the town alive and socially well. Weekly shows, plays, and recitals at the Main Street Theater and the Tourtellotte auditorium offered some distractions to the hardships of the day. Baseball and basketball were still athletic mainstays. These games offered the Thompson citizens an opportunity to forget. Many during the 1933, 1934, 1935, and 1936 baseball seasons followed Jim Canty's baseball accomplishments at Holy Cross.

By 1936, Gustov Colby gave up the Tourtellotte men's basketball head coaching reins to George Selig. George was a man who accomplished much for high school basketball in Thompson and set the stage for Jim Canty. According to Francis Fitzgibbons, George petitioned and received from the Cluett Peabody Company permission to use their much larger gymnasium. He also sought and received permission from the Thompson Board of Education to use the town's school buses to pick-up and drop-off fans, as well as parents. Before long, hundreds of Tourtellotte fans were turning out to root for the Tigers. Shortly after that, long caravans of automobiles formed at the school and followed the team to away games. The Tigers had a dedicated and expansive following.

We do not have many records from the early 1930s and we were certain that research in local newspapers could fill in the gaps. Although, old timers remember the basketball teams of the time, both boys and girls, were always "in the thick of it." By 1932, Tourtellotte had made it to the championship game three times, and by 1937, they had made the tournament many more times.

The 1938 season started with a bang. George Selig had several seasons under his belt and the boys, led by the Bates brothers, started the season by easily defeating Stratford 50-39. Selig, like Colby and Coombs, seemed to have the ability to take raw talent and hone it into a well-oiled machine. The team played as a strong unit and things were off to a good start.

Several days after the Stratford victory, an unidentified newspaper article (most likely the Worcester Telegram and Gazette), provided by the Jewell family titled, "St. Louis Opens Here Tomorrow," noted the high-powered Bates brothers and Tourtellotte's offensive attack.

*The Selig outfit demonstrated that it has a powerful offense against Stratford in the first game being of the long end of a 50-39 score. This high-scoring attack is built around the Bates brothers, Ray, and George, forward, who accounted for 24 markers in the opener. The rest of the lineup will be Suprenant at center, Jewell and Gity or Wilkinson, guards.*

This came at a time when scores greater than 50 points were rare. In fact, it was not until 1940 (18 years after the start of the CIAC State Tournament) that a score in the final game of the season exceeded 50 points. Small courts and emphasis on defensive play kept the scores low. Furthermore, the three-point shot would be introduced to the game of basketball at a much later date.

The balance of the 1938 regular season was as impressive as the first game with the Tigers, under the skillful leadership of Captain Herbert Jewell, racking up one victory after another. By the end of January, the boys had 15 straight wins. These wins included several impressive blow-outs, such as a 71-10 victory over Woodstock and a 63-8 defeat over Putnam High. An undefeated season seemed possible and a season-end unidentified newspaper article, compliments of the Jewell Family, stated:

*Captain Herbert Jewell, leader of the Tourtellotte High team and high scorer for the season, is the player who will need special attention from the Bartlett High team tomorrow night when Tourtellotte meets Green and White in the B.H.S. gym. Tourtellotte defeated Bartlett in North Grosvenordale, and nothing would be a bigger prize for the Connecticut boys than to repeat in the home gym of Coach Finnegan's charges.*

The Tigers went on to lose the game that evening 23-28. They were still reeling off an unexpected 23-35 defeat to St. Louis, several days before the Bartlett game, ending the 15-game winning streak. It seemed the boys had a challenging time finding their groove and dropped three in a row to St. Louis, Bartlett, and Plainfield. Selig, still a relatively new head coach, took some time to find a solution, but he eventually did. The Tourtellotte boys were able to right the ship by taking two of the next three games, placing them in an acceptable position. A position that made reaching the state tournament feel like a certainty.

Despite the unexpected losses, Tourtellotte Memorial High School was ranked number one in the State. A February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1938, newspaper article titled, "Five Basketball Teams From Eastern Connecticut in Interscholastic Tourney", confirms this by reporting, "because of the odd number of teams filing for the C-D qualifying competition, the top ranking Tourtellotte High of North Grosvenordale was seeded into the finals" (Jewell Collection).

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, 1938, Tourtellotte played their first Class C-D State Tournament game against Bethel High School at Weaver High School in Hartford, Connecticut. The Tourtellotte fans who made the long trek to Hartford to watch their Tigers went home happy, since the Tigers defeated Bethel by the score of 39-22. Tourtellotte had a two-point lead at the half, but were able

to turn on the steam in the third period and extended their lead by 15 points. They never looked back. Jewell led the Tourtellotte team with 17 points, while Ray Bates and Pandely "Pando" Gity added 10 points each (March 10, 1938, unidentified Jewell newspaper article).

Several days later, Tourtellotte would meet one of the Constitution State's strongest programs, Terryville High School. Terryville had defeated a tenacious Stafford High School in overtime of the first game on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1938.

Terryville was a school that was known for its strong teams, and they played in the state tournament on more than one occasion. Selig would have known better than to take the team lightly and he would have prepared his boys for the match in the semi-finals. The following article titled, "Tourtellotte High losses Tourney Tilt to Terryville" captures the game:

*The highly rated Tourtellotte high basketball team was eliminated from the state class C-D interscholastic tourney last Thursday night in the Weaver High gym by Terryville 41-29. The Red and Black apparently were nervous as every player except diminutive Gity had tournament fumbleities. They started off with a six-point lead and ended the first period behind 12-7. The height and weight of the Terryville quintet proved too much for the Tourtellotte as they scored several baskets on the rebound. Terryville was leading 21-15, at the end of the second period and 31-21 at the conclusion of the third. Bukowski, rangy forward for Terryville, was high scorer caging seven one-handers. Southpaw Gity led the Eastern Connecticut hoopsters scoring 4 field goals and 3 free tries" (March 17, 1938, unidentified newspaper article, Jewell Collection).*

Bloomfield went on to defeat Terryville 13-8 in the lowest ever scoring game in CIAC State Tournament history (CIAC). This low score will almost certainly never be broken. State basketball scores in the modern era traditionally eclipse the 13-8 mark in the first quarter.

After the conclusion of the 1938 season, Tony Saborowski of the Webster Times went on to list the 1938 Times All-Star Cagers. They included: Ray Bates and George Jewell who were selected to the first team. George Bates and Pando Gity were selected to the second team, while Henry Suprenant and Chris Petro were chosen for honorable mentions (Jewell Collection). All told, six Tourtellotte hoopsters were recognized by the Webster Times for their outstanding abilities on the court. A remarkable number because only five basketball players can man the basketball court at one time.

1938 proved to be a successful year in other respects as well. The boys' baseball team, also under the tutelage of George Selig, went 11-3 and the girls' basketball team, under the direction of head coach, Agnes Gahagan, went undefeated, winning 12 straight games (Norwich Bulletin, March 10, 1938). Gahagen would prove to be, yet another Tourtellotte head coach that would become legendary. Unfortunately, women's sports then did not receive the same recognition as men's sports. Many of the original trail blazers, like Gahagan, went unnoticed. After 30 years of leading the Lady Tigers, Agnes never received the accolades she deserved.



## 1940-1941

The 1939 and 1940 basketball seasons, still under head coach George Selig, continued their solid play. At the end of 1941, the United States had officially entered World War II following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The U.S. was mobilizing its military and industrial might. Japanese General Yamamoto's comment, "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant," made after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, would prove to be prophetic. America's manufacturing capabilities, the likes the world had never seen, kicked into high gear. The Depression was over. The United States was now focused on another challenge. This challenge was to help the war effort. Communities throughout the country were making incredible sacrifices that would be difficult to comprehend today. Thompson was no different. Rationing was in effect and the mills were relentlessly working in support of the war effort. By 1942, everyone in town knew somebody who was in harm's way and the town was abuzz with discussion about the war. Uneasiness and concern existed in every corner of rural Thompson society.

To do their share, several students of Tourtellotte Memorial High School put their high school educations on hold and enlisted at the tender ages of sixteen and seventeen. When it was all said and done, 161 students and graduates of Tourtellotte Memorial High School had marched off to war.

When Jim Canty arrived at Tourtellotte Memorial High School as a teacher in 1941, he was assigned to teach science. The following year, George Selig, a man who accomplished much for athletics at Tourtellotte, was offered another more financially lucrative job at Bartlett High School located in nearby Webster, Massachusetts. His decision to leave Tourtellotte proved to be a good one as George eventually became that school district's superintendent.

Accepting the post of head coach for both the basketball and baseball team was easy for Jim Canty. He loved both sports, having played one professionally, and he liked the work George Selig had accomplished in promoting both sports while he was away at Holy Cross and playing professional baseball down south. Following the likes of Coombs, Colby and Selig would be a daunting task, but a task made easier by the small stipend Thompson coaches received. According to the Thompson Town Annual Report, teachers in 1941 made less than \$2,000 per year. In today's dollars, the teachers' \$2,000 salaries would be equal to approximately \$34,000. The few extra dollars the head coaching positions provided were enough to make a small-town family's financial struggle less painful.

As a new head coach, Jim immediately knew that to have a successful long-term high school athletic program, the town needed to develop an active feeder system. Recreation departments, as we know them today, did not exist and the interest had to be developed in other ways. To this end, Jim looked to the junior high school grades to develop players. These were the 11 to 13-year-olds that would feed into the high school junior varsity program. In turn, this fed the varsity squad. To this day, the junior high school (middle school) programs remain successful.

Ed Negip, a former Canty player from 1957-1959 stated years later that as a child, "we played every day at the Cluett Peabody gym. Everyone there wanted to play for Mr. Canty." This sentiment was confirmed years later in an April 4, 1951, article by Tom Carey of the Worcester Telegram and Gazette. "First of all, Jim believes in starting the youngsters off early on a hoop career. Everybody plays basketball at Tourtellotte from the fifth grade on and how they respect Jim" (Canty Collection).

## 1942

The 1942 season, led by senior captain, Tom Fatsi, and head coach, Jim Canty, started well for the Tigers. The team marched to a three and zero record by beating the likes of Stafford by 11, Plainfield by 13, and St. Louis by 7. Problems arose, though, with an unexpected 21-26 loss to Putnam Tech. This defeat was the start of a short-term downward spiral that found the Tigers 1-6 in their next seven games, and 5-6 in their first 11 games. Tourtellotte was on unfamiliar ground. They simply were not used to losing and the new head coach faced his first challenge. How could he rally the Tigers, turn the tide, and make it to the postseason?

Jim knew the key was with the team leaders, Tom Fatsi, team captain and the team's leading scorer, Maurice "Moose" Negip. For the second half of the season, Jim developed offenses that played into the strengths of his two top scorers and defenses that kept their opponents on edge. It worked. During the last eight regular season games, TMHS outscored their opponents 321-217, beating their opponents by as much as 40 points. They went on to win the Quinebaug Valley Conference by defeating Plainfield 39-31 in the first round, Killingly 60-42 in the semi-finals, and Stafford in the final. Their late season heroics were enough, to once again, earn them a spot in the CIAC State Tournament.

The Tigers went into the state tourney with 11 straight wins. Unfortunately, they encountered a motivated Old Saybrook team and lost in the first-round game, 32-39. Jim's plans to build an offense around Fatsi and Negip worked. It just was not enough. Lessons were learned. Fatsi finished the season with 167 total points, while Negip finished with 241.

Jim Canty learned a great deal about high school basketball that season and realized innovative defenses had a place in winning high school programs. Seamlessly switching from one defense to another confused better teams. During that first year, Jim understood what would become an old basketball adage that it was offense that sold tickets and defense that won games. He now learned how to win games. Jim also learned one of the greatest lessons a coach can learn; the measure of a good coach is not in how well he played the game, but in how well he can teach it. A tall task for any coach.

Other key contributors to the 1942 team were John Ungerer who scored 104 points, George Bessette added 91 points, and Merrill Johnson chipped in 82 points. Thus, the Tigers received valuable contributions from a slew of cagers and optimism was clearly on the horizon. First, for the team. Second, for Mr. Canty.

## 1943

With the 1942 lessons learned, Jim set his sights to the 1943 season. He knew he had to rely on Maurice "Moose" Negip, and he saw Moose as a key component to success. Basketball was in Negip blood. Maurice's brother, Emil, was the first, and most likely the last, player to score 100 points at the Cluett Peabody Gym during a men's game. An amazing feat when considering there were no three-point shots at that time. Fans who attended the game that day included Jim Sali, Ed Negip, and Cliff Svenning. Each reported the 100<sup>th</sup> point went through the net at the buzzer. The Negip boys, sons of Albanian immigrants, were making their mark on the game. Emil's younger brother Maurice looked like he was following in his big brother's footsteps.

Like most good coaches, Jim began sizing up his 1943 team on the first day of school in September 1942. John Ungerer, Maurice Negip, Walter Modleski, Everett Shepard, Russ Gleason, Andrew Vogel, Ed Babula, Merrill Johnson, George Bessette, and Roland Blain were all returning players. Several had varsity experience and were already proven work horses. Jim examined what it was like the team did wrong in the beginning of the 1942 season and during the last game. He then set out to correct those deficiencies. Once again this meant calling upon the leaders of the team, as well as continuing to develop the less experienced players.

When it was all said and done, the team won 20 straight games. Moose Negip finished the season with 241 points. The team won the Eastern Basketball Championship and won the Quinebaug Valley Conference Championship. They defeated Glastonbury 40-30 in the first round of the CIAC State Championship Tournament, Bloomfield 50-34 in the quarterfinals, and Guilford 31-24 in the semi-finals. The Thompson team was the tournament favorite, and, given three tournament victories over three determined teams, they felt their third state championship was in sight.

Unfortunately, the team received shocking news right before the final game. Maurice "Moose" Negip, only a junior at the time, had been called to active duty. He was the school's first student to be drafted by the U.S. Army. A March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1943, unidentified newspaper article from the Canty Collection states:

*Maurice Bernard Negip, Junior star of the Tourtellotte Memorial High School basketball team, now in the midst of the playoffs for the state championship, has been inducted into the Army and will report for active-duty next week ... Negip is a member of the Junior class and is the high scorer of the team for the season. By his induction into the Army at this time, he became the first young man to be taken from the high school here for service with the Army.*

According to several sources, Moose had to report for a physical that day and it was touch and go as to whether he would make the final game at all. Without Moose Negip in the starting lineup, the Tigers were worried. He was their high scorer and the person around whom, much of the offense was designed. In spite of a fourth quarter rally led by the late-arriving Negip, Tourtellotte was defeated by the powerhouse Ellsworth, 22-34. The Tigers were only a few points away from winning the top spot in the state and their third state championship. Many in Thompson wondered what could have been had the United States Army waited one more week. An unidentified newspaper article from the Canty Collection dated March 15, 1943, titled "Tourtellotte Defeated in Tourney Finale, 34-22", captured the highlights of the game:

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*...the game without one of its stars, Maurice Negip, and although he arrived in time to play from midway in the first period, the team never seemed to get started... Ellsworth pulled away steadily and held a lead 30-9 at the end of the third quarter.' The Tigers outscored Ellsworth 13-4 in the fourth, but was unable to rally enough.*

The state finals were not the only concern for the people from Thompson in the winter of 1943. While disappointed with the State Championship loss, they had other things on their minds. A March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1943, unidentified newspaper article from the Canty Collection titled "Tourtellotte High Advances in Connecticut Tournament" brings perspective to the events of the day. It reported:

*...Saturday afternoon. A general meeting for civilian defense workers and the general public will, be held Tuesday evening, March 16, in St. Joseph's Auditorium. Army representatives will show moving pictures on the activities of air raid wardens.*

Overall, 1943 was a very good year for the Hilltoppers from a basketball perspective. They had won 20 in a row, won the QVC division, made it to the CIAC State Tournament and nearly won the coveted title in the process. The new head coach, Jim Canty, had two seasons under his belt and was learning at a rapid pace.

## 1944

People in town began to take notice of the boys' basketball team. The excitement of the 1927 and 1929 championship seasons, once again, captivated the town. Some people took special notice of young Jim Canty and found that the quiet gentlemanly coach may be the real deal. Other coaches in the area who felt a new Thompson head coach would provide some slack in their already competitive schedule, found Canty to be a considerable adversary. In his first two seasons, the Cantymen were 38-7 and still ranked as one of the state's best prospects for a 1944 championship.

The 1944 season did not begin like the 1943 season. The Tigers won the opening game against the alumni 54-41, but went on to lose to St. Louis in the regular season opener 34-54. They won the next game against Putnam Trade 41-27, but that did little to set the Tigers on the right path. They lost the next game to Wells 21-23. The roller coaster ride lasted nine games with the dazed Tigers finishing their first nine games with only three wins. For Jim Canty, the learning curve had yet to complete its course.

In January 1944, before their tenth game of the season, Jim gathered his beleaguered team before a practice at the CPAC. The team, Ted Fatsi (younger brother of Tom), Walter Modiszewski, Ed Babula, Donald Maitland, Burt Elliot, Bob Willett, Leo Beaulac, Bill Bates, Leo Courtemanche, Donald Gleason, Dick Mead, Vangel Tanacea, and Paul Azud probably sat around the locker room unable to look at their coach in the eyes. Those who played for Jim Canty did not like to disappoint the man they now called Coach and all of them wanted to make it to the big game at the end of the season. They all knew playing the way they were was not going to get them to where they desired.

The current players were also too young to remember the exploits of the 1927 and 1929 teams but would have certainly been part of the resurgence brought about by George Selig. They all wanted to play in the big hall in the big game for Canty. They were all painfully aware of getting to the "dance" last season and missing the opportunity to ring the bell by just six baskets. For the veterans, it was a terrible feeling and one they did not want to duplicate this season. After last year's loss, several of the veterans had something to prove.

The low point of the season was the seventh game 26-44 loss to St. Louis. The boys tried to turn things around only to be disappointed once again with a one-point heartbreaker to both Putnam and Bartlett in games eight and nine. Something drastic needed to happen.

Given Jim Canty's demeanor, it is easy to imagine the locker room scene the day after the Bartlett game. The boys donned their practice uniforms and gathered; there was silence in the room when Mr. Canty entered the room. They hated disappointing their mentor and coach and they knew they were a better team than what they showed. They talked about it all day at school and knew they were meeting that night before practice. They knew Mr. Canty was disappointed with their 3-6 record and they knew they did not have the answers.

Jim Canty entered the room, looked at his dejected team and smiled. Some coaches would take center stage and rant and rave to motivate their players. The few, the rare few, like Canty, would simply pull up a chair, sit among the players and ask, "so, what are we going to do boys?"

Many sports writers of the time, given Jim's brief time at the helm, would have wavered in their opinion about the new young skipper. Some who offered glowing accolades last season wondered if his first two seasons were just flukes. Some turned on the new coach and reported that the Tigers now had little chance for the postseason. Jim would have calmly seen it for what it was; a group of young men struggling with their talents and emotions, and quietly made the appropriate adjustments.

It is hard to say specifically what happened that day in that locker room. Stories were handed down from one person to the next and, like any oral history, details were lost or adjusted to suit whoever happens to be telling the story, but the consensus seems to be that Jim Canty simply adjusted his offense and defense. In other words, he developed a playbook that worked. Whatever it was, it worked. After the one-point Bartlett loss, things began to turn. The local sports writers who wrote the team off the week before would eat their words. Several knew better. A February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1944, Norwich Bulletin article titled, - "Putnam Tech Out For 12<sup>th</sup> Straight Win This Evening," reports the situation for Thompson.

*"Putnam Tech basketballer will be after their 12<sup>th</sup> straight win of the season Monday when they visit North Grosvenordale for a return game with Tourtellotte Memorial high school courtmen at the Community house... Tourtellotte on the other hand, has dropped six decisions in 16 games, two each to Bartlett and St. Louis of Webster, Mass., and one each to Putnam High and Pomfret School. Of late the Cantymen have started to click again, usually the way when the state tourney season approaches, and the 'fur will fly' tomorrow night when these two rivals aggregations clash" (Canty Collection).*

Tourtellotte beat Putnam Trade 56-23 to stop their 12-game winning streak. And, in fact, won the next six games only to be nudged out of the State Championship 28-27 by Bloomfield.

The season rebound started with a huge 56-21, 35-point victory over Woodstock Academy. That was followed by yet another big 56-33 win over Killingly, and yet another 76-33 victory over Cole Trade. The Tigers went on to win the last ten games of the regular season, finishing by defeating the much older and much more experienced CPAC Arrows, a local men's team whose roster included former Tigers in an exhibition game. Like the 1943 season, the boys found their stride during the second half of the season. According to school records, they outscored their opponents by an amazing 29.4-point average (614 to 291). They once again dominated the Quinebaug Valley Conference. Local and state sports writers took notice and once again the boys were headed to the CIAC State Tournament.

When the Tourtellotte Tigers arrived at Weaver High School in March 1944 for the first round of the tournament, they were a much different team than the one which began the season. All their first half self-doubts were gone. Jim Canty had the boys believing in themselves, as well as one another. More importantly, though, he had them believing they could beat any team in the state.

Their first draw was Terryville High School. Terryville, Connecticut is a small town located west of Hartford that only lists a little more than five thousand residents. Hence, Terryville might seem like an unremarkable town, but it was well known for its strong boys' basketball teams. They had made it to the finals four times (1926, 1928, 1936, and 1938). In 1928 and 1936, they celebrated victories. Tourtellotte had made it to the big dance four times, too. The years were 1927, 1929, 1932, and 1943. Much like Terryville, Tourtellotte also won the tournament twice in 1927 & 1929. Both teams desperately wanted to knock the other out in the first round.

The Tigers dominated Terryville through most of the game. Their deep bench and Canty's innovative play calling led them to a 52-33 victory in the first round of the CIAC Tournament. They went on to handily defeat Plainfield, a QVC rival, by a score of 55-30 in the quarterfinals. The boys then returned to Thompson to prepare for what they felt was going to be their toughest game of the season.

Ellsworth High School, another small-school dynamo, had also been to the big game four times winning all four games in 1939, 1940, 1941, and 1943. They were by far the most dominant small school basketball team in the state at that time, having won the tournament three years in a row and four of the last five seasons. New Canaan was the only other small school in the state to have come close to this feat. To the 1944 Tigers, Ellsworth also had one other important distinction. They were the team who sent the Tigers home as finalists in 1943, and the Tigers wanted retribution.

One hour after the game's opening tipoff, the Tigers got their revenge, but it would not come easy. In what would become one of the greatest defensive slugfests in CIAC history the Tigers managed to squeak out a two-point victory, beating Ellsworth 29-27 in the semifinals. Battered, tired, and bruised, they returned to Thompson.

The next team on the docket for the Tigers was Bloomfield High School, a town located about a half hour northwest of Hartford. The population of the town at the time was right around five thousand. Today, Bloomfield has roughly quadrupled in size to 20,000 residents. They had made it to the CIAC finals twice, winning in 1938 and losing in 1941. Little was known about the team with the exception that the school was in a much larger town. This gave them the advantage as it provided them with a larger pool from which to pick their players, maybe.

The locker room mood was different than it had been. It was 1:30 PM, one hour before the start of the game, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1944, at Weaver High School in Hartford and the Tourtellotte players were uneasy. The confidence they developed over the second half of the season and had going into the Ellsworth game had been shattered. Ellsworth scared the boys badly and they knew they had to dig deep. The mood in the locker room was much different than the mood before the first few tournament games. Seeing this, Jim Canty would have taken a long hard look at his starters: Walter Modlizewski, Ted Fatsi, Donny Maitland, Eddy Babula, and Burt Elliot. He saw great anxiety. The substitutes Bobby Willet, Leo Cortemanche, Billy Bates, Paul Azud, Leo Beulec, Swede Constantine, and Donny Gleason did not offer much more confidence. Canty would have taken a deep breath and started down the same calm path he always took. "Alright boys, calm down and listen up. Do I need to remind you who you guys just beat the other day? Ellsworth is one of the best programs in the state. Look around the room. Go ahead. If you go out there tonight and play the way I know you can, then the trophy is as good as ours. Trust each other, play hard and have fun."

Canty knew the Bloomfield boys: Reid, LaPenna, Redding, Prosiatkowski, and Pinney were formidable, but there was not a whole bunch he could do about that right now. The only thing the team could control was themselves.

Whatever it was Jim Canty said to his team that night worked. On March 12, 1944, the Hartford Current ran a front page (sports section) article that outlined the championship game in detail. The long-winded title of the article, written by Sam Gunst, was "Tourtellotte Edges out Bloomfield, 28-27 to Capture C-D Championship – Foul Line Superiority Proves Decisive Factor-Winners Convert Eight of 15 Free Throws, Losers Five of 10; Ted Fatsi Breaks 27-27 Tie With Minute and Half to Play." It aptly captured the exciting Tourtellotte one-point victory:

*Tourtellotte and Bloomfield, as evenly matched a pair of teams as ever collided in a C-D final, staged a sparkling duel yesterday afternoon at Weaver High gym, with slightly calmer and more efficient Tourtellotte triumphing, 28-27.*

*Coolness in the clutches carried Tourtellotte to the title over a game Bloomfield outfit, which fought back from a 17-8 deficit at halftime to go into the lead, albeit a mighty short-lived lead, midway of the fourth period.*

*Tourtellotte made good on eight of 15 free throws, while Bloomfield converted five out of 10 and it was superiority from the foul line which brought the North Grosvenordale team their victory.*

#### **BLOOMFIELD MISSES FOULS**

*This foul line superiority was particularly manifest during the blazing forth period which started with Tourtellotte leading 19-17. Bloomfield had six foul shots in this last session and made but two of them. Tourtellotte had five and converted three, and it was a foul shot by Ted Fatsi, high point man of the game with 14, that broke a 27-27 tie with a minute and a half to go and sent Tourtellotte out in front to stay.*

*With 28 seconds to go Bloomfield had a chance to tie the score as Amos Redding was fouled, but Redding's effort rolled around the rim and bounced off.*

*Employing a zone defense, Tourtellotte forced Bloomfield to take most of their shots from outside the foul circle and made it comparatively easy for their two big guards, Ed Babula, and Burton Elliott to snare most of the rebounds.*

*Bloomfield used a man-for-man defense, but Tourtellotte's two little forwards, Ted Fatsi, and Walter Modliszwski, seeped through sufficiently to make 24 points between them.*

*Bloomfield made one more field goal than Tourtellotte, but also took 13 more shots, and with 11 successes out of 69 attempts had only a .159 average. Tourtellotte made 10 field goals in 56 attempts for a .179 average.*

*The rivals just about matched point for point in the first and fourth periods. The second period was all Tourtellotte's, Bloomfield making no field goals in 16 attempts, while the third quarter was all Bloomfield's, Tourtellotte being held without a field goal in 13 efforts.*

#### **BLOOMFIELD SCORES FIRST**

*Frank LaPenna got a hoop from close in to send Bloomfield off to a 2-0 lead. Ted Fatsi tied the score with a layup and Walter Modliszwski converted a free throw to give Tourtellotte a 3-2 lead. Gene Pinney matched Modliszwski's free throw and after Fatsi on another layup had regained the lead for Tourtellotte, again pulled Bloomfield level with a hoop from midcourt. Fatsi made it 7-5, Tourtellotte, with an under-the-basket shot, but Amos Redding tossed in a long one-hander to make it 7-7. Ed Babula sank a free throw to give Tourtellotte an 8-7 edge at the end of the first period.*

*Bloomfield was held to one point in the second period. Fatsi with a hoop from close in stretched Tourtellotte's advantage to 10-7 early in the session. Donald Maitland made it 11-7 with a foul shot and Modliszwski with two hoops increased the lead to 15-7 with four minutes of the half remaining. Pinney got Bloomfield's lone point of the period as he made*



*good on one out of two free throws, the miss being the first by any player from the foul line. Modliszwski tapped in a rebound to run Tourtellotte's lead to 17-8. Redding and Fatsi each missed foul shots in the closing minutes of the half.*

*Bloomfield looked like a badly beaten club as the teams left the floor for the intermission, but any ideas Tourtellotte might have entertained of any easy triumph were rapidly dissipated early in the third period as Coach John J. Paterno's charges roared back to cut their rivals' lead to 17-14.*

*Redding got two hoops in quick succession and after Fred Prosiakowski had missed a foul shot, Pinney made connections from the side. Bloomfield apparently had Tourtellotte on the run, but couldn't follow up their advantage. Tourtellotte's jitters in this session were further emphasized by the fact that they converted only two out of five free throws. Modliszwski made one free throw, then missed one, then made one out of two to stretch Tourtellotte's lead to 19-14. Maitland failed to make good on two charity tosses. Prosiakowski with a hoop from midcourt and a foul shot left Bloomfield trailing 19-17 going into the fourth period.*

#### **TOURTELLOTTE STRETCHES LEAD**

*Fatsi sank a hoop from under the basket early in the fourth quarter to make it 21-17, Tourtellotte. LaPenna made a foul shot and Modliszwski got one out of two to leave Tourtellotte still ahead by four points.*

*Side shots by Pinney and LaPenna pulled Bloomfield even at 22-22 with six minutes left to play. Tourtellotte and Bloomfield then took turns blowing opportunities to forge ahead. Bill Bates missed a foul shot for Tourtellotte and Redding missed two for Bloomfield.*

*Fatsi converted a free throw, but so did Pinney and the rivals were deadlocked at 23-23. With four minutes and 23 seconds to go Don Reid missed a free throw for Bloomfield. Prosiakowski then put Bloomfield ahead with a hoop from side court, but Tourtellotte came back to tie the score without losing possession of the ball as Fatsi tossed in a hoop from the side.*

#### **FATSI GETS WINNING POINT**

*Elliott batted in a rebound to send Tourtellotte ahead, this with two minutes and 41 seconds to go. Pinney tied it up on a hoop from close in. In the last minute and a half, Fatsi made good on a free throw and Redding missed his shot from the foul line, and that was the ball game.*

*From their championship team, Tourtellotte will lose only two regulars, their co-captains Walter Modliszwski and Ed Babula, but both of them were mighty valuable....[missing information].....*

*After yesterday's game Dr. Charles J. Prohaska of the State Department of Education presented medals to runner-up Bloomfield, Coach Paterno and Captain Pinney accepting for their team. Co-captains Modliszwski and Babula received the trophy emblematic of the C-D title on behalf of Tourtellotte.*

## The Cantymen

*Yesterday's paid attendance was 602. The total paid attendance for all games of the tournament here was 3525 representing a considerable increase over last year's crowds. This does not include the attendance for the one playdown game at the Woodrow Wilson gym in Middletown. The quarterfinals which were played in afternoon and night sessions drew a total of 1154 paid. The semi-finals drew 968, the largest crowd at any one session.*

The 1944 Tigers proved that a young, knowledgeable small-town coach, working with a never-say-die group of young men could achieve the pinnacle. In other words, this coach would lead the team all the way to the state championship. Ted Fatsi, Walter Modiszewski, Ed Babula, Donald Maitland, Burt Elliot, Bob Willett, Leo Beaulac, Bill Bates, Leo Courtemanche, Donald Gleason, Dick Mead, Vangel Tanacea, and Paul Azud had accomplished something only two other Thompson teams had accomplished in the high school's 35-year history, a state title. The curious aspect, however, was that Jim Canty was a vital part of all three titles.

Watching the returning heroes and all the ensuing celebration was the players' younger brothers, cousins, and friends. In a flash, young boys throughout Thompson wanted to be just like the older boys who went to school on the hill and played basketball at the Cluett Peabody Athletic Club. Every boy in North Grosvenordale, Grosvenordale, Quinebaug, Fabyan, and the other villages of Town of Thompson wanted to be just like Fatsi, Maitland, and the other Tigers. They all knew if they worked hard, then they too would have their shot at a state title. Throughout Thompson, the interest in basketball ratcheted up another notch.

Among those who watched were Tasi Vriga, Joe Augustinski, and Nick Angelo. At 10 and 11 years of age, they had no way of knowing in March 1944 that they would become part of Thompson history and, eventually, establish a record of their own. But...that would have to wait for a few years.

## 1945

The great Tourtellotte teams of the early years did not die with the 1944 championship team. The 1945 and 1946 teams, in many ways, would prove to be better than the 1944 team. The 1945 basketball team started 4-0 by easily defeating Marianapolis, Griswold, Killingly, and Putnam Tech. The Tigers, feeling good about their early 1945 performance, simply felt they picked up where they left off in 1944. Mr. Canty, a pragmatist, most likely knew better and did what he could to keep the team grounded, as well as focused on the matter at hand. What they accomplished last season was in the past. He understood that the Tigers were the team with the largest targets on their backs. Every small school in Connecticut would be gunning for them, especially the local small teams. This became painfully obvious to the boys on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1945, when they began a three-game losing skid. The Tigers lost to Putnam 25-34, St. Louis 23-41, and Bartlett 25-33. It seemed as if the wind was taken out of their sails.

Instead of lamenting over the losses, Jim Canty did what all good coaches do, he fixed what was broken, practiced what worked, and rallied his troops for the next game scheduled for January 17<sup>th</sup>. The boys responded and gave Woodstock Academy one of their worst losses in their school's history. A January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1945, unidentified newspaper article, compliments of the Canty family captures the story of the game with just the title line – "Tourtellotte Defeats Woodstock Five 39-7." In one of the more lopsided games of Tourtellotte's history, they held the Woodstock team to just 7 points. Two baskets, and three foul shots. The Woodstock player Wells was their high scorer with a mere three points.

When the team found their stride, Mr. Canty pulled his starting five to manage the score and not embarrass the other team. As a result, though, his second five players played harder and better than his starting five. The substitutes did not want to squander the opportunity to prove to Coach Canty they were worthy of a starting nod by the end of this season or next. Several players recall Canty calling time out only to instruct his team that they had to pass the ball a specific number of times before anyone was allowed to shoot. The larger the deficit, the larger the required number of passes. In some of these games Coach Canty had a tough time keeping a handle of the boys' desire, and ability, to score. The Woodstock game was one such game.

After the big win against Woodstock, the boys dropped two games. One to Bartlett 30-50 and the other to Pomfret by a score of 26-57. They quickly found the magic again with a 50-30 victory over Griswold. After the Griswold win, the Tigers found themselves at six wins and five losses with six games remaining in the regular season. Thoughts about not qualifying for the state tournament began to develop among the players. Stories would indicate that the only thing Mr. Canty was worried about was the next game just like another fabled New England coach, Bill Belichick.

Like true Cantymen, they fought back and went on to defeat Woodstock 54-15, Wells 50-28, Arrows (A Cluett Peabody Athletic Club team, which did not count toward a state playoff berth) 50-33, Putnam Tech 46-22, and Wells 42-22. Confidence at this point in the season was returning and the boys once again had visions of back-to-back State Championships. Over a six-game winning streak that started with the 50-30 win over Griswold, the Tigers outscored their opponents 292-150. Things were looking promising.

On February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the wheels once again came off with an unexpected 38-47 loss to St. Louis. Now hopes of qualifying for the states, something which they were almost certain of only days before, was now in question. CIAC officials and athletic directors throughout the state were scrambling and comparing records to determine which school qualified. For Tourtellotte, it came down to the last game of the season against none other than their neighboring rival, Putnam High School.

Again, it is easy to imagine the advice given to the team by Coach Canty. "Boys, we are where we are. The only thing we can control is how we play the next game. So, I suggest we put aside our worries about the state tournament and prepare for the Putnam game."

The last game of the season, one that could decide their state tournament outcome, occurred on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1945, at the Cluett Peabody Athletic Club. An unidentified newspaper article picks up the story from there with an article titled, "Turtles Even Series With Putnam High."

*After receiving a last-minute invitation to participate in the state CIAC tournament in Hartford, the Tourtellotte Memorial high school basketballers squared accounts with the Putnam high school cagers tonight by taking a 42-31 decision at the Community House. The news obtained the day before and before a hometown crowd was enough to push the Tigers over the edge.*

With everything considered, it was the opinion of the CIAC Tournament Selection Board that Tourtellotte had enough wins regardless of the outcome against Putnam. Another unidentified newspaper article reports:

*The winners paced by Captain Ted Fatsi (13 points) and Bill Bates (11 points), led at the close of all periods by scores of 12-5, 17-14, and 30-22... Throughout the entire encounter the defensive play of both Burt Elliot of the Turtles and Paul Hoar of the Blue and White shone (Canty Collection).*

All in all, after the big 50-30 Griswold victory the only loss the Tigers suffered was to their nemesis, St. Louis, during the next to the last game of the regular season. Several memories of the day indicate that the Tigers felt they were better than their record indicated, and they felt as though the team could match the 1944 performance in the state tournament. Time would tell.

The Tigers' 1945 team made the journey to Hartford for the first round of the state tournament. Like all away games, the basketball team and cheerleaders travelled to the game on a town school bus. A lengthy line of Thompson vehicles full of family, friends, and fans followed.

The official Tourtellotte Memorial High School scorebooks did not include the scores and individual performance of the players who played. We have few records to rely on. What is clear is that the team went on to win the first game in the CIAC State Tournament, beating Simsbury 36-33 in what had to be a defensive battle that rivaled anything the CIAC Tournament had seen to date. Switching defenses must have been in the arsenal of both coaches that day in Hartford. The Thompson caravan made its way home realizing they were only a few games away from making school history by winning back-to-back state championships.

Several days after the exhausting Simsbury game, the excited team faced off against Bethel High School. Bethel, which at the time consisted of roughly five thousand residents, would have a sizable pool to select players. Coach Canty and the Thompson boys knew little else about the Bethel team. Bethel is in southwest Connecticut, roughly 70 miles northeast of New York City. For those in Thompson, it could not have been any further away while remaining in the state. Stories that remain from that day indicate it was a slugfest that finished with Bethel High School on top. Bethel would go on to lose in the semifinals of the CIAC Tournament. Instead, 1945 saw Ellsworth High School of South Windsor finishing the season as state champions.

The Tigers loss to Bethel High School dashed the Tigers hope for the rare back-to-back state championships. This group of young men must have wondered what could have been had they won the title. Some must have felt terrible they did not bring their hometown Thompson the

coveted back-to-back distinction. Others must have felt it would never happen. Time would prove them wrong. There was a group of seventh and eighth graders awaiting their turn that would prove the naysayers wrong.

When it was all said and done, the team's 1945 record stood at 15-6. The team made it, once again, to the state championship tournament, getting to the quarterfinals. Team Captain Ted Fatsi stood head and shoulders above everyone else finishing the season as the team's top scorer for the season with 273 points. Bill Bates finished with 129, Don Maitland 99, Burt Elliot 87, Bob Willett 74, and Paul Azud 37. Coach Canty must have considered this a good season. The Tigers were one of the very few teams invited to play in the state tournament. They had their low points, but showed great poise in fighting back when times were trying. They did what Coach expected. Now it was time for baseball.

Life in 1945 was not all athletics and school. World War II was still exacting its toll of young men and the war took another Tourtellotte player. A short, undated newspaper article provided by the Cantys simply states "Donald Gleason left us soon after school began. He shows up on the Roll of Honor – Left school and basketball to join the service." Donald Gleason is among the many who served during WWII enlisting during his senior year. He is proudly listed in the front hallway of the Tourtellotte Memorial High School foyer among the many other young men and women who served.

In 1945, Jim Canty was still a young and active athlete himself. He continued to play baseball and managed one of the area's premier amateur teams, the Favereau's Chefs. The Chefs played out of the Worcester area and went toe-to-toe against teams who recruited their players from all over south-central Massachusetts, northwestern Rhode Island, and northeastern Connecticut. It is uncertain to know if he still harbored thoughts of playing in the big leagues, but like most young men who could throw or hit a ball well, if the call came, he would have considered it.

Amateur baseball was important in 1945 and the better amateur leagues commanded the same attention many minor league teams command today. Local newspapers, to include the Worcester Telegram and Gazette, carried daily box scores and stories of the teams, as well as their games. The run for the pennant pitted town against town and was conducted with much local fanfare. Jim Canty was a favorite topic for Tom Carey, sportswriter of the Worcester paper, sometimes much to the chagrin of local readers. One story that became prevalent in the late summer of 1945 was the performance of the Favereau's Chefs and the managing performance of their manager, Jim Canty.

By the end of the 1945 season, Jim Canty, a Holy Cross hitting record holder, was struggling at the plate. It is unclear if it was technique or if age was finally catching up to the once great athlete, but newspaper accounts of the final weeks of the season reported Jim had benched himself for poor hitting performance. Knowing what we know of Jim it would be fair to say that he opted to do the right thing and let a better performer take his place in the outfield.

In a September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945, article titled "Just Talking it Over with Tom Carey", Tom, replying to a write-in complaining about Canty playing favorites states, "If Canty is playing favorites, how come he benched himself in the Westover and Prudence frays? Jim was not connecting for the base hits so for the good of the team he decided to give someone else a chance." A few weeks later in a September 27, 1945, article Tom wrote, "Favreau's Chefs versus the Worcester Wire nine. Canty having trouble at the plate – hitting everything at the outfielders, batting over .260, but having a lot of RBIs" (Canty Collection).

## 1946

We do not have an official score book from the 1946 season. Much of the details from that year have been lost. What we have is a collection of newspaper clippings from several collections. Even without the scorebook, it is fair to say that 1946 proved to be another excellent season for the Tourtellotte cagers. Don Maitland was promoted to team captain. He and Bill Bates became key contributors of the team. Rene Blanchette, Swede Constantine, Paul Azud, Robert Rivers, Rich Thomas, Donald Peterson, Danny Almquist, Mathew Pieper, Joseph Rogalski, and James Mack, manager, rounded out the balance of the roster.

By February 1946, with 14 straight victories under their belt, interest in Thompson was, once again, gaining considerable steam. Tourtellotte students and fans from all over the town were snipping newspaper articles for their scrapbooks and everyone hoped for another state championship trophy.

With a big win over Bartlett in early February, the articles meticulously glued and arranged in the scrapbooks detail the story. An unidentified newspaper article titled, "Tourtellotte Chalks Up 14<sup>th</sup> Straight Win, 51-30 [Over Bartlett] – Maintains Winning Streak By Walloping B.H.S. Team" states:

*Tourtellotte Memorial High School cagers swept their home-and-home series with Bartlett High by taking a 51-30 victory before an estimated crowd of 1,000 in the Cluett-Peabody gymnasium Friday night. The win enabled the Cantymen to keep their record unblemished after 14 straight contests. The setback was the seventh in 12 starts for the Green and White.*

*The Turtles shifted into high gear in the second half after holding a 19-15 edge at the half. The teams were deadlocked 10-all at the close of the first quarter.*

*Paced by Capt. Don Maitland and "Gee" Blanchette. Tourtellotte spurred in the third quarter and held a comfortable 28-15 margin midway between the period. Throughout the balance of the tilt the speed and aggressiveness as demonstrated by the Grosvenordale boys proved too difficult for the Bartlett team to overcome.*

*Referee's O'Grady and O'Brien called a total of 42 personal and one technical fouls, 22 fouls were charged against the winners. Both team missed 14 free tosses apiece.*

*Maitland's 13 points was high for the winners. Walkowiak chalked up 9 points for the Green and White.*

Blanchette, Bates, and Maitland were once again the top three scorers scoring 12, 10, and 13 points. Everyone in town, including the 1,000 people who attended the Bartlett game, felt this group of young men had what it took to go all the way.

After the big Bartlett win, the Tigers went on to easily defeat Putnam High 43-34 for their 15<sup>th</sup> straight win. Coach Canty undoubtedly used his bench to give his starters a rest for an all-important 16<sup>th</sup> game against Plainfield High School. The records indicate that Plainfield was not a real threat, but proved to be a tenacious and worthy opponent. A newspaper article the following day reveals, "... after trailing for the first three periods, the Tourtellotte Memorial High School

cagers tallied 20 points in the last eight minutes of play to defeat a scrappy Plainfield High School quintet Friday night at the Cluett Peabody Community Center by a 46-39 margin." Rene Blanchette led the team that evening by scoring 17 points. When the boys left the CPAC that day they all let out a sigh of relief. For three-quarters of the game, the outlook looked bleak. Canty, always an optimist, kept his team grounded and focused. In the fourth quarter, things began to turn in the Turtles' favor.

After the Plainfield nail-biter, the squad went on to defeat Wells 38-21 for their 17<sup>th</sup> straight win. This record did not even include victorious matches against the Alumni and CPAC Arrows. Blanchette continued his high scoring feats by scoring 13 points in the match with Bill Bates contributing 10 points.

The final game of the regular season was against Putnam Tech. This game gave the boys another scare. It is uncertain if the boys were rattled after the Plainfield narrow escape or if 19 straight wins was having a negative effect on the team. What is clear is after the narrow escape with Plainfield the Turtles had another narrow escape with Putnam Tech. A local paper wrote, "Putnam hoopsters gave the undefeated Tourtellotte High School court men a real scare Monday night at the Cluett Peabody gymnasium at North Grosvenordale, but finally succumbed to drop a 38-34 decision." Don Maitland and Bill Bates combined for 28 points, scoring 14 each for the final season win over Putnam Tech.

The Putnam Tech game marked the end of the regular season, and the team was headed to the CIAC Tournament with an undefeated record and a first-place tournament seed. For the fifth year in a row the boys were selected to participate in the state championships as one of the top ranked teams in the entire state of Connecticut. A February 1946 newspaper article provided by Betty LeClair titled: "Tourtellotte in Hartford Tourney - Selected for Fifth Time, Opening Round February 26 - Canty Club Riding High With Unblemished Slate", picks up the story. It states:

*The Tourtellotte Memorial High Basketeers, undefeated in sixteen outings this season, have accepted an invitation to compete in the Connecticut Interscholastic Basketball Tournament at Hartford. The tourney gets underway on Tuesday at the Weaver High gymnasium in Hartford.*

*The playdowns will open Tuesday, February 26 and continue until Friday, March 1. The quarterfinals are scheduled for Tuesday March 5 in both the afternoon and evening, the semi-finals will be held on Thursday, March 7 and the finals on Saturday, March 9.*

*Tourtellotte's entry in the Nutmeg State tourney, a red-letter event as far as scholastic athletes and their followers are concerned, will mark the fifth successive competition for the Grosvenordale School under the direction of Coach James (Jimmy) Canty.*

*The "Turtles" were eliminated in the quarterfinals in the 1942 tourney, and reached the finals in 1943, but bowed to Ellsworth High by a score of 32-22. In 1944 the Canty-coached club nosed out Bloomfield High, 28-27, in the tourney final, and last year dropped out of the running in the quarter-final round.*

*Tourtellotte, if successful in the playdowns will be called on to battle three outstanding fives – Suffield, Bloomfield, and Ellsworth.*

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*The Grosvenordale outfit has three more regular season engagements, including a return clash with Mary E. Wells High at Southbridge tomorrow night, and a home-and-home series with Griswold High of Jewett City, Conn. The series with Griswold High will be cancelled if the Jewett City school is entered in the tournament, as the dates for Griswold games with Tourtellotte are scheduled for March 4 and 8.*

Tourtellotte defeated Thomaston 34-28 in the first round of the state tournament. Newspaper reports show that Tourtellotte played well and, "... led all the way and had complete control of the backboards as they held period advantages of 10-4, 18-14 and 21-19. It was in the initial session that the Turtles outscored their rivals 10-4." Don Maitland was high scorer for the Tigers downing 10 points with teammates Rene Blanchette contributing eight and Bill Bates five.

Riding high in the state tourney, the Tigers then went on to defeat Killingly 41-34 and by March 5<sup>th</sup> they seemed like they were on their way to their fourth state championship. Another unidentified newspaper article dated March 5<sup>th</sup> titled, "Tourtellotte Advances in Class C Tournament; Griswold is Defeated", picks up the story:

*Tourtellotte Memorial high school basketball team of North Grosvenordale entered the semi-final round in the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference Class C tournament being held at Weaver high gym this afternoon when they defeated Killingly high of Danielson 41 to 43.*

*In the evening quarterfinals Suffield High knocked the chances of the Griswold team of Jewett City higher than a kite when they took a 40-35 ball game.*

*Killingly was far from the team that met Tourtellotte in the regular season and played a fighting brand of ball all the way. Constantine drew first blood in the opening seconds of play when he scored a basket for Tourtellotte. The lead see-sawed back and forth during the first stanza and at quarter time Danielson has a one-point lead.*

*Jim Canty's crew of five came back strong in the second period and broke through the Joe Ventura coached aggregation defense to hold a comfortable 21 to 13 halftime lead. In the opening minutes of the second stanza, Bates popped two successive shots to put the Turtles out in front for good.*

*During the third period the Hilltoppers were in complete control of the game and in the opening minutes of the final quarter sent in a host of substitutes.*

*When the final score was tallied it read Bates - 18, Maitland -11, Azud - 7, and Constantine - 4. All tolled the Tigers scored 16 baskets and 9 foul shots. The lead score for the Killing was F. Labelle at 13.*

Coach Canty, true to form, did not want to kick a downed opponent. Instead, he used the balance of the game to teach and provide the non-starters the opportunity to play in a state tournament game. Even in the state playoffs, Mr. Canty was praiseworthy.



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The return bus ride to North Grosvenordale must have been an exciting event for all involved. The bus would have been abuzz with renewed optimism and hopes of another state championship. Riding high off their easy Killingly win the team felt great about their prospects for another trophy in the Tourtellotte Memorial High School lobby. The starters were as fresh as any team in the tournament and things seemed to be going their way.

On March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1946, Tourtellotte travelled to Hartford in hopes of their 22<sup>nd</sup> straight win of the season against an old rival, Bloomfield High School. It was Bloomfield that was on the receiving end of a 28-27 upset two years before by the Tigers in the 1944 state championship game and they wanted to settle the score. The game started before a full crowd at 7:30 PM. By 7:33 PM, just a few short minutes after the initial tip-off, both teams understood that, like the 1944 game, defense and tenacity were going to win this game.

Bloomfield came out hard and Tourtellotte responded in kind. A March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1946, newspaper article, provided by Betty LeClair gives us a glimpse at the game:

*Showing the signs of fatigue and the tension of 21 straight victories, Tourtellotte Memorial high school basketballers of North Grosvenordale dropped a 36-29 decision to fifth-ranking Bloomfield high school hoopsters tonight at the Weaver gym in the first bracket of the Class C tournament semi-finals.*

*Evidence that the Cantymen were tired was shown in the last period when they were held to a lone foul conversion. Bloomfield paced by Billy Clark who tossed 12 important markers overcame a 25-28 deficit going into the final stanza and outscored the Hilltoppers 11-1 to win going away. During the greater portion of the last four minutes, they maintained possession of the ball with a series of freeze plays.*

*After trailing 7-11 at the close of the first stanza, the Tourtellotte machine rallied in the second eight minutes of play and deadlocked the issue at 18-all at intermission. Fred Prosiatkowski, rugged Bloomfield guard, displayed uncanny accuracy from the center of the court and dropped in three long shots during this period of time.*

*Captain Don Maitland sparked the Tourtellotte quintet in a third period rally as he contributed seven valuable markers and as a result Tourtellotte enjoyed a 28-25 edge going into the last period.*

Tourtellotte was ahead 28-25 at the end of the third period, but they were unable to keep the Bloomfield offense and tenacious defense at bay. Bloomfield for their part, recognized the threat that existed in Rene Blanchette and effectively shut him down. At the final whistle, Rene had scored only four points, two of which from foul shots, a total well off his recent average. Eight game minutes after it began, the Turtles were held to just one point, while Bloomfield scored eleven. Had the Thompson team stopped just one Bloomfield basket and made just three baskets themselves they would have, once again, made it to the championship game. It is sometimes the small things in basketball that add up to big victories on the court. Coach Canty understood this, but he would wait for a better time to review that lesson with the team. Later recollections would indicate the players were more disappointed in letting Coach Canty down than they were in losing the game.

Bloomfield went on to defeat Ellsworth in the final game of the season and won their second state championship by beating Ellsworth 35-26. Maybe it was the long road of an

undefeated season, maybe it was the extra effort by an excited Bloomfield squad seeking retribution. Whatever it was, Tourtellotte's hopes for a fourth state championship were dashed sometime around 8:30 PM on March 7, 1946. The bus ride, for the most part, was quiet.

Highlights of the season included: Bill Bates hitting 252 points, Don Maitland 230, Rene Blanchette 182, Swede Constantine 83, Paul Azud 78, and Bob Rivers 59 tallies. Other players totaled 69 points. Bill Bates was named a forward on the Connecticut C-D Class All-Star Team and Captain Don Maitland, Tourtellotte's second highest season scorer, was named as the center on the All-Star Second Team.

The Tigers finished the 1946 season with a basketball banquet sponsored by the Tourtellotte Memorial High School Student Council at the North Grosvenordale Community House. A March 29<sup>th</sup> article, titled "Basketball Banquet in Community House", reported:

*The annual basketball banquet in honor of the Tourtellotte High basketball team was held last night at the Community House by the Student Council under the guidance of Agnes Gahagan and Jim Canty.*

*Joe Archambault was the toastmaster. Speakers included Jerome Ryscavage, Henry Dunleavy, Coach Jim Canty, Frank Pelletier, Chairman School Board; George Selig, Supt. of Bartlett High, Webster, and former coach at Tourtellotte; Frank M. Buckley, Supt., of Thompson schools; James E. Mack, Pres. Of the Student Council; Don Maitland. Captain of this year's basketball team and Rene Blanchette, newly elected captain of next year's team. Dancing followed.*

Another article titled "T.M.H.S. Squad to be Honored, Banquet Tonight" states:

The Tourtellotte Memorial High School basketball squad will be honored at a banquet at the North Grosvenordale Community House this evening.

*Coach James Canty's club, after winning 20 consecutive games, including two tournament contests, bowed in the semi-finals of the Connecticut Interscholastic tourney to Bloomfield, and closed the campaign with an outstanding record of 20 victories and one defeat.*

*Members of the squad to be feted tonight are Capt. Don Maitland, Robert Rivers, Peter Constantine, Rene Blanchette, Dan Almquist, Peter Thomas, Matthew Pieper, Donald Peterson, William Bates, Paul Azud, and Joseph Rogalski.*

*The Tourtellotte girl's team unbeaten during the past season will be guests at the affair.*

*George Selig, superintendent of the Webster schools and former athletic director and coach at Tourtellotte High, will be the principal speaker. The following members of the girls' squad will attend: Capt. Janice Bates, Mary Luster, Teresa Wroblewski, Priscilla Gibson, Fannie Gesavelli, Madeline Cuhna, Doris Laporte, Joyce Johnson, Doris Negip, Connie Donovan, Lorraine Laflamme and Maxine Randall.*

With the banquet, the team finished the 1946 season on a high note. While the team did not win another state championship that season, they did win the QVC Divisional Championship

and many fond memories were shaped that season. Memories that would last a lifetime. Dan Almquist, a sophomore and 1946 bench player, sixty years later, remembers that season as a magical part of his high school career.

Tom Carey, a long-time sports reporter and columnist for the Worcester Telegram and Gazette, was always fond of Jim Canty. He started reporting on Jim during Jim's days at Holy Cross. During March of 1946, in one of his weekly columns, "Just Talking it Over", Tom shared some kind words about Coach Canty, his exploits on the field and his time behind the whistle. They say much about Canty as a player, coach, and man.

*I have always admired the centerfield performing of Jim Canty, probably one of the smoothest roaming fly chasers Holy Cross College and Southbridge ever produced. But Jim does not only shine out on the diamond. His hoop coaching ability should come in for plenty of praise.*

*When a mentor can pilot a club to 22 straight wins in a season and sports writers do not pat too much attention to this outstanding record only one thing can be charged to those writers and that is blindness. I have wanted to tell your readers a few interesting highlights concerning Jim's coaching duties at Tourtellotte High in North Grosvenordale, but Winter sports went over in town so big in the past Winter I could not find the time.*

*Jim Canty has been coaching basketball and baseball at the North Grosvenordale Institute for four years without too many local sports lovers knowing that Jim left town every morning. He is sporting a four-year win record that would make even Frank Kearny, The Rhode Island State coach, sit up and take notice. Jim is batting for over .800. In 1943, his quintet won 17 out of 20 tilts. In 1944 his outfit walked off with 18 straight triumphs. The following season his charges chalked up 17 decisions in 21 outings. This year his dream team won 22 straight frays.*

*His diamond clubs have enjoyed tremendous winning success in his four-year stay, too. In good old American English, Jim Canty is a whale of a hoop and baseball mentor. Naturally, I never have sat on a Tourtellotte bench to listen to the brainy Canty direct his charges, but I do know that there isn't a thing about the net trade that he doesn't know. Jim is not a strict coach by any means, but players who work under him respect his orders and also look to him as a great pal. Even the youngsters in grammar school at Tourtellotte are taught basketball by Canty, who really believes in building for the future.*

*Jim never looked for any glory and if you ask him anything about his great coaching record he will give all the credit to his players. I had quite a chat with him one night at the Y gym just before his Hyde quintet was to take the floor against Al Renna's Muffins. Jim's North Grosvenordale juggernaut had chalked up 17 wins in as many starts. Naturally, Jim was happy and proud of his hands, but here is the exact words he had to say to me. "Tom, any coach is proud of his team, especially when it is winning. But my club has been lucky at times and don't predict a winning season for us yet, Tom. Harvey Clarke's Wells High team is the outfit that I fear the most and it wouldn't surprise me to see it knock us off." He was loud in his*

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*praises for Clarke's team and also mentioned that Harvey was doing a great job of coaching and that should give him a pat on the back. There is Jim Canty for you fans. A great coach, a real gentleman and an athletic mentor who will never success go to his head.*

*Yes, this is the same Canty that the Favreau's Chefs bleacher wolves booed last summer. Jim handled the coaching reins for the Chefs last season and also was his club's star outfielder, coming up with several brilliant catches during the campaign, but never could please his critics. He did not slug too well, hitting a slump in mid-season. He probably would have snapped out of it in a week or so if the fans had backed him up instead of razing his every move. I stuck with Canty last season when even some of his friends advised him to hang up his spikes. Jim himself thought his swing days were over. He lost confidence up there at the plate and even benched himself for a spell. But Canty broke a lot of his knockers hearts the last month of the Chef's schedule. Opposing pitchers could not retire him and Jim, who had not smashed a drive out of the park all season, was polling one a week over the fence now. Canty was once again the idol of the Sunday afternoon peanut chowers.*

*The fans were rating him a better all-around diamond performer than Jake Edwards. They wanted to know who was responsible for benching him now. The reason for my bringing up these facts, fans, is that I wanted to prove to you all that Canty is a great athlete and a player who can take the good with the bad. Fans have asked me to compare the Canty hoop brain with that of Lou Kyrios, the Wells High mentor. I refuse to be involved in such an argument. Both are great coaches and let's leave it that way. I could bring out important points about the Canty coaching success and also could tell my readers that Kyrios is the greatest developer of hoop talent around these parts. The two of them have so many outstanding coaching qualities there is no need to compare their abilities.*

*Jim Canty has come a long way in the coaching profession and the entire town should be mighty proud of him. I wish him extended coaching glory and know all you ardent cage fans do also. Jim is mum on his baseball plans for the coming campaign, but you can chalk down this Carey prediction. Jim Canty will again coach the Favereau's Chefs this season and he will be seen romping in the sun field position, rubbing elbows with Jake Edwards, who will be stationed in left field. Imagine watching the greatest fly chasers the town has ever known performing on the same team. How can rival sluggers smack drives past these two antelope receivers who are bound to save many a game for the Chefs this summer? Out of this world catches will be seen in left and center field all during the Chefs 1946 campaign.*

During those years it was common for the graduating class to produce a class prophecy. This was found in the 1946 Tourtellotte Memorial High School yearbook, written by the seniors in June of 1946. The class prophecy was used as a means of predicting, in a light-hearted way, where the students of the graduating class may be somewhere in the future. Keep in mind V-J

Day (Victory over Japan at the conclusion of World War II) was only 10 months prior to the release of this document. It reads:

*... Then over to Japan, where the U.S. has completed an excellent job in teaching Japanese to forget aggression, a huge stadium is shown. The coach has a familiar face. It is Billy Bates. The U.S. Government borrowed him from the N.Y. Yankees for a season, so that he could teach the Japanese the game of baseball.*

*Another scene in Tokyo shows a huge gymnasium, and on the basketball court is another familiar face. Why it looks like Don Maitland. He was invited by our government to teach the game of basketball to the Japanese. He received a leave of absence from the University of Conn. where just the year before, he had coached a National Championship team.*

The class of 1946 very accurately predicted the future of baseball in Japan. In a farewell letter to the class of 1946, Jim Canty wrote the following letter. Again, it says much about Jim as a man and about the times in which he lived and taught at Tourtellotte. WWII was over and the country now faced a new and much more frightening enemy called nuclear proliferation. The Cold War had begun.

*Dear seniors,*

*This is indeed a sorrowful and yet enjoyable time for you. Sorrowful because you are leaving familiar haunts and faces that you hold dear. Enjoyable, because now you are to encounter opportunities for which you have been preparing yourselves for so long.*

*Yes, your school has been a steppingstone to greater things. By greater things I do not necessarily mean financial or material things, but I do mean you have become aware of what your place in a democracy should be. You realize that with the privileges democracy offers come many obligations. These obligations make it imperative for you to aid in the combating of communistic propaganda so prevalent in the world today. You are aware of the many infiltrations of the Communists into our country, our labor unions, and sad to say, even into high government positions. You, as future citizens, must be prepared to sell our freedoms, our way of living, yes our democracy" (Canty Collection).*

Some would argue that the 1946 team was among the best in Tourtellotte's history and possibly one of the best of all Eastern Connecticut teams. According to available records it was one of three undefeated regular seasons to date, a difficult, and exceedingly rare feat in high school basketball. The team finished the regular season ranked as the highest seeded team in the state, something quite astounding when we consider there were only approximately 60 boys in the entire school.

## 1947

During the winter of 1946 and 1947 the country was healing. World War II had been over for sixteen months and America was moving forward. *It's a Wonderful Life* starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed was the hot movie of the season - it was eventually nominated for five academy awards. Martial law was declared in Vietnam, a move that began a downward spiral that would last for three decades and cost millions of lives. The communist threat was very real to the free world and America was doing what it could to stem the "Red Tide." The Voice of America began broadcasting in Eastern Europe to educate the communist behind the Iron Curtain on the benefits of a free and open society.

Across the country the football season had ended, and high schools were looking forward to their basketball season. Unlike many towns, basketball tryout was a huge event in Thompson. Maybe it was due to the school being so small, it did not have a football program or maybe because a dynasty had been created and everyone wanted to be a part of it. Whatever the reason, according to the 1947 Tourtellotte Memorial High School Yearbook, "30 fellows reported for the first practice. Of these, 20 were accepted." While having thirty young men tryout would not have been significant in many school districts, it represented half of the total number of boys attending the high school that year. Everyone wanted to be part of Mr. Canty's basketball squad.

For several days, Jim Canty ran the boys through a series of drills and workouts. It was easy to see the better athletes and those who possessed little skill. Evaluating the layer in between the two is what presents the greatest challenge. Here a coach needs to look beyond skill and assess talent, as well as potential. When the roster was finalized, Coach Canty had only six returning players. The other 12 players would be made up of last year's junior varsity team or inexperienced players. Of the six returning players, only two saw significant play time last season and he had lost four of his five top scorers from the 1946 season. This left Coach Canty with Rene Blanchette and Bob Rivers from which to construct an offense and defense. It was most likely November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1946, when Jim Canty posted the final roster. Like every day he arrived at Tourtellotte well before the students. He gave the list one final look, making certain that he had made the best choices possible and wishing he could keep them all. With a final sigh, he grabbed a tack and posted the list on the school bulletin board. It was done. One-by-one, as soon they arrived at school, the boys made a beeline to the student's bulletin board. Twenty boys were happy, while ten were not.

The 1947 season officially opened on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1946, with a home game against Putnam Tech. Several days before the Putnam Tech game, the Tigers defeated the Tourtellotte Alumni in a non-conference game. While they easily beat their older opponents, those who knew the game, especially Coach Canty could see the 1947 team had several challenges before it. The largest - they lacked experience. Skill and talent are important aspects of any athletic endeavor, but experience binds the two.

During that first QVC game, Putnam Tech's starting forward Bates scored 25 points and proved to be too much for the Tigers in a 40-44 defeat, despite Tourtellotte's Rene Blanchette and Bob Rivers scoring 10 points each. The Tigers led the game 27-12 at the end of the first half, but the wheels came off during the second half and the Tigers did not have the horses necessary to win this race.

Several days after the Putnam Tech loss, the Turtles played Plainfield and won that game 43-34. Andy Ducharme scored 17 points and many, including Coach Canty, hoped Andy could fill one of the obvious holes the team had this season. Even with Andy becoming a key contributor, there were other voids that had yet to be filled if Tourtellotte Memorial High School hoped to have another successful season.

Several weeks of practice were not enough to give Coach Canty a sense of where his team was going or what combination of players could make them successful. There were several key players emerging, but it was difficult to win games off the backs of only three players. Three games into the season and Coach Canty was searching for answers.

The roster for the January 3<sup>rd</sup> game against Wells included the names of 12 players, many of whom were underclassmen. Coach Canty was searching for a combination of players and plays that would work. Whatever combination he used that day did not. The Tigers were hammered by Wells 26-56. Rene Blanchette was the high scorer with 15 points, but it proved woefully short. The rest of the bench only contributed 11 points to the thirty-point shellacking.

The Tigers went on to lose six out of the next nine games, something very unusual for the Thompson squad. They were unfamiliar with losing and the boys felt they were letting Mr. Canty down. Jim, on the other hand, with nearly twenty years of basketball under his belt, easily understood the challenges before him and knew the boys were giving him what they could given the circumstance.

The team hit another low point on February 7<sup>th</sup> when they lost to Putnam High School 18-45. A short article found in a local newspaper reported:

*Putnam High school easily defeated Tourtellotte Memorial high School last night 45-18 in a basketball game played at the local gymnasium. Putnam took an early lead and at half time was ahead by a 25-9 margin. They increased their lead steadily during the second period.*

*Rene Blanchette had a game high of 18 points, but it wasn't nearly enough to stave off the constant Putnam attack.*

As a coach Jim understood he had a young team. For the younger boys, he understood the need to rebuild and teach. For the older boys, those who spent the last four years learning and getting what minutes they could, he needed to figure out a way to win games. They deserved that if nothing else.

The answers did not come easy and things for the Tigers had yet to turn until February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1947, when Andy Ducharme scored 10 points in the first quarter of the Plainfield game. It was enough to motivate the Tigers into taking the game. Andy went on to score 14 points in the 46-45 victory. With only four games left in the season and a record of 7-8 everyone, including Canty, wondered if it was too little too late. The Tigers knew they needed to win the four games remaining in the regular season if they hoped to receive a state championship invitation. Even with a final record of 11-8, a postseason bid would be doubtful. All they could do was win the few games that remained.

Coming off the one-point win against Plainfield on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1947, the Tigers faced Bartlett. The Webster boys had defeated the Hilltoppers 35-28 during their first match in January and many felt they were the better team. The second game, a teeter-totter, must-win match-up against the Webster quintet ended in the second one-point game in as many matches. The 47-46 victory gave many a glimmer of hope. On the other hand, others felt the team was getting the job done, but was doing so at a considerable cost. How long could they keep this fervent pace, and would it be good enough to get them into the postseason?

The answer came in the second to last game of the season. In another scrappy match against another staunch rival, St. Louis, the Tigers had yet another nail-biter and exhibited great courage, but this time were bested by a better team and came out on the losing end with a 51-53 loss.

The last three games, Plainfield, Bartlett, and St. Louis, spoke volumes about Coach Canty and his team. Heart, desire, and focus were key lessons learned that year. Especially, over the course of those three games. The scrappy Cantymen finished those games winning by one point in two contests and losing by two points in the other.

It is uncertain what the mindset of the players was during the last game of the season. Discussions with players six decades later indicate they played every game with incredible intensity and did so for Mr. Canty, as well as their fellow teammates. However, even the best trained athlete's efforts grow weary at some point. In Tourtellotte's case, the boys felt anything less than 100% or anything other than a win would let Mr. Canty down. Coach Canty, on the other hand, never expected anything more from the boys than what the boys could give. In the end, "all you can do is all you can do."

By the end of February, the arduous work in the last three games took a toll and the Tigers dropped the last game of the season to Wells in a 30-43 decision. Many feel the boys were simply tired. An article dated February 19<sup>th</sup> titled "Rally By Wells Sinks Conn. Five," reports:

*After leading for three periods, Tourtellotte Memorial High School lost to Mary E. Wells of Southbridge last night, 43 to 30, in a basketball game played at the Athletic Club.*

*Tourtellotte held a 16 to 13 lead at the half and 25 to 24 advantage at the end of the third period. In the last four minutes of play, Regip and Duquette got the range, and started rolling up Well's advantage. Blanchette was high scorer for the losers.*

Rene Blanchette was once again the high scorer of the game with 14 points. Other contributors included: Andrew Ducharme with six points, Matt Pieper with three, and Danny Almqvist scored four. Again, though, it was not enough.

To gain perspective on the 1947 season and understand the team's accomplishments that year, and more importantly, how they fit into the larger picture, the accomplishments of those 1947 seniors and the future accomplishments of the underclassmen must be considered. Jim Canty might not have done well in today's society, which focuses on instant gratification. He understood the fact that it took a great deal of effort and time to build a program. Thus, he understood that his athletic program would have high points, not-so-high points, and knew 1947 was a rebuilding year. Using the season this way, he continued the traditions established by Coaches Coombs, Colby, and Selig. In many respects, 1947 was as important to Tourtellotte basketball as the state championship years, for without years like 1947, little could be built for the future.

A 1947 yearbook article aptly summarizes the 1947 season from the senior class perspective. It states:

*What this year's team lacked in height, was certainly made up for in speed. We practiced almost every day, and under the able coaching of Mr. Canty, we developed quite well.*

*Our spirits were very high for the first game and each and every member played hard. We wanted to represent Tourtellotte as it always had been represented. We won that first game and three quarters of the games that followed.*



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*The first team was composed of the captain, Rene Blanchette, who played forward along with Andy Ducharme, Donald Peterson played center, and Joe Rogalski and Bob Rivers played a good defensive battle as guards.*

*Although none of these fellows will be here to play next year, we feel sure that under the coaching of Mr. Canty and the able leadership of the co-captains, Richard Laflamme and Danny Almquist, the team will be of the quality that Tourtellotte has always produced" (Canty Collection).*

1947 was a rebuilding year for the Tourtellotte basketball squad. Coach Canty used 17 varsity players throughout the year, reaching deep into the first-year class with George Dargati, Benny Wrubleski, Tommy Tanacea, Christy Carabina, Jim Naum, and Jimmy Karapanos seeing extensive varsity action. Canty was always teaching and to that end always training. He saw the year for what it was and set his eyes on the future. Of the seventeen players who saw varsity time that season, only five were seniors and three were regular starters.

They walked off the court during the Wells game disappointed, some in themselves and some in the overall season. Tourtellotte was used to winning and this was the worst season in an extraordinarily long time. In spite of that, it is easy to imagine Wells post-game meeting. Coach Canty, always the gentleman, always the teacher, always an example, probably said, "boys, keep those heads high. I could not be more proud of you. Sure, we did not go as far as we wanted this season, but we gave it what we could, every minute of every game and that's all a coach, anyone, can expect..."

The seventeen players sitting in the room that day included: Rene Blanchette (Captain), Andrew Ducharme, Robert Rivers, Danny Almquist, Tommy Tanacea, Donald Peterson, Joseph Rogalski, Christy Carabina, James Karapanos, George Dargati, Jim Naum, Rich LaFlamme, Mathew Pieper, Francis Ungerer, Vangel Angelo, Stanley Jezerski, and Benny Wrubleski.

The Tigers finished the 1947 season at 9-10. It was the first losing season of Canty's career, but reports indicate he could not have cared less. The accuracy of individual player records from that season are suspect as several games are missing from the 1947 scorebook, but what is available indicates Andrew Ducharme, Rene Blanchette, and Bob Rivers were the high scorers for the season with Rene Blanchette leading the pack.

## 1948

There is no 1948 scorebook nor many newspaper articles from which to draw a detailed picture of the 1948 season. Enough information exists through the 1948 yearbook and memories from surviving players to help us piece together the 1948 season. In November of 1948, more than 30 young men tried out for Mr. Canty's basketball team. A remarkable number for such a small school. Many of the boys trying out in 1947 were seventh and eighth graders during Tourtellotte's run for the 1944 State Championship. Eight players of the 1948 tryout squad were returning players who saw varsity action on the 1947 team. This made it difficult for the fresh players who were trying to find a spot on the roster. Danny Almquist, a hard-working junior starter from the 1947 team, was selected as the team captain along with classmate Richard Laflamme. When the roster was finally posted on the school bulletin board on the first floor of the 1909 building, it included captains Danny Almquist and Rich Laflamme along with eighteen other boys. Thirteen of these boys would be given the opportunity to play varsity basketball in the '48 season. These thirteen included: Vangel Angelo, Tommy Tanacea, George Dargati, Jim Naum, Christy Carabina, James Karapanos, Donald Garvais, Frank Ungerer, Benny Wrubleski, and Stanley Jezierski. Richard Vrabel was selected as team manager.

The Tigers started the season, like many previous seasons, with a 37-34 win over the Alumni team at the Cluett Peabody Athletic Club. Over the years, many have postulated that there is an unspoken rule that the older boys let their younger counterparts win the game to start the regular season with a win. The many interviews that occurred with former players for this book would prove the skeptics wrong. These Alumni were athletes and did not want to lose any game.

After the 1948 Alumni game, many local basketball purists felt a little different about the 1948 squad than they did the 1947 squad. With the underclassmen development that occurred during the prior season, many felt this squad exhibited greater potential than last season's squad. Now, the team was ready for the regular season to begin, and they could try to realize their considerable potential.

The regular season began with a 51-34 win over Lyman High School. The Tigers split the next six games beating Plainfield, Putnam Tech, and Bartlett, while dropping games to Griswold, St. Louis, and Wells. All six games were close contests, which were decided by less than 10 points. The team showed great promise and were reinforcing the positive opinions made at the beginning of the season. Coach Canty learned the Tigers were poised and experienced beyond their years.

From there, the Turtles then went on a six-game winning spree. The six victories consisted of wins over: Woodstock, Plainfield, St Joe's, Pomfret, Griswold, and Woodstock for a second time. By the first week of February 1948, the Thompson squad stood confidently at 11-3 and once again they seemed like they were in contention for a state championship.

Coach Canty knew that allowing his team to get overconfident could be a grave mistake. Although, it would have been an easy trap to fall into given the positive stride that the Tourtellotte squad had already taken in the season. George Dargati and Tommy Tanacea were playing very well, but they were just sophomores with only a year of experience under their belts. Several of the upperclassmen, like Dan Almquist and Rich Laflamme, were contributing, but everyone knew that anything could happen when the team is mostly comprised of inexperienced players. Taking their eye off the prize, even for a moment might prematurely end the season for the boys – and that was something Canty would attempt to avoid at all costs. He reminded the boys of that risk of distraction despite the six-game winning streak. The season was far from over.

That lesson was learned during their 15<sup>th</sup> game of the season against Killingly. Tourtellotte had been on the winning end of most of the matches played against their southern rivals over the past few years and the 1947 team saw no reason that would change. When it was all said and done, however, the stunned Cantymen left the gymnasium on the losing end of a 38-53 upset. Danny Almquist remembers, "Coach Canty used the game to get our heads back on right." There was an opportunity to teach the team members a life lesson - never take anything for granted. Subsequently, few ever did as men. The Tigers also learned that consistency was a vital ingredient to success on and off the court.

Motivated by the unexpected Killingly loss, the squad came back with a big 42-36 win over Putnam High School. It was a memorable game for many of the players, especially for team captain Danny Almquist. The game was a tug-of-war contest for much of the time. Canty, seeing a Putnam weakness, called a time out and gathered his team. He saw a weakness in the Putnam defense and quickly developed a strategy. Putnam showed signs of tiring in the high intensity game and Coach Canty wanted to take advantage of that opportunity. Forty-one years later, team captain Danny Almquist fondly recalled a moment, "instead of playing guard that day he had me play a fast forward. Mr. Canty told me, 'Danny, as soon as we touch the ball, get down the floor and get the fast break.' Boy, and that is exactly what I did. Every time we touched the ball, I was off. The guys were able to get the ball to me and we scored a bunch of points real quick." Danny went on to score 32 points that evening, the most of his high school career. It was a personal best that few athletes would ever forget, especially given the typical low scoring contests of the 1948 season.

The Tigers won the next game against Putnam Tech and then dropped two close games to St. Louis and Putnam High School. During the end of February, they beat Wells 43-35 and lost to Bartlett in the final game of the season 24-32, but it did not matter as the 14 regular season victories were enough for the team to once again be invited to play for the CIAC state tournament. This invitation made it the sixth time in seven years as a coach that Canty and his squad made the state tournament. Few small high schools in Connecticut could boast of that accomplishment.

The CIAC state tournament was held at Teacher's College in New Britain, Connecticut. Dan Almquist remembers both games being a struggle, but Tourtellotte came out on top winning the first nail biter against Bloomfield 40-38. Danny reported, "the game was a tussle all the way and we won during the last minute." The win qualified Tourtellotte for a quarterfinal game against Morgan High School.

Morgan High School, located in Clinton, Connecticut, was a school Tourtellotte had never played. This coastal Connecticut town contained roughly half of the total population of Thompson, Connecticut at the time. Despite this population disparity, player recollection tells us it was another slugfest that persisted the entire game. The lead changed hands numerous times and by the end of the game both teams were exhausted. Whoever was going to withstand the longest was going to win this game. Danny remembers it being one of the toughest games of his high school career. "Every time we gained the lead they would take it right back," Dan recalled. "Then, we would get the ball and we would be one point up. The whole game was like that. They made a shot during the last minute of the game, and we had a chance to tie it, but just could not put the ball in the basket. The whole season came down to one shot at the end of the game. I do not remember who took the shot." Like many athletes, whoever did would give anything for one more try at that shot.

As in 1947, many considered the 1948 season another rebuilding year for Tourtellotte. It is difficult to know what Coach Canty thought about that season. He did have a considerable number of younger players. One thing is for certain, many of the Tourtellotte players who participated in the loss against Morgan at New Britain College in '48 could not have imagined the

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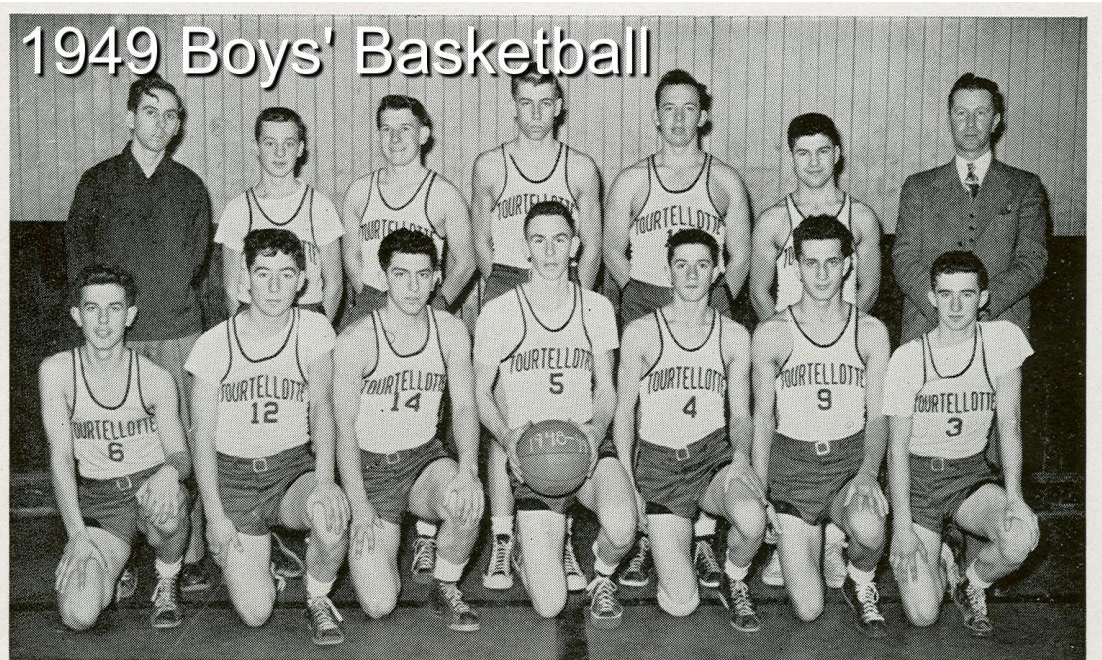
great things to come. For Dan Almquist, and three other seniors, they would graduate without ever getting the big trophy, a state championship, but those he helped train as a senior that year would.

## 1949

The seeds that were sown in 1947, and further developed in 1948, paid off during the 1949 season. Many people felt the Tourtellotte Memorial High School boys' basketball team was one of the best in the state.

Tryout anxiety began to build several weeks before the actual date. Many of the boys had been practicing daily to refine their skills and improve weaknesses. Several knew they were shoe-ins and were concerned about performing well enough to become first-team members. Others just wanted to make the initial cuts. With seven seasons under his belt, Coach Canty knew what he wanted, and the boys knew what he expected. When the time came, almost half the boys enrolled in the high school applied. Several eighth graders were also hoping to become part of the junior varsity squad.

The tryouts lasted several days. The annual posting ritual with its disappointment and elation occurred sometime in late November. When it was all said and done, the varsity squad included: Captain Francis Ungerer, Joe Augustynski, Donald Garvais, Richard Hagstrom, Benny Wrubleski, James Karapanos, Tasi Vriga, Christy Carabina, Tommy Tanacea, George Dargati, Jim Naum, Nick Angelo, and Jim Sali. Pat Forgit was selected as the team manager. Many, to include Coach Canty, saw something special in this group of young men. Many had played in the program for several years and had a level of experience that surpassed previous squads. Among the younger players, several athletes were youngsters during the 1944 championship, and they wanted a piece of that action themselves.



### THE CHAMPS

*Standing:* Manager Pat Forgit, Joseph Augustynski, Donald Garvais, Richard Hagstrom, Benny Wrubleski, James Karapanos, Coach James Canty.

*Kneeling:* Tasi Vriga, Christy Carabina, Thomas Tanacea, Captain Francis Ungerer, George Dargati, James Naum, Nick Angelo.

The season began in early December with a win over the Alumni. It was followed by four consecutive triumphs over: Woodstock 66-35, Stafford 56-36, St. Louis 41-38, and, in lopsided fashion, Plainfield 54-26. As was the case in previous seasons, the team then see-sawed for four games losing to St. Louis 31-35, winning against St. Joe's 59-28, losing to Killingly 42-55, and then winning over Putnam Tech 41-37. After nine games, eight scholastic games, they stood at 7-2 (6-2 in the scholastic ranks). From there, they would find their stride and only drop one game in nine and that was a 37-41 loss. Many felt this loss was due to a poor shooting performance and that they should have won the game.

By the middle of January, everyone who attended a Tourtellotte game could see there was something special in junior George Dargati. George finished the previous 1948 season, his sophomore year, leading the team in scoring with 252 points, an 11-point average, a strong point per game average for a sophomore. In 1949, he became a scoring machine throwing in nearly 20 points per game. Available scorebooks indicate that no one in Tourtellotte history had hit this milestone prior to 1949, not even Mr. Canty himself.

The second week of February found the Tigers with an 11-3 record. With three games remaining in the regular season, the Tigers felt confident that a state tournament invitation was inevitable, but securing the last three games against Wells, Putnam High School, and Putnam Tech would make it certain.

The first match of the remaining three was against Wells. The Turtles had not faced their opponents from Southbridge this season and had split their two games against them in the 1948 season. No one took this game for granted. Soon after the starting tilt, Canty's incredible ability to size-up an opponent and make the appropriate adjustments stood out. The conclusion was a 40-24 victory for Tourtellotte. Tom Carey of the Worcester Telegram and Gazette reported the following day:

*The Jim Canty greets were artists at the trick trade. They were such a successfully performing organization they went into a zone and man-to-man defenses quicker than the eyes could follow. These unorthodox habits mystified our representatives...*

Carey goes on to speak about his discussions with Wells coach Kyrios. Kyrios is reported to have said, "he [Kyrios] rates him [Canty] on par with some of the college coaches." This was a sentiment shared by many in the trade. Carey goes on to state, "as a baseball coach he is a class by himself. He piloted Favreau's Chefs to three town series wins in as many years. He is the Jack Barry of schoolboys too... Jim has said no to many a fine small college offer." The readers should be reminded that to be compared to Holy Cross' Jack Barry, one of the winningest coaches in college baseball, was an outstanding complement. Stories from family and friends of the time support the fact that Canty was so well thought of during his tenure. In fact, a college coaching job was only a submitted application away, but Jim knew he had found a home at Tourtellotte. Mr. Canty knew that the horizon was very bright for the small high school in Connecticut.

By the middle of February 1949, with only two games left in the regular season, the Quinebaug Valley Conference was at a virtual deadlock. The Tourtellotte Tigers stood at 8-1 (12-3 overall) in conference wins, while the Putnam Clippers stood at 9-1. The Putnam Patriot, on February 17, 1949, in an article titled, "Conference in Virtual Deadlock - Tigers Square Series with Clipper Quintet," reported:

*Unless Stafford High School cagers are able to upset the favored Tigers of Tourtellotte Memorial High School tomorrow night at the Community gym*

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*in North Grosvenordale, the Cantymen will share honors in the Quinebaug Valley Conference.*

*Tigers gained a virtual tie for the conference leadership with the Putnam High Clippers Tuesday night by taking a 44-40 decision from the Greenhalgh-coached Basketeers to even the home and home series between the two quintets. [An estimated] 900 fans witnessed the tilt.*

*At the present time, the PHS forces have a 9-1 conference record while the Tigers have an 8-1 mark and the remaining game on the docket Friday night.*

*The victory Tuesday was the 15<sup>th</sup> of the campaign in 21 starts for the Cantymen. The setback was the fifth in 15 tilts this season for the Clippers. The decision also enabled the Tigers to maintain an unbeaten scholastic record on their "home" court games in 10 games.*

### *Dargati Paces Winners*

*George Dargati, Tiger southpaw forward, was by far the most colorful and spectacular cager on the floor Tuesday night as he flipped 17 points to bring his sensational total to 290 in 21 Contests [other sources indicate it was only 17 games].*

*Although the contest was twice deadlocked early in the first period, 3-3 and 5-5 it was a basket by Dargati that gave the Tigers a 7-5 edge and from that time until the final whistle they were never headed. The first stanza ended with the Tigers out front 13-8*

### *Second Period Rally*

*At the outset of the second period Billy Mansfield converted from the charity stripe and reduced the Tiger advantage to 13-9. For the next four minutes, however, the host club prevailed and swelled their margin to 25-9 before Ray Rheault dropped another charity shot. During the Tiger "blitz" Dargati flipped three baskets, Jimmy Karapanos added a pair and Tom Tanacea hit with a set from the corner.*

*During the last four minutes of the period Clippers prevailed. Rheault added two more hoops from the 15-foot line and Walt McNally added a singleton. Only PHS basket came in the waning minutes of the period when Billy Mansfield dribbled practically the length of the court as the defense appeared to relax. Dargati retaliated and the teams left the court at intermission with the Tigers protecting a 27-15 margin.*

Putnam outplayed the Tigers in the second half, but it was not enough. At the last whistle, with both teams battered and bruised, the Tigers came out on top by a single point. The final score read Tourtellotte - 41 and Putnam - 40. Two weeks earlier, the Tigers had lost to Putnam 37-41. Hence, this was a revenge game for the Tigers and it allowed them to settle the score with the rival Clippers.

When the regular season ended, the boys stood at 18-3, which was more than enough to once again make the CIAC Tournament. This would be the seventh time in eight years that Canty escorted his squad westward to play against the state's elite.

The Turtles had secured a fourth-place position in the state tournament according to school records. The team went on to handily defeat Hawley High School, 76-31 in the first round of the state tournament. Not even the snowstorm, which bared its ugly head could slow the Tigers down. George Dargati, to surprise no one, led all the Tigers with 24 total points in the one-sided contest.

Portland High School was the next opponent that the Tourtellotte squad had to face. The team won this affair by a quarterfinal score of 44-38. The Tigers were then tasked with a contest against Berlin High School in the semifinals. This game could have gone to Berlin or Tourtellotte, but the Tigers were able to narrowly escape with a 38-36 semifinal victory. During the last match of the '49 CIAC State Tournament, Tourtellotte faced off against semifinalist Morgan High School. It was Morgan who eliminated Tourtellotte Memorial High School in the quarterfinals of the 1948 state championships and the Tigers were anxious to even the balance of power.

From the first click of the clock, the trained eye could tell it was not going to be an easy match against Morgan. Canty had his team playing strong and well prepared. The Tigers knew that taking an early lead against a team like Morgan would give them the upper hand and they wanted to leave nothing to chance.

The details of the game have been lost, but we know through the players that as the last minute of the game ticked away, the Tourtellotte players sitting on the bench, several of whom were starters, were now standing. Even with the quick start, no one could have anticipated such an uneven match. With only a minute left in the fourth quarter and a lead of more than 25 points, there was no hope for Morgan High School to work their way back into the game. Thompson took the early lead and never looked back. The Turtles anxiously watched the second hand of the old-style clock tick down the final minute of the game. When the buzzer finally sounded, it was the team from the small school in North Grosvenordale, Connecticut that would grab the final gold ring.

When it was all said and done, Tourtellotte easily defeated Morgan 62-31. Not since Ellsworth's 55-17 trouncing over Glastonbury in 1940 had there been such a large point differential in the final match in the small school division of the state finals. Since 1949, many have suggested that had Jim Canty kept his starters in the game, Tourtellotte could have easily beat the Ellsworth record, but that was a record in which Mr. Canty was not interested.

The Turtles also established another record in 1949. The victory over Morgan was their fourth state championship. No other small school had met this milestone and only Class M Branford and the powerhouse, Class L Hillhouse of New Haven, matched or exceeded this mark. Tourtellotte basketball is now ranked among the best in New England.

The final buzzer sounded and the Tourtellotte boys went wild. Canty used the entire bench to ensure everyone who had contributed during the season had a piece of this game. Every player on the lineup card would have memories of this specific game for the rest of their lives and that is exactly the way Canty wanted it. As the players celebrated on the floor, Jim Canty sat on the team bench for a few minutes soaking in the moment before getting up to join his players in shaking the hands of the Morgan players and coaches. Jim Canty never felt comfortable in these situations, and he felt moments like these belonged to the players, rather than the coaches.

Victorious, they returned home. Several days later they received an invitation to the New England Championships, one of high school's most prestigious recognitions. Even against a larger Sacred Heart High School they played well, losing that game 41-48. A March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1949, article titled, "Sacred Heart Cagers Whip Tourtellotte at New Haven, New Haven Arena 5,000 People Jammed the Arena", reports, "Sacred Heart took the lead midway in the first period and held it the rest of the way." The score at intermission was 26-13. Tourtellotte battled back, but found Sacred Heart to be too much of an opponent.



Several reports indicate that the Sacred Heart boys said, "...they were intimidated by George Dargati." George went on to score 23 points during the game. Jim Naum, Tommy Tanacea, and Jimmy Karapanos all scored four points each during the game, but the effort fell seven points short. Sacred Heart went on to play the finals in front of a large crowd at Boston Garden. Several of the former Tourtellotte players on the 1949 squad said they were ill-prepared for what they saw when they walked into the New Haven Arena. Never had the boys played before such a large crowd. The 5,000 people sitting in the stands that day nearly equaled the entire 1949 population of the Town of Thompson. George Dargati, years later said, "it really took us a while to calm down."

When the boys returned from the New England Tournament, it was time to hang up their basketball shoes and dust off their baseball cleats. Local newspapers recaptured the Tigers' season and championship for several weeks, many amazed at the feat that Tourtellotte accomplished given the limited resources and the small number of players trying out. On April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1949, Tom Carey in his column, "Just Talking it Over", stated, "for years Jim has been turning out gee-whiz clubs at Tourtellotte high. In the last eight years, seven of his clubs have appeared in post season tourneys. A more popular name for Canty would be Tourney King Jim." Little did Tom know it was only a start.

The excitement of the playoffs went well beyond the players and coaching staff. In the stands stood beaming family members, especially the mothers. A 1949 unidentified newspaper article found in the Canty collection captured the story of two such mothers:

*One of the most excited fans in the audience was George Dargati's mother, when the writer learned, had served Georgie an extra special dinner "so that he would shoot well." Her companion was the mother of Christy Carabina, injured regular with the TMHS quintet. She really "beamed" when Christy made a late appearance for drills as he received a "royal" welcome from the fans. He later saw limited service due to an ankle injury.*

After the excitement of the tournament finally ceased, the sports writers covering the events moved on to the perplexing task of selecting the 1949 Connecticut All-Star team. A March 1949, unidentified newspaper article found in the Canty collection, written by Roger Dove titled "TMHS Hoopmen Dominate All-Star Selections", states:

*Tourtellotte High's championship hoopmen dominated selections for the 1949 CIAC Class C All-Star Team named Saturday afternoon by sportswriters covering the tournament.*

*George Dargati, sharp-shooting lefthander, and Captain Francis Ungerer, center and rebound star, made the first team with forward Tom Tanacea receiving a second team birth. The top vote getters in the all-star poll represented eight different schools.*

First Team:

George Dargati	Tourtellotte	49
Terry Cramer	Portland	46
Don Scott	Morgan	33
Phil Tinsley	Berlin	38
Francis Ungerer	Tourtellotte	30

Second Team:

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<i>Ed Gunderson</i>	<i>Bloomfield</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Dan Daily</i>	<i>Ellsworth</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Tom Tanacea</i>	<i>Tourtellotte</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Whit Thompson</i>	<i>Guilford</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Lou Novinsky</i>	<i>Hale-Ray</i>	<i>7</i>

*Led by Francis Ungerer, captain and center, Tourtellotte was always in control of the boards. Although not blessed with much height. Tourtellotte made up for this with scrap and aggressiveness and determination to get the rebounds.*

*With 1949 season behind them and the spring thaw in full force, the boys moved on to baseball and the 1950 season.*

## 1949 State Champions



## BASKETBALL

First row; (left to right); George Dargati, Thomas Tanacea, Richard LaFlamme, Daniel Almquist, Christy Carabina, James Karapanos.

Second row; (left to right); Robert Forgit, Bronislaw Wrubleski, James Naum, Mr. Canty (Coach), Francis Ungerer, Donald Garvais.

Third row; (left to right); Richard Hagstrom, Vangel Angelo, Stanley Jezerski, Edward Vrabel (Manager).

## 1950

When November 1949 arrived, times were starting to shift on the American and basketball landscape. A modern style of play was coming into the fold and was called the fast break. This fast break approach to the game of basketball matched the style of play that the Tigers hoped to continue playing following the incredibly successful 1949 season. Although there was a mixed bag of expectations throughout the Town of Thompson, the Turtle fans were looking forward to another successful season. The veteran players were anxiously awaiting the season, while the fresh players were questioning their chances of breaking into such a talented roster and who could blame them after such a successful 1949 campaign.

Canty himself felt good about the prospects of the 1950 season. Quickly reviewing his tryout squad, he saw that he lost only two players from the 1949 season. These two players were: Don Garvais and Jim Sali and together they combined for 47 points in their senior season. Mr. Canty had 11 returning players, six of which were his highest scorers from the previous season and some returning junior varsity players who showed considerable promise. Excluding the New England Championship Tournament, the team had come off a nine-game winning streak and an 18-4 season. The boys had been playing throughout the summer and fall in preparation of the season. Things looked optimistic. What no one in town expected, though, was that the records established by the 1949 Tigers would only be the start of many good things to come.

While the score books from the championship years are long gone, we get a clear picture of the 1950 season because of the hundreds of newspaper articles kept by the players and their families. These articles provided a front-row seat to the action throughout the 1950 season.

Like previous seasons, Jim Canty had a large turnout for his 1950 basketball tryouts. Player estimates indicate there were approximately 15 returning varsity and junior varsity players, leaving only five spots to be filled by 15-20 new and anxious young men. Anxious is the operative word, since many Tourtellotte boys sought playing for the defending state championship team.

When Canty made his final decisions three days later, and the annual rush to the bulletin board was complete, 18 boys remained on the 1950 Tourtellotte boys' basketball roster. A high total for a small high school. For the try-outs who did not make the cut, Canty spoke with the disappointed boys who showed promise and explained what they needed to improve upon to make the team next year. To several others, he advised, in his kind, polite, and honest way, that they should pursue another activity more suited to their talents. Not everyone could play the game of basketball, nor as Canty rationalized as a science teacher, could everyone be an Einstein. There was nothing wrong with the fact that we each possess our own set of individual talents.

After the long offseason, the season began with an Alumni matchup. At the end of the first quarter, the high schoolers were ahead 11 to 7. The game edged closer by the half with the score at 21-19. The high schoolers performed well in the third quarter. Resulting in a 13-point quarter versus only 6 points for the Alumni. This sparked the Alumni crew because they attempted to close the gap, but came up short. Leading to a final tally of 41-39 with the high-school gang securing the win. George Dargati led the Tigers with 14 points, while Richard Laflamme paced the Alumni with 8 points. Mr. Canty must have been quite pleased with his current team's effort in this Alumni game. He should not have been surprised that his starting five contributed 34 of the 41 points. Since, these were his top five scorers from a year ago. Mr. Canty must have been satisfied with his Tigers' toughness. This toughness enabled them to beat a balanced Alumni group.

A little more than two weeks later, the Tigers were matched-up with St. Louis in Webster, Massachusetts on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1949. Mr. Canty decided to start the same five players as in the

Alumni game. These included: George Dargati, Tommy Tanacea, Frank Ungerer, Jim Naum, and Christy Carabina. The Tigers came out strong in the first quarter, which contributed to an 8-2 margin to start the second quarter. Defense marked this strong quarter for the Tigers because they only allowed two free tosses. This defense remained strong in the second stanza with the Turtles up 17-8. By the final buzzer, the Tigers had proven how strong they could be at the defensive end of the floor. They held St. Louis to 20 points, while scoring 38 points of their own. Yet again, George Dargati provided a scoring boost with 2 field goals and 6 free throws for a total of 10 points. Tommy Tanacea assisted with 7 points. As did Jim Naum with 7, despite fouling out of the second straight contest. For St. Louis, Mullins and Benvenuti each matched with 7 apiece.

The Tigers were now 2-0 and primed for a game against Griswold High School on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1949. The Wolverines did not stage a strong fight. This appears to have been because of strong defense, once again, for the cagers. Tourtellotte won this home contest by a final score of 66 to 35. The Tigers were led in scoring by George Dargati's 20 tallies. Fellow starters, Tommy Tanacea and Christy Carabina combined for 21 points. As for the bench, they were paced by Jim Karapanos and his 9 points. The defense was so strong that the Tigers held all Griswold players below 5 points each. Mr. Canty must have been quite pleased with the impressive performance and the Tigers' grit on the defensive side of the court. He must have also been glad to see five bench players contribute points. As many of these players would play a vital role in the next action-packed season.

This was no time to celebrate because two games remained on the docket before the Christmas break. The first game, which was played on December 20<sup>th</sup> in North Grosvenordale, was against Plainfield High School. The Panthers appeared to be outmatched. Tourtellotte would go on to win this contest by a final tally of 60 to 28. George Dargati appeared to be firing on all cylinders for he led the Tiger attack with 22 points. These 22 points were nearly enough to beat the Panthers.

Jim Canty, always the gentleman, never gave into the dark side of coaching. He frowned upon the lack of sportsmanship so common in today's youth athletics. He always believed that being a gentleman and setting the example as a coach was the coach's principal duty. Many coaches simply disagreed and felt that taking an aggressive dominating position over your adversaries was the only way in which to teach young men how to behave and succeed in athletics as well as life.

In the spring baseball season of 1949, Jim Canty and his baseball squad ran into such a coach. The players, to this day, were uncertain what caused the unpleasantness, but they remember the coach making the game miserable for both teams and Coach Canty brushing it off as just another learning experience for his team. During their following December basketball match-up, to gain the upper-hand, the same coach gave Canty considerable grief about the color of the Tigers' uniforms. After considerable discussion, and for the sake of setting an example to all players present, Canty politely relented, and had his boys change into their away uniforms. The boys did not appreciate their coach receiving the undeserved treatment and demanded justice. Canty quieted the boys down and said, "There's more than one way to skin a cat." When that got the boys' attention, he finished with a quiet and polite, "Boys, I think we're going to beat them badly today."

The Tigers were set to play Killingly High School in North Grosvenordale on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Tigers pounced on the Killingly Red Men, easily winning the lopsided game by a final tally of 90-32. This landslide victory exhibited the growing prowess of George Dargati. He finished with 27 points. Three other Tigers scored in double-digits. They included: Jim Karapanos, Jim Naum, and Frank Ungerer. Karapanos had 14, while Naum and Ungerer each notched 10 points.

At the Christmas break, the Tigers were now 5-0 and had proven how strong they could perform on both ends of the floor. Scoring 90 points in the last game, while also allowing 20

points in game two against St. Louis. One final contest was left for 1949. In this game, the Hilltoppers would suit up against Putnam Tech. George Dargati continued his impressive 20-point scoring streak by notching 21. Excitement was truly growing in his camp. Tommy Tanacea also scored in double-digits with 10 of his own. Pacing the Tigers to a 53-35 final score. The Tigers led the entire game and closed out 1949 on a high note.

Their first match-up in 1950 would be against Plainfield High School on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1950, at Plainfield. The Panthers wanted revenge for their 60-28 loss earlier in the season. Understandably, the Panthers came out of the gates fighting. They led 9-6 after the first stanza. The second quarter was a teeter-totter affair with both teams trading leads. Two field goals were scored by George Dargati just before the buzzer sounded to mark the end of the half. In the end, the Tigers were able to edge ahead with a score of 24-20 at the middle intermission. One can imagine that Mr. Canty stressed defense to his athletes in this break. However, the Tigers started to pull ahead through their offense in the third stanza. After a basket and free throw by Frank Ungerer, the Tigers lead 27 to 20, but the Plainfield crew fought back with four points of their own to make the score 27-24. The Tigers countered with 15 consecutive points and never looked back. Winning the contest by a final score of 67-41. George Dargati ended his 20-point scoring streak, but once again paced the Tigers in points with 16. Christy Carabina assisted with 14 of his own.

The Tigers squad had no time to rest after this hard-fought contest with a match against Mary E. Wells High School in Southbridge on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1950. A January 7, 1950, article titled, "Canty Hands Win Eighth Straight Tilt - Beat Wells 45-28" in front of "...a capacity crowd, which oozed into every available nook and cranny of the [Wells Street] gym saw the North Grosvenordale representatives stretch their 1950 string to eight consecutive victories." George Dargati led all scorers with 13 total points. On January 10<sup>th</sup>, the Tigers hosted the Woodstock Centaurs. This game would feature a well-balanced scoring attack for the Tourtellotte squad. In all, nine Tigers would score during the contest. Including: George Dargati (13), Tasi Vriga (12), Jim Karapanos (9), Christy Carabina and Richard Hagstrom (8), Frank Ungerer (6), Jim Naum (5), Tommy Tanacea (4), and Nevret Ali (2). In total, the Tigers scored 67 and the Centaurs - 47. The balanced Tigers scoring attack proved how precious player development was to Mr. Canty, a strategy, which rewarded the Tigers time and time again.

Another tough match-up was scheduled for January 13<sup>th</sup>. The Tigers had to play a tough Bartlett team in neighboring Webster, Massachusetts. The Bartlett squad would take the first lead of the game, but then George Dargati would score three points and the Tigers would not trail again in the game. Dargati scored 20 points for the Tigers and Jim Naum added 10 of his own. The Tigers team was hitting their stride as the latter stages of January came onto the horizon.

On January 18<sup>th</sup>, the Tigers were slated to play another neighboring school in Woodstock Academy at Woodstock. The Tigers, once again, implemented a balanced scoring attack. Much like a previous game, nine Hilltoppers would score points in this game against Woodstock Academy. George Dargati led the way with an impressive 29 points, followed by 10 points each for Tasi Vriga and Tommy Tanacea. By contrast, only the Centaur starters scored points, with one Woodstock player providing nearly half of Woodstock's total points with 20. In the end, the Tigers would claim victory in this contest by a final score of 72-41. George Dargati's performance on this day shocked no one and exhibited how his basketball skill was growing impressively in 1949.

In two days, the cagers would host the Stafford High School Bulldogs. Yet again, George Dargati led the charge for the Tigers with 25 tallies. Jim Naum would also assist in the scoring punch by chipping in 8 of his own. Mattesen led the way for the Bulldogs with 13 points. In the end, the Tigers offense and defense proved too mighty for the Bulldogs to corral. The final score read 49-37 in favor of the Tigers. This was a much slimmer victory margin for the Tigers. Mr.

Canty must have preached about sharing the basketball to his team and how unselfishness can improve team performance. On January 25<sup>th</sup>, the Tigers faced the Killingly High School Red Men, and ten Tigers would score points in this match-up with Killingly. George Dargati led the Hilltoppers with 25 points, despite fouling out of the game. Tommy Tanacea would score 14 for the Tourtellotte team.

The Tigers hosted their rival, the Putnam High School Clippers, in a highly anticipated game. On January 27<sup>th</sup>, the Tigers faced off against Putnam High School before a packed crowd. A local newspaper article titled, "Unbeaten Putnam and Tourtellotte Fives Will Clash," read:

*The most important basketball game of the season in northeastern Connecticut is scheduled tonight at the Cluett gymnasium when Tourtellotte Memorial High School meets Putnam High School [in a] Quinebaug Valley Conference game.*

*Tourtellotte will go into the game a slight favorite. The Tourtellotte five is the same team which won the state Class S championship last year and has won 13 [including the alumni game] consecutive games this year.*

*Putnam also is undefeated, so one of the records must be shattered tonight. Putnam has won all 11 of its starts.*

*Coach James Canty has announced that George Dargati and Jimmy Karapanos will represent the Tourtellotte basketball team in a free throw basketball contest Saturday at Plainfield as one of the features of a "Parade of Sports" for the polio benefit fund.*

At the end of the first stanza, the score was tied at 9. Each team traded blows during the first quarter action. Mansfield provided most of the scoring punch for Putnam, while Frank Ungerer commanded the push from the Tigers. The second quarter also proved quite intense and evenly matched. The Putnam squad even secured a thin 20-19 halftime lead. We do not know what Mr. Canty said to the Hilltoppers in the locker room at halftime, but whatever he said, or did not say, provoked the Tigers. The Tigers easily outmatched the Clippers 20-7 in the third quarter, resulting in a score of 39 to 27. Tourtellotte finished strong in the fourth quarter, 15-9 resulting in a hard fought 54-36 victory for the Tigers. This is one game in which the final score did not give it justice. George Dargati continued his frenetic pace with 19 points scored, which paced the Tigers.

The next day, on January 28, the Worcester Evening Telegram and Gazette ran an article, "Tourtellotte Snaps Putnam String", 54-34. It noted the highlights of the game, but it was significant because it went on to describe the 1950 Tourtellotte varsity squad in greater detail. It read:

*NICK ANGELO - Senior, 18 years old. A member of the squad for four years, three on the varsity... Resides in Fabyan, plays a forward position and shares the team captaincy with Tasi Vriga.*

*WILFRED MARTIN – Senior 17-year-old, squad member for three years, one on the varsity... Lives in Quinebaug, plays a guard position.*

*TASI VRIGA – Seventeen years old and a squad member for five years, three on the varsity... Played Junior varsity ball while an eighth grader... Teams up with Angelo and brother Ted at the forwards... Stands 6 feet, 2*

*inches tall... A regular on the baseball team... Plays first base and, for the past two years, bats in the No. 3 position.*

*NEVZAT ALI – This seventeen-year-old President of the Junior Class plays guard on the Tigers hoop squad... Stands 5 feet 10 inches tall and has been a varsity man for two years... Spent his freshman campaign as a member of the Junior Varsity group... Plays baseball and is cast in the role of catcher.*

*JOE AUGUSTYNSKI... Seventeen years old and a member of the Junior class, Augustynski is one of the fastest performers on the Red and Black squad... A varsity guard for the past three semesters, Joe also plays baseball, operating out of the shortstop berth or working on the mound.*

*TOMMY HESSION – A transfer student from St. Joseph's High School, Hession is seventeen and a Junior Class member... Is a regular guard and is playing his first season of ball under the Tourtellotte banner... States that he will be a candidate for the baseball team seeking just to play... Resides on the big curve in North Grosvenordale.*

*Standing six feet, three inches and still growing RONALD BRAYTON, a seventeen-year-old Junior, the cool and collected Tiger pivot man is a second-year man on the Canty squad... Has been a member of the baseball team for two years.*

*THEODORE "YARKI" VRIGA... Younger brother of Senior Ted (Tasi) Vriga. "Yarki" is the only freshman on the varsity corps... Played Junior Varsity ball as an eighth grader and was a third baseman on the baseball team... Stands 6 feet 1 ½ inches in height.*

This late January game against Putnam High School showed the grittiness of the Tourtellotte team. To all high school athletic observers, this Tigers team had experienced players who focused on the task at hand and trusted the Canty game plan. Many teams have deviated from the pre-game strategy when trailing going in the half against Putnam, especially, a team that had success in the past. This team, though, was fully cognizant of how successful the Canty strategy had worked in previous games, and seasons for that matter, and they grasped the concept. Halftime adjustments were made, but the overall strategy remained the same and was utilized to propel the Tourtellotte team in the second half to victory against a strong rival school.

On January 30<sup>th</sup>, the Tigers would play another rival in St. Joseph High School. St. Joseph High School was located within the town of Thompson. The entire town was abuzz as they eagerly awaited the hometown clash between the two schools. The Hilltoppers proved how strong their roster was in this contest and easily quieted the excited St. Joseph fanatics. The Tigers continued their balanced scoring trend with nine separate scorers, which gave the team a 57-37 win. George Dargati, as expected by now, paced the Tigers with 13 total tallies and Archambault scored 12 to lead the St. Joseph squad. This impressive performance closed out the month of January. The Tigers successfully secured a win in each contest this month. Only time would tell if the Tigers could replicate this in February.

The next contest was on February 1<sup>st</sup> when the streaking Tigers would suit-up in a game against the Pomfret Preparatory School Griffins at Pomfret. Each quarter was won by the Tigers, which culminated in a final score of 60-31. Eight scorers contributed for the Tigers in this game and George Dargati led the way with 15 points. Such a dominant performance by this Tourtellotte

squad must have enthralled the Tigers' fans and families. At this point, most must have realized that this collection of young men was truly special.

Two days later, on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Tigers faced-off again against the Stafford Bulldogs. As in the previous head-to-head match-up, Dargati would lead all scorers. Mr. Canty prepared his players to attack early and often against the Stafford team at Stafford, resulting in an early 17-5 lead at the first quarter break. Stafford would make some necessary adjustments in the second quarter. The 12-point lead remained when the teams went to the locker rooms at halftime with a score of 27-15. In the third and fourth quarters, much like the second quarter, neither team gained much of an advantage. The Tourtellotte team won each quarter 10-9, which translated to a final score of 47-34. Dargati added 20 points to continue his frenetic scoring pace and further increase his single season scoring total. Mr. Canty also understood what his team was capable of handling under their own power during this performance. He did not utilize a single timeout.

The next game was against Wells High School on February 7<sup>th</sup>, but this time the Tigers faced the Wells team in North Grosvenordale. The Tigers proved how vital home court advantage could be in this easy 59-32 win. Dargati led the roaring Tigers with 22 points. Tourtellotte, as they did in the previous game, used a strong first quarter to gain the early lead and the lead was not relinquished through the final three quarters.

Before the next game, Mr. Canty must have stressed the importance of a quick start. This next game was played against the Bartlett Indians on February 10<sup>th</sup>. The Tigers would take charge in the first quarter and never looked back. The Tigers won every quarter and rolled to a 43-31 victory over the Indians. The Tigers led in scoring by a different name than in most of the previous games. The Hilltoppers leading scorer was Frank Ungerer who notched 16 tallies, while George Dargati contributed 14 more. Thompson thoroughly enjoyed the Tigers' success. Night in and night out, the Tigers played hard.

Many Thompson residents prayed the Tigers would fall in their mid-February game against crosstown rival St. Joseph High School. George Dargati would quiet these prayers by leading the pack with 18 total points. The final score of the match was 63-37.

Halfway through February, everyone must have been pleased with how Tourtellotte had performed to this point in the season. By the time February 15<sup>th</sup> rolled around, the Tigers were seeking their 22<sup>nd</sup> straight win. There were few players who understood then what several more victories would mean to the school or what history would eventually be written about this team. Few of the players understood what their own role would be in this rapidly developing story. Two more victories and they would tie the incredible goal achieved by the 1924 team. Three more victories and they would exceed it.

For the next two games, the team was tested, but still surged to consecutive victories. The first test came against the neighboring Putnam Clippers. This game would test the Tourtellotte Tigers capabilities once again. On February 15<sup>th</sup>, the talented Clippers trailed at the end of the first half, 23-20. W. Mansfield and George Dargati each contributed 9 points to their respective teams. One can imagine Mr. Canty calmly reinforcing his team players at the halftime break, reminding the Tigers how they played their best brand of basketball.

In the second half, Tommy Tanacea took the reins and led the Tigers cause with 9 points. In the end, the final score read Tourtellotte 48 and Putnam 37. George Dargati and Tommy Tanacea both notched 15 points.

On Thursday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, the Putnam Patriot ran a story titled, "Dargati Has 19-Point Average." It reported the high offensive mark established by the Tourtellotte Senior. It read:

*Co-Capt. George (Lefty) Dargati, offensive spark in the undefeated Tourtellotte High School basketball team, tossed 15 points last night at the*



*sports arena as the Tigers defeated Putnam High and swelled his total contribution to 399 for the campaign.*

*On the basis of 21 games, all in the victory column, the elusive and hard-driving southpaw has averaged 19 markers per game and seems certain to establish a new TMHS individual scoring record.*

Later games would prove the reporter correct and George would go on to break the TMHS scoring record. In the same newspaper there was another article titled, "Tourtellotte Wins Conference Title." It read:

*Tourtellotte Memorial High School basketball team of North Grosvenordale kept its record unblemished last night by defeating Putnam High School by a score of 48-37 and at the same time clinched the Quinebaug Valley Conference title for the current season. This was victory number 22 for the Hilltoppers.*

Due to Putnam's physical style of play, Tourtellotte went to the foul line often and converted 20 free throws. No matter, Putnam could not derail the runaway train that the Tigers team were on, which continued full steam ahead into latter February.

Mr. Canty would have one day to prepare his Tourtellotte team for their next contest against Griswold High School. The team would have to travel to Griswold for a match-up against the Wolverine team on February 17<sup>th</sup>. The Tigers came out of the visiting locker room strong with 18 points in the first stanza, compared to 9 for the Wolverines. The Tigers would maintain their early lead and claim a 67-50 victory. Griswold's Provencher paced all players with 19 total points, while the Tigers were led by George Dargati's 17 tallies. As in the previous games, Tommy Tanacea became lethal in the second half scoring 14 total points. The Tigers' roar was noticeable throughout northeastern Connecticut. Central Massachusetts would hear them roar all too soon.

The next Tigers regular season game was against St. Louis at home on February 21<sup>st</sup>. The score at the halfway point favored Tourtellotte by a large 27-8 margin. Numerous bench players saw action during the second half because Mr. Canty was always the teacher and saw this "garbage" time as development minutes. Younger and less experienced players could take advantage of the valuable time allotment.

In the second half, the St. Louis gang also found more scoring opportunities, but could not close the gap, losing 55-30. George Dargati and Tommy Tanacea would lead all scorers. George scored 21, including 11 in the second half, and Tommy scored 15, including 8 second-half points. Fiddes led all St. Louis scorers with 9 points, which all came in the second half. The Tiger roar was spreading throughout these two states as they notched win after win against schools in both Connecticut and Massachusetts. Mr. Canty, as knowledgeable as he was, must have realized that this group of hoopsters had the ability and trusted experience to match any team on any given night. When this group was in sync, shots were falling and their defense was breathtaking, which made them very hard to beat.

The Tigers' last game of the season against Putnam Tech was played for another reason and it had the attention of all the local newspapers. Many attended the game in hopes of witnessing Tourtellotte history being made. One article titled, "TMHS to Play Putnam Tech Friday – Tigers In Quest of Unblemished Record," read:

*All eyes will be turned towards the Cluett Peabody Community gymnasium Friday evening when the Tigers of Tourtellotte High School play host to the Techmen of Putnam Trade in the season's finale.*

In spite of Coach Canty's effort to control the score in the final stanzas, the Tigers attacked the game with a zest few had seen. The boys were now fully aware of the record at hand, and all wanted their place in history recorded with a strong win and win they did. After the Putnam High School victory, they went on to beat Griswold and St. Louis, making them two games short of the 1924 Championship team 24-0 record. Even the bench players played the next game as if their lives depended upon the outcome. The Tigers came out hard and established an early lead and never looked back. When the final buzzer sounded the Tigers defeated the Putnam Techmen 81-45. The victory placed them one game short of tying a long-standing record.

Many teams would celebrate their success after winning every single regular season contest. Mr. Canty, however, instilled a level of discipline in his team because the ultimate goal was still in the horizon and had yet to be achieved. Therefore, the team needed to perform countless drills and work on designed plays to ensure they could be ready for postseason match ups against teams as talented and well-coached as they were.

The Tigers impressive record earned them an invitation to the state tournament. In fact, the CIAC ranked Tourtellotte Memorial High School as the top team in the state in the Class "S" division. Many basketball experts in the state would have ranked them number one in any division.

The first postseason game would be played on February 28<sup>th</sup> against the Simsbury High School Trojans in New Britain, Connecticut. This was a difficult draw for the Tigers and the first half could be used as evidence to confirm this point. The Tigers trailed 13-18 at the end of the first quarter. Whatever strategies and plays were designed failed to work in the first quarter. Additionally, the Tourtellotte defense was being shredded by the Simsbury attacks. No one knows what was said to the Tigers by Mr. Canty, but one can imagine that defense was the main point of emphasis.

Defense was on display in the second quarter, but not just by the Tigers. Rather by both teams. Each team held the other to less than ten total second quarter points. The Tigers notched only nine second quarter points in this quarter, but they clamped down on their defensive inefficiencies and held the Trojans to five tallies. The halftime intermission score, 22-23, had the Trojans leading by a paper-thin margin. Both teams saw areas for improvement and sought to highlight them within the halftime break.

Tommy Tanacea, as was often the case during the regular season, would encourage and motivate the Tigers in the third quarter. He scored the first two points of the second half to bring the Tigers ahead 24-23. The Trojans countered, however, with five straight points to take a 28-24 lead. Tasi Vriga would then score a field goal to trim the deficit to 28-26. Simsbury would counter once again with consecutive points. This time with 6 consecutive points to take a 34-26 advantage. Mr. Canty must have realized that eight points was a large margin against such a skilled Simsbury squad.

Mr. Canty had experienced starters who he could challenge and lean on. Three such experienced Tourtellotte starters, George Dargati, Jim Naum, and Tommy Tanacea, would then score 9 consecutive points to slip the Tigers ahead by one, 35-34. The Trojans Mainville would then score a field goal to close out the third stanza to bring the score to 36-35 in favor of Simsbury. The third quarter showed how streaky the performance could be for both teams. The fans in attendance knew the final quarter would be exciting. Neither team was going to back down. The team leaders needed to motivate their teams to secure a spot in the next round.

George Dargati knew this final quarter was his to lead the Tigers if they were going to come out on top. He did just that by notching five fourth quarter points. The Tigers would pull out the victory by the final score of 46-44. George Dove, we presume a reporter from the New Britain area, in writing about the late part of the game, wrote:

*Then Tourtellotte, doing its best job of the game off the boards and given some timely scoring help by George Dargati, forged steadily ahead. Dargati, who had been held out of some of the earlier action because of four personal fouls, committed his fifth with two minutes and 42 seconds left. The North Grosvenordale quintet froze the ball most of the remainder of the time, doing a pretty good job at keeping possession, but just staggered in and no more as Simsbury racked up six big points in the last minute.*

The two-headed attack of Fraser and Mainville contributed 30 combined points for the Trojans. Meanwhile, Dargati and Tanacea teamed-up for 24 combined points to pace the Tigers. One would imagine that manicures were going to need to be performed on the fans from both teams who attended because this first round game was indeed a nail biter.

After the game, the squad was excited in the locker room. As one player put it, "We just tied the school record!" It took 23 years to accomplish the feat achieved by the 1927 record setting Tigers team. The ride back to Thompson, Connecticut must have been a bit more tranquil. The Tigers had reeled in another win, but the team was brought back "down to earth." The Trojans had exploited weaknesses and nearly won a hard-fought game in New Britain. Words of advice from Mr. Canty must have held greater meaning in the practices before the next state tourney game.

In a February 1950 article titled, "Strictly Sports, Tigers Picked to retain State Crown", one reporter picks up the significance of another state tourney win for Tourtellotte.

*One scholastic reporter has already predicted that the Tigers of Tourtellotte Memorial High School will successfully defend their state championship laurels next month in the "S" tournament which will be staged in New Britain.*

*In a column 'Grist from the Sports Mill' written by Bill Newell in The Courant on Tuesday morning the observer gave a very interesting background and progress noted in state tourney play since the CIAC initiated the competition back in the early twenties.*

*Newell concluded in part 'Form upheavals have been quite common in the past and the fact that the underdog has won out so many times has actually helped the tournaments. Predicting the winners in events of this kind is pretty risky business. However, this reporter has his choices picked and they are New Britain Class A, Sacred Heart in Class B and Tourtellotte in Class C. It would be the first time in history that all three champions successfully defended their crowns...' Neither New Britain nor Sacred Heart made it to the Bulkeley from New London defeated Bridgeport Central in the large school division and Derby defeated Sacred Heart won the middle school championship... Interest and enthusiasm in the Tiger array dominate whenever sportsmen congregate, especially in North Grosvenordale. A victory this season will be more than just another*

*triumph. It will mean the fifth for the school and strangely the fifth in which Coach Jimmy Canty has played some role. He coached the last two championship quintets and played with the first two.*

The reporter, whoever it was, batted .666 with that article. During this period, there is evidence that many sportswriters and basketball experts compared Jim Canty to Ellsworth's Hugh Greer. Hugh was recognized as one of the best high school coaches in the northeast, possibly the country, and in 1947 he was asked to lead the UConn men's basketball team. Hugh went on to establish himself as one of the game's very best coaches. He finished his career at UConn 286-112 with 12 Yankee Conference Championships. In 1946-47, in spite of a grueling schedule he and the UConn men went undefeated. Throughout his long 16-year career, Hugh only had two losing seasons. For Jim Canty to be compared to such an influence in the game was a considerable compliment, one Jim took in stride.

This next hurdle for Tourtellotte came in a game against Suffield High School on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1950, back in New Britain. Coach Canty knew both teams played strong on the defensive end. Hence, defense would determine the winner of this game. Thirty minutes before game time the anxious Tigers made their way to the court for their pregame warm-ups. When they arrived, they found the arena filled to capacity. The boys were accustomed to playing before 1,000 people, a packed crowd at the Cluett Peabody Gymnasium, but this was different. This was a much larger college arena and there was not a seat to be found.

The Tigers came out of the gates strong in the first quarter leading 12-8. Tiger players years later remarked, "Suffield quickly showed us that they could have cared less about our undefeated record, and they played like it! They were a tough bunch." Eight of the 12 points for Tourtellotte were scored by Tommy Tanacea, once again setting the beat for the rest of the Tigers to follow. The Wildcats, though, proved too much for the Tigers in the second quarter, thanks to 8 points from Palewicz and 7 from Brodeur. Suffield pulled ahead of the Tigers 28-26 in the final minute of the first half by a Palewicz field goal. With their confidence bruised, they gathered their towels and headed for the locker room, heads hanging low.

Yet again, the Tigers were sitting in their half time locker room on the short end of the score. The team had a visible weakness, their defensive effort enabled 20 second quarter points to Suffield. Mr. Canty must have clued the team in on this during the break. During the half-time meeting, after everyone finally calmed down, Coach Canty turned to his seniors and quietly asked, "What's it going to be, boys?" The team looked at each other for a moment. One senior, the team leader, finally offered, "We got to reach deep guys, we just got to reach deep." "OK then. We know what we have to do to win this game," replied Canty. "Let's get out there." Dargati and the Tigers had been here before, and this was not the way they wanted to finish this season. George "Lefty" Dargati knew what had to be done. He looked around the locker room and did what all good team leaders do; he reached deep, took charge, and rallied his frustrated teammates. One player years later remarked, "He was a man possessed. You couldn't help but follow him."

Tigers' team captain, George Dargati came out of the locker room with a determination that few coaches ever see and those fortunate few who do, remember it for the rest of their lives. The third stanza was a defensive struggle for both sides. Tourtellotte won the quarter to bring the game to a tie at 34. A strong final quarter was necessary for either team to advance to the semifinals.

George Dargati, just 18 years old, proved to himself, and those around him, what a properly motivated leader could accomplish. George Dargati really shined in the closing frame of the game, scoring 11 of the Tigers 12 total points. The Tigers defense also shut down Brodeur and Palewicz during the final quarter resulting in an arduous 46-40 win for the Tigers. Dargati

finished with 27 total points and displayed his scoring ability for the entire state of Connecticut. He must not have wanted to be denied an opportunity to play for another championship. The Tigers' March 3, 1950, come-from-behind win not only allowed them to advance to the state semi-finals, but that victory put them in the record books. They had beaten the 1927 undefeated season record, a record established by Canty as a player and 23 years later broken by him as a coach. They were not done yet. A semifinal match still lay ahead of the Tigers and a perfect season.

The newspapers on the morning of March 4<sup>th</sup> reported that the Tourtellotte Tigers had moved into the semifinals against Farmington High School. Farmington had defeated a tenacious Putnam High School by two points (32-30) and Farmington was looking to finish its sweep of the small northeast schools. The remaining small school from the state's quiet corner wanted to make certain that would not happen. Canty brought his boys home and began to prepare his team for the next game.

The game was to be played in New Britain on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1950. The Tigers knew this game was going to be challenging and that they were going to have to perform well to win. Mr. Canty knew his leaders at this stage of the season and was going to have to count on them to advance to the finals.

Those leaders were able to start strong for the Tigers in the first quarter. Winning the quarter by a margin of 13-4, George Dargati led the Tiger squad in this quarter with five points and Tommy Tanacea chipped in four points of his own. The Indians tomahawked their way back into the contest by winning the second quarter 12-10 to bring the score to 23-16 at the half. Fortunately, the Tigers were ahead going into the locker rooms in New Britain. This, however, did not ease the growing tension.

The Tigers proved too tough for the Indians in the second half, winning the game rather handedly, 59-31. The one-sided score occurred due to the Tigers expanding their lead during the third quarter behind a 14-2 quarter. Defense had returned for the Tigers and, as a result, they had reached the state championship game. Numerous Tigers scored points in the semifinal game, including George Dargati (17), Frank Ungerer (11), Jim Naum (9), Jim Karapanos (6), Nick Angelo (5), Christy Carabina (4), Tommy Tanacea (4), Richard Hagstom (2), and Nevret Ali (1). The Farmington gang was paced by 12 from R. Parsons. The balanced scoring from the Tigers gave state playoff experience to many young performers who were going to be needed in the future.

As a result of that one game Tourtellotte Memorial High School was now gaining interest outside the southern New England area. A small unidentified newspaper article found among the Canty collection, dated March 7, 1950, had something not before seen in the hundreds of other articles found for this book. At the top, it read "United Press." The Tigers were gaining national attention. The article outlined the 59-31 Tiger victory over the Farmington squad. It was titled, "Canty Cagers Win Again," and read:

*One of the hottest teams in the three divisions came through with another victory last night and moved one notch closer to the Class C championship for the second consecutive year. Tourtellotte of North Grosvenordale trounced Farmington 59-31 at the Connecticut Teacher's College gym in New Britain... Tourtellotte showed Farmington who was boss in the Class C division a few minutes after the game got underway. At the close of the first period the North Grosvenordale shooters led 13-4. At the half it was 23-16 and Farmington never had a chance.*

Two days were given to the Hilltoppers to prepare for the state championship game. This game was against Ellsworth High School on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 1950. Mr. Canty must have seemed like a

“broken record” to the Tigers team. He would once again focus the Tigers attention on defense in the days before the big game. By now, all knew about the history that could be made, but few openly spoke about it to not jinx their chances. There were quiet conversations like:

“You know if we win this game, we could become...”

“Yeah, I know. Let’s just not... let’s talk about something else.”

March 9<sup>th</sup> came and the Tourtellotte squad was ready in New Britain to face off against Ellsworth. When the boys arrived, they entered with force. More than 500 people from Thompson attended the game at the New Britain Teacher’s College. Overall, there were more than 1,200 people filling the stands to capacity. One report called Thompson a virtual “Ghost Town.” Even the Arrow Grill in North Grosvenordale, a popular teenage hang-out, was closed for the day. There was a note on the door, “Gone to Game.” Every corner of the arena was filled. Many went to see if Tourtellotte could win their fifth state championship and their 28<sup>th</sup> straight game, setting a new state record. To do so, they had to get by one of the toughest teams ever in CIAC history, Ellsworth High School. Ellsworth was after an unprecedented seventh state title. Like most games of the season, George Dargati came out firing. Every time Ellsworth’s defense adjusted to Dargati, another Tourtellotte player exploited the opportunity.

The Tigers hoopsters focused on defense in the first and second quarters, only allowing nine points in total. In spite of this strong defensive effort, the New Britain team matched the Tigers defensive intensity and allowed one less point. Giving Ellsworth a one-point lead heading into the half, Mr. Canty must have calmed his squad during the break and challenged them to perform better on the offensive end of the court in the second half. Ellsworth’s defense might have also taxed their players. In any event, the Tigers scored nearly two times the amount of first half points in the third quarter. The Tourtellotte gang threw in 15 points. Six of the points were scored by Jim Naum. The fourth quarter showed the offensive prowess of the Tigers once again. The Tigers built upon their third quarter lead by securing 17 fourth quarter points.

The Norwich Bulletin published an article a day later titled, “28<sup>th</sup> Straight Win Brings Fifth Hoop Crown to Tourtellotte High.” It captured the excitement of the game... and the season.

*When defending champion Tourtellotte Memorial High School defeated Ellsworth of South Windsor, 40 to 26, in the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic conference Class S finals at New Britain Teachers’ college gym Thursday afternoon it not only registered its 28<sup>th</sup> straight victory of the 1949-1950 season but also captured its fifth class championship. Only undefeated high school quintet in the state this season, Tourtellotte wound up its regular schedule with 24 victories and then polished off four tournament foes to complete a perfect season.*

*Prior to their tourney competition the Tigers annexed the Quinebaug Valley conference championship by sweeping six conference foes aside in two meetings each.*

#### Canty in Five Titles

*The Tigers are coached by Jim Canty, former Holy Cross athlete and strangely enough Canty had had a part in all five TMHS state title victories. Twice when he was a player at Tourtellotte the school won the crown and three times as a coach his Tigers came through.*

## The Cantymen

*The great TMHS hoop success of the 1949-50 season was due largely to the brilliant play of southpaw George Dargati. A sensation last season and named to the Class S all-star team, Dargati eclipsed his 1948-49 efforts by far as he collected a record total of 529 points for 28 games played. During the team's regular schedule, George hit for 455 points to better his own mark of 436 points set during the 1948-49 play. In tourney competition this season the sharp shooting forward connected for 74 tallies in four games. Over the 23-game route Dargati averaged 18.9 points per game.*

*Runner-up to Dargati in the individual scoring race is Tom Tanacea, also a forward, who hit 264 tallies for 28 games. Over the 24-game schedule Tanacea was credited with setting 231 points.*

*Team statistics show that the TMHS club scored a total of 1587 points against 915 for the opposition.*

### *Team Play Did Trick*

*Although Dargati was the star performer his feats were made possible only through the teamwork of his mates. The usual starting Tiger combination was made up of Dargati and Tanacea at forward, Frank Ungerer at center and Chris Carabina and Jim Naum in the backcourt. It was team play that enabled Tourtellotte to accomplish its great court feat.*

*Next season Coach Canty will have to do a complete rebuilding job for he will lose seven regulars by graduation in June, Dargati, Tanacea, Ungerer, Naum, Carabina, Karapanos and Hagstrom are members of the 1950 graduating class.*

The final tallies of the game showed Dargati at 16 points, Frank Ungerer (2), Tommy Tanacea (6), Jim Naum (8), Christy Carabina (6), and Jimmy Karapanos (2). Those who did not score filled several defensive holes that completely frustrated the Ellsworth offense. In the end, all the players interviewed, including Dargati, were quick to add, "It was a team effort." The Tigers now had their fifth state championship and had beaten the much-feared Ellsworth High School by 14 points.

On March 13, 1950, Tom Carey of the Worcester Evening Gazette, reports,

*Canty has had Dargati, Tommy Tanacea, Frank Ungerer, Jimmy Naum, Christy Carabina, Jimmy Karapanos, and Tasi Vriga under his wing ever since the boys entered the sixth grade... His (Dargati) running mate, Tommy Tanacea, would be a stick-out star on any other club except a team that featured a Dargati.*

Tom went to add in a March 18<sup>th</sup> article that, "Dargati, Tanacea and Ungerer could hold their own in college competition." Everyone who remembers the boys play that year agree.

Dargati went on to score 26 points in the Class "C" New England All-Star game. Frank Ungerer and Tommy Tanacea also saw playing time.

To finish the season, the team held their annual banquet at the Arrow Grill on March 20, 1950. About 100 attended. Canty received a gold golf bag and a matching set of clubs. Jerome Ryscavage, Thompson Superintendent of School, acted as toastmaster. Several reporters were present to include Frank P. Crotty and Tom Cary of the Evening Gazette.

## The Cantymen

The Tigers finished the season as the Connecticut State Champions, and Quinebaug Valley Conference Champions. Once again, the Cantymen proved that a small school nestled in a small mill town with a lot of hard work and good coaching could come out on top.

George Dargati was selected by the CIAC and sports reporters from all over the state as the number one player in the state and the top choice for the Class "C" division All-Star team. Tourtellotte, once again, was ranked number one in the state and they went on to beat their extraordinary 1924, undefeated 24-0 season with a 28-0 record. Few high school teams accomplish this mark in their history; by 1950 the Tourtellotte Memorial High School boys' basketball team hit this mark twice.

Remarkably, the little school from the Quiet Corner of Connecticut was able to run-the-table. Contributions were made from the entire roster throughout the season.



## 1951

A 1951 Tourtellotte yearbook provided exquisite clarity to the present state of the country. For instance, the class favorite song, which was also played throughout the United States, was the Tennessee Waltz, sung by the popular Patti Page, who, much like Canty, had a lengthy career. Both Patti and Jim also received strong acclaim due to their late '40s and early '50s achievements.

The class favorite actor was Alan Ladd. This actor would also connect to Thompson on a later date. As he was the headliner of a 1959 film titled *The Man in the Net*. This movie featured parts of Thompson, as well as Woodstock. One such spot was the Ballard Farm located on Thompson's Ballard Road. Another class favorite was the popular mid-century favorite movie, *Gone with the Wind*. Finally, the class favorite teachers were Ms. Stewart and, who else but, Mr. Canty.

The start of the 1951 season varied much from the start of the 1950 season. In November of 1949, Coach Canty knew exactly what his line-up would look like for the start of 1949-1950 campaign. Tourtellotte had most of their championship roster returning for the 1950 season and all who knew Tigers basketball figured they would, once again, become a force in the Quinebaug Valley Conference in 1950. The opposite was true for the 1951 season. The Tourtellotte squad had lost seven senior players including: George Dargati, Tommy Tenacea, and Frank Ungerer. Canty also lost a senior bench that could fill whatever unexpected void developed throughout the 1950 season. They included: Jim Naum, Christy Carabina, and Jim Karanpanos. Nick Angelo, Joe Augustinski, and Tasi Vriga who played in 1949 and 1950, were the only players on the team with two years of varsity experience and returning player Nevret Ali only had one.

After a grueling three-day tryout, the new varsity squad additions included: senior Wilfred Martin, juniors Ron Brayton, Tom Hession, Rudy Almquist, Walter Elliot; and Peter Bertschmann, sophomores Rudy Chenette and Stuart Joslin, and first-year student Ted Vriga. Hession was an unexpected junior transfer standout from St. Joseph's and known throughout town as an outstanding athlete. Brayton, at 6'3", added much needed height to the Tourtellotte forecourt. The problem Canty now faced is how to take these fresh players and mold them into a squad that could win.

Opinions around town were guarded and varied widely. Last season, few people thought two championships in a row were possible, despite the team retaining most of the 1949 team. Going for three in a row with an inexperienced bunch was flat out impossible. Canty began his work...

The Tigers had several weeks to prepare for the 1951 interscholastic season. To those outside Thompson's inner basketball circle, the hope of a winning season seemed dim. Many felt that even the expert wizardry of the fabulous Jim Canty could only do so much. At the end of the day, you need players.

Canty, however, saw it much differently. He had a great deal of faith in the high school and junior high school feeder system that he created many years ago. He knew what was coming and had a great deal of optimism for the new varsity squad. He felt he could easily mold Ron Brayton, Tom Hession, Nick Angelo, Joe Augustinski, and Tasi Vriga into a great starting lineup. He also saw solid potential on his bench, especially in Tasi's younger first-year brother, Ted. Some in the past, speculated that Ted's talents would peak early, but Canty saw him improve year-after-year and he knew this young man was an outstanding basketball player. Young Vriga would become a key component of the 1951 team. Just how much surprised many.

Seniors Nick Angelo and Tasi Vriga were elected co-captains of the team and, on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1950, the 1951 squad, led by the new captains, took the court for the first time of the season for the traditional opening game against the alumni. Some, to this day, speculate that Canty invited his old charges to crank up the steam to observe his new lineup under pressure. The game did not count against the interscholastic record and Canty felt the preseason match was a good time to identify any weaknesses. The 1949 and 1950 squads, not needing much prompting from their old mentor, proved to be too much for the 1951 team. George Dargati, Tommy Tanacea, Jim Naum, Christy Carabina, Jim Karapanos, Richard Hagstrom, and Don Garvais still had a great deal of fight left in them and made easy work of the new squad. When the final buzzer sounded, the 1951 team found themselves at the losing end of a 47-50 final score. Many were discouraged. Canty saw great hope.

The first interscholastic game of the 1951 season was held on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1950, in Stafford, Connecticut against Stafford High School. With several weeks of practice under his belt and the alumni game two weeks earlier, Canty decided to start the Stafford game with Nick Angelo, Ron Brayton, Tom Hession, Joe Augustinski, and Tasi Vriga.

By the end of the first quarter, the Tigers found themselves tied at seven, and at the end of the half, tied at seventeen. Canty used the first-year student Vriga as his sixth player, but his lack of experience at this level was showing. In spite of scoring 13 points in the alumni game, the fourteen-year-old had only two in this game and he was sent to the bench early in the fourth quarter with five fouls. By the end of the third period, the Tigers were up by a single point. The fragile lead in the fourth quarter changed hands several times, but the scrappy Hilltoppers finally came out on top, winning the game by one very hard-fought point. It was not pretty, but it was a check in the win column and Canty would take the team's 29<sup>th</sup> straight interscholastic victory and build from there. Pivot man Ron Brayton was high scorer of the game with 10 points. Seniors Tom Hession and Tasi Vriga both had eight.

While many who attended the Stafford game questioned Canty's use of the quick-moving Ted Vriga, Coach Canty did not. He had seen numerous players come and go. He clearly understood this young man could play the game of basketball. What Canty also understood was that more work was needed.

For the second game of the season, Canty decided to go with Tasi Vriga, Ted Vriga, Ron Brayton, Tom Hession, and Nick Angelo as his starting five. A local newspaper ran a story that included the statement, "St. Louis hasn't defeated their cross-border adversaries since Ernie Ducharme, Jackie Longergan and company walked the graduation plan in 1948." This was a record that the Tigers Canty wanted to keep intact.

The boys came out firing on all eight cylinders and quickly took the lead early in the first quarter. Never would they look back. By the end of the third quarter, the Tigers were up 28-20 and outscored their opponents 12-7 in the fourth. The hard-charging first-year student, Ted Vriga, scored 19 of the Tigers' 40 points. He was followed by Ron Brayton at 11, and his older brother, Tasi, at 5. On December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1950, in Webster, Massachusetts, the Tigers won their 30<sup>th</sup> straight interscholastic game in a row. More important than the intact winning streak, Canty saw a spark in this group of young men that he had seen before.

On December 15<sup>th</sup>, Canty changed the lineup once again for the Griswold game. Still searching for, what some thought was, the elusive magic starting lineup Canty replaced Joe Augustinski with Nick Angelo. The plan seemed to work, and the Tigers led 9-8 at the end of the first quarter. They opened the lead by the end of the first half, 26-16, and went on to outscored Griswold 19-6 in the third period. The Tigers even stayed with the green and white 8-10 in the fourth to secure a 53-32 victory. What Canty found during the Griswold game was that he had six starters from which to choose, and the Tigers secured their 31<sup>st</sup> straight victory.

## The Cantymen

Local Massachusetts sportswriter, Ed Patenaude wrote the Tigers a teasing letter in his newspaper column that read:

*An Open Letter to the Tigers of Tourtellotte Memorial High School, North Grosvenordale, Connecticut.*

*Dear Team:*

*Down into the dust went your conquering banner... riding a blazing streak of thirty-one consecutive victories, and Connecticut State Class "S" Championships in '49 and '50. Defeated unhorsed your galloping, Tigers. There was no thunderous collapse, you were merely defeated. Hold your chin high, boys, defeat was inevitable. You go on assailing schedules that bulged at the seams with piston-punching foes and expect to ring the bell in every meeting. You've lost an entire varsity quintet and confounded the skeptics by perpetuating your skein until it finally culminated on Friday evening. Meanwhile, the majority of your opponents have been sprouting potently. Being able to lose, graciously, is hard, I know, but you can be thankful. Future Red and Black editions have something to shoot at, you've established a mark by which to measure future streaks. And, of primary importance, be thankful that your coach answers to the name of Jim Canty. He's the Strauss of the coaching profession. Thirty-one games is a long winning streak but, honestly, I doubt very much that it would have ever been conceived were it not for your able leader. He will never run out of his famed Canty-Seasoned timbers. Among your numbers are several underclassmen, future greats at the little high school on the big hill in North Grosvenordale. You see, the grain of salt administered with defeat, does not leave a parched taste on your palate when you have something to be thankful for.*

*Sincerely,  
Ed Patenaude*

The Tigers did not lose just yet. By game three, after three straight victories, Jim Canty was gaining a sense of who this team could become. With six potential starters and several bench players, who could fill whatever void developed, Canty knew this could be another special group of young men, who could have another very special season. The team played well together and whenever it was needed, someone always came forward to take the lead. Six days before Christmas, in game four against Plainfield High School, that someone was the first-year student, Ted Vriga.

Teddy Vriga started game four with the same tenacity he demonstrated all season. His defensive play was excellent but, for some unknown reason, he was unable to put the ball in the basket. By the end of the first half, he only scored two baskets. Others took the lead and, in spite of Vriga's low-scoring performance during the first two quarters, the Tigers led Plainfield 37-28. It is uncertain if it was Coach Canty's halftime talk, help from his teammates, or just Ted figuring it out for himself. Whatever it was, Teddy fixed the problem, scoring 20 points in the second half of the game, leading the team to a 61-40 victory over their opponent. Brother Tasi contributed 13 and Joe Augustinski 8.

Game five against Putnam Tech was played on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1950, before a packed crowd at the Cluett Peabody Gymnasium. The Tigers struggled but eked out a 14-12 lead at the

end of the first quarter. The second quarter was no better and by the end of the second stanza the score showed the Tigers on the upper end of a slim 28-26 lead. In the third and fourth quarters, it was Tom Hession's turn to take control and rally his teammates. When the dust settled Tom scored 11 points, Nick Angelo scored 10, and Ron Brayton, Tasi Vriga, and Augustinski all scored 7 in the 49-42 victory. Again, it was not pretty, but the chemistry Canty had seen earlier was taking hold and the boys found a way, once again, to help each other out. The Putnam Tech win was their 33<sup>rd</sup> victory in a row.

Two days after Christmas of 1950, the Vriga brothers took offensive control against the Redman of Killingly combining for 28 points. Tasi scored 15 points and kid-brother Ted 13. They won the game 46-36. Game seven against Plainfield High School, it was Tasi Vriga, Angelo, Brayton, and Hession who stepped up to secure the lead. Tasi scored 14 points, Brayton threw in for 12, Angelo and Hession each had 11, for the 55-43 win. Game eight against Southbridge was a flat-out rout. The Tigers led the game at the half 36-12 and never looked back. Canty used this game to give his starters rest, while the bench did some activity. At the sound of the final buzzer, the scoreboard showed a 55-30 Tourtellotte win. The Tigers had won their 36<sup>th</sup> game in a row. Game nine was much of the same. Ted Vriga was Tourtellotte's high scorer with 10 points in another easy 40-31 victory over their strong cross-border rival Bartlett. Game 10 the Tigers held the Putnam Tech team to just three scorers. Tasi Vriga and Tom Hession combined for 25 points in the 43-36 victory. It seemed everything was going the Tigers' way.

Game 11 against Putnam High School had some significance that few of the Tourtellotte players realized. When Canty entered the Putnam gymnasium he immediately recognized the face of an old friend, one he had shared many hours with on the basketball court. Putnam's official timer for the games that evening was Putnam teacher and multi-sport coach, George St. Marie. St. Marie was a Canty classmate and fellow member of the 1927 and 1929 Tourtellotte State Championship Teams. After exchanging pleasantries, the two old friends went about their duties. It is impossible to know what St. Marie was thinking that day. Canty's 1950 team did what many felt would be impossible in the QVC, they broke the 24-0 record set by St. Marie's and Canty's 1927 team. It took more than twenty years to do that and here they are in front of him going after game number 39. Everyone who knew St. Marie understood the competitive nature of the man. He always did what he could to make Putnam High School stand out in any athletic event. On this night, many are certain a small piece of him wanted Tourtellotte to win and continue their quest toward the impossible.

When George flipped the switch indicating the end of the game Hession and Ted Vriga combined for 31 points and a 60-38 victory over Putnam High, their 39<sup>th</sup> straight victory.

The Tigers continued their winning ways for six more games defeating Woodstock 91-65, Stafford 59-33, Killingly 87-57, Griswold 62-45, St. Joes 68-35, and Woodstock 70-20. Tom Hession and the Vriga brothers continued their high-scoring antics, all scoring more than 20 points in several games. Ron Brayton became a steady unflappable force as the Tigers' pivot man and made his mark in every game on the boards. The bench players, several of whom would have started on many other high school teams, got to experience game action. In the game against Woodstock Academy, Stu Joslin came off the bench and netted 14 points. By February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1951, the boys were undefeated at 17-0 for the season and were on a remarkable 45-0 winning streak. No school in the larger state of Connecticut had accomplished this milestone. The target on the Tigers back grew larger with each victory.

Reeling over their 40-31 loss to the Tigers on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1951, Bartlett wanted revenge. They sought to be the David that would unseat the mighty Goliath. Having easily beaten the green and white in round one of the two game series, the Tigers had no reason to expect they would lose this game. Canty understood that anything could happen in the game of basketball, and he worked at keeping his young team focused.

When Canty and his team arrived at the Bartlett gymnasium in Webster, Massachusetts, Canty was caught off guard when he saw the Bartlett lineup. Obviously missing from the Bartlett lineup was hard charging Pleszka who scored eight points during their first match. The only other threat on the Bartlett lineup was Don Daveau who only scored six points in the first showing. Even Canty must have felt confident of the Tigers' prospects of winning number 46.

The game started like any other. The Tigers came out swinging and drew first blood, but it was a scrappy Bartlett who was landing the most punches. A local newspaper picked up the action in an article titled, Bartlett Scores 53 to 50 Win Over Tourtellotte: Redskins Withstand Final Period Surge by Tigers... reads:

*Opportunity knocked loudly on Bartlett's door Friday evening and the Warriors basketball team took advantage of such knocks by defeating a favored Tourtellotte High quintet, 53-50, in a game played at the BHS bailiwick.*

*No condescending upset label can be attached to Bartlett's triumph. It was a glittering verdict engineered by a quick Redskin game so versatile that it destroyed the Tiger's habitual poise.*

*Scoring took place early and often with Tourtellotte tallying the initial basket on the opening game tap-off, a down-the-center push up shot by guard Tommy Hession.*

#### **FLOOR GAME**

*The Redskins presented their clientele with an early indication of what was to come. They had undergone intensive training in preparing for the Tourtellotte game and their endeavors were of a gratifying nature. They moved the ball with deft, lightning like action and, despite a pressing Tourtellotte defense, managed to worm the pellet through for a number of beneath the board shots.*

*Throughout the first two periods of play, the Tigers defensive alignment bordered on indecision. By packing their defense, they managed to frustrate the Redskins sparkling five-man breakaway weave, but they couldn't stop the outside set shooting of forward Don Daveau.*

*Bartlett pulled away to a seven point, 18-11 advantage at the period pole. Employing their packed system in the second canto, the men of Canty has apparently solved their problem when Daveau began to pop his mid-court sets.*

*Unable to penetrate the Red and Black defensive alignment, the Redskins merely allowed Daveau to set. His shooting was startling, to say the least. He popped four consecutive outside sets to keep Bartlett in contention with a six-point, 31-25, spread at intermission time.*

*Bernie Nieszczezewski pumped through a pair of foul shots to move Bartlett out front by three markers, 49-46. The Cantymen pulled away by a single point on consecutive hoops by Nick Angelo and Tommy Hession, 50-49, but Bartlett center Edwin Leddudzinski nailed a floor goal to pole-vault the Warriors back into the lead 51-49.*

*The after Ted Vriga failed to hit on an all-important foul attempt, Eddie Fiske, attempting to freeze the pellet, was fouled, and clinked the meshing, stealing the ball almost immediately and collecting another free toss. Again, Fiske came through to put Bartlett ahead by three points, 53-50. Tourtellotte took the ball out of bounds, but that was all.*

*Don Daveau, whose set shooting broke the Tiger defense, paced Bartlett with 23-points. For the Tigers, Tommy Hession collected 20 tallies on a combination of nine field goals and two foul shots...*

Canty did what he always did, what all good coaches do, at halftime he spoke to his players, adjusted, and attempted to settle them down. They had been here before, but this time his speech, defensive, and offensive adjustments did not work. In spite of the Tigers outscoring Bartlett 15-10 in the fourth quarter and Tom Hession hitting for 20 scores, the Tigers lost their first game since 1949, 53-50. Everyone, including the players, was stunned. It is uncertain whether Bartlett's Donny Daveau had the game of his life or if he was of a caliber not yet seen by the 1951 Tigers. Either way, he proved to be too much for the Tigers on that day. When the scores were finally tallied, Daveau had 23 of green and white's 53 points. He had become the diminutive David that slew the mighty Goliath. Canty, always the gentleman, congratulated the Bartlett players and their coach. Then, he set his sights on the next game. The longest winning streak in school history had ended.

The next game against Wells was a home game held at the Cluett Peabody gymnasium on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1951. The stunned Tigers had mixed feelings about the end of the longest winning streak in the school's history, possibly the longest in state history. They all knew the unprecedented winning streak had to end at some point, but many, especially the seniors, wished it was the 1952 squad who would drop the ball, so to speak, and not them. Canty did not speak much about the loss, except in the context of moving forward. He spoke to them about the impossible task of 17 straight wins this season, especially because they had a new and relatively young lineup. Canty, as always, looked for the positives in what his team had accomplished. There were other gold rings to reach for. The QVC championship and the CIAC State Tournament were only a few weeks away and he knew if the Tigers wanted a shot at they needed to remain focused. They had lost to Bartlett a modest three points, Donny Daveau had the game of his life, "...not much we can do about that boys, except to get ready for the next game."

Canty went with Tasi Vriga, Nick Angelo, Ronnie Brayton, Tom Hession, and Joe Augustinski for his starting squad. Again, the coaching move proved to be the right one. By the end of the first half, the Tigers were tied with Wells at 28 points. No one felt comfortable with the level and type of play. The Tigers were still feeling the effects of the Bartlett defeat and they all knew they had to relax and play their brand of basketball. Wells, on the other hand, saw an opportunity to kick the Tigers while they were down, and wanted to become the second team of the season to defeat the Tigers. After a few words from Coach Canty, captains Vriga and Angelo rallied their teammates and in the last half of the game the team found their comfort zone once again. A local newspaper reported, "a close man-to-man defense which stifled the Crimson and Gray's fast break, and some fine rebound play by Tasi Vriga and Ronnie Brayton, who gave the home club control of the backboards a good part of the fray," allowed the Tigers to persevere. They outscored their opponents 15-12 in the third period and 19-16 in the fourth. The Tigers sank eight unanswered points in the late part of the fourth quarter and pulled ahead of the Crimson and Gray for the final time, finishing the game 62-56.

More importantly, the Tigers were fired up. By the end of the game, six Tigers were in foul trouble with four fouls each. Ted Vriga had fouled out of the game. Tasi Vriga was able to

shut down Wells' high scoring Tom Michael, who had an unprecedented 19 foul shot attempts, of which, he made thirteen. Possibly inspired by the starting nod, Joe Augustinski was the player who stepped up offensively during this game, scoring 18 points. The elder Vriga contributed 14, while Nicky Angelo added 11 scores.

The last three regular season games were played on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and 23<sup>rd</sup> against rival Putnam High School, Pomfret, and St. Louis. The Tigers defeated all three teams 53-40, 40-31, and 62-41, respectively. They outscored their opponents 155-102, won the QVC once again, and seemed well poised for the upcoming CIAC State Championship. The Vriga boys led the team in scoring during the three-game home stretch with Tasi scoring 38 points and kid-brother Teddy at 36. Together they combined for nearly half of the Tigers' score. During the final game against St. Louis, Canty played all 12 players allowing his starters a much-needed rest in preparation of the upcoming state tournament.

With only a few short days before the playoffs began, Jim Canty got to work preparing his team for its third straight run at the "holy grail" of Connecticut basketball. Canty knew at the onset of the 1951 season that he had good basketball players, but just how good was the question. As the season progressed, it became clear that Tourtellotte had six very capable starters, each of whom could lead the team defensively and offensively. Canty knew that for the team to go deep into the playoffs, he would have to rely on the team's ability to attack from every corner.

The first game of the CIAC State Tournament was held on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1951, at the Teacher's College located in New Britain, Connecticut. The same day on which the 8<sup>th</sup> Golden Globes were declared. "Sunset Boulevard," Jose Ferrer, and Gloria Swanson would all win the award. The young Tiger squad was nervous, as were many Golden Globe fans, but well prepared. Tourtellotte drew the well-experienced Ellsworth as their first-round opponent. Canty knew he was up against a leviathan as Ellsworth had six state championships and eight state championship showings. No school in the Connecticut Class C division had more wins than the powerful Ellsworth. Canty must have thought that a 1951 Tourtellotte State Championship win would put his Hilltoppers tied with the powerhouse from South Windsor for the most Class C wins, but that was getting a little ahead of the situation. Coach Canty also understood it was Ellsworth who the Tigers embarrassed in the 1950 State Championship in a 40-26 rout. Coach Canty expected the proud team from South Windsor would want to answer the 1950 upset with an upset of their own.

Canty knew the key to winning the state championship with such a young team would be to employ a tenacious and unrelenting defense, which played into the strength of his young, fleet-footed team. He also understood the Tigers needed to score from whatever corner of the court the opponents exposed. All season long they had taken advantage of these opportunities. Someone in a red and black uniform always found a way to step up and assume the lead. Others saw this rare ability, too. Al Todd, a local writer, in a 1951 article titled, "Tigers Have Class", captured what many in the area thought of the Tigers and their scoring abilities. It states:

*Tourtellotte's (courageous) Tigers have an impressive 17-2 [Includes the alumni game] record and lead the Valley League hands down. Why is this team good? It boasts several performers who can score regularly with clever basketball trickery. The high scoring honors have been shared by four men. Tommy Hession, Co-Capt. Tasi Vriga, Ted Vriga and Ronnie Brayton can really pepper the nets with the aid of clever floor work by Co-Capt. Nicky Angelo and the rest of the squad...*

*The Cantymen who are expertly coached may have a player or two with off nights and still maintain terrific scoring punch. These boys play hard to*

*win but in case of defeat (which this writer notices are rare) they accept it in a sporting manner.*

Canty's offensive strategy agreed with Todd's observations, and he would use the Tigers multi-faceted scoring ability to their advantage. He also knew that keeping Ronnie Brayton in the game, and out of foul trouble, would be crucial. Brayton, only a sophomore, became a critical part of the Tiger's offense and defense, especially when it came to playing the boards.

Canty thought long and hard about his starting line-up. Ted Vriga was a natural who was partially responsible for getting the Hilltoppers to the playoffs, but he lacked state championship experience. Nick Angelo and Joe Augustinski had the experience. In fact, they had both been to the state tourney twice. When the final starting lineups were announced it found Tasi Vriga at right forward, Nick Angelo at left forward, Ron Brayton at center, Tom Hession at right guard, and Joe Augustinski at left guard. An unidentified newspaper article dated March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1951, titled, "Tourtellotte Triumphs over Ellsworth by 52-43", picks up the action.

*Tourtellotte Tigers of North Grosvenordale, defending champions, got off to a good start in their bid to capture the third straight Class C championship in the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference basketball tournament at the New Britain Teachers College gymnasium Wednesday night. The Tigers eliminated Ellsworth Memorial of South Windsor, 52-43 with a polished display to rank as a strong threat for the crown in the opening game of the night program.*

*Owen Griffith, Hartford Current sportswriter, said:  
A packed house of 1400 witnessed the night games which marked the end of the playdowns.*

*TOURTELLOTTE 52, ELLSWORTH 43  
In one of the best performances of the tournament to date Tourtellotte Memorial romped to a 52-43 victory over Ellsworth.*

*The North Grosvenordale outfit showed class all down the line; great ball handlers, deadly shooting and expert play off the boards play to win handedly over a team that had a poor night in shooting.*

*The shooting percentages just about tell the story. Tourtellotte sniped 18 of 49 field goal tries and the South Windsor opponents got 12 hoops in 54 attempts. In foul shooting the Tigers got 14 in 25 tries and Ellsworth 19 in 27 tosses. The speedy team from the northeast corner of the state raced from the opening whistle. The team which has a 21-3 [editor's note: this does not agree with the record books] for the season took the lead three minutes after the start, posting a 15-7 margin at the quarter time; 29-18 at the half and 39-25 at the three quarters.*

*The Vriga brothers led their team in scoring, Tasi sniping 14 and Ted netting 10. Stanley Morrey paced Ellsworth with 12.*

*In building up their first quarter lead Tourtellotte Held Ellsworth to one field goal in 12 tries. The second quarter was a repetition with the Tigers boosting their margin to 11 points with six goals in 14 tries while Ellsworth could snipe only four in 23 tries from the floor. Ellsworth was unable to reduce the deficit against the speedy Tourtellotte team in the third quarter,*



*trailing by 25-39 when they entered the final session but with the score 26-42 the South Windsor boys put on a drive.*

Ellsworth put on a valiant final push outscoring the Tigers 18-13 in the fourth quarter, but it would prove to be too little too late. Shortly after the start of the game, the talented first-year student, Teddy Vriga, made his way into the fray. He and his older brother, Tasi, combined for 24 points. Ellsworth's inability to shut down the Tigers multi-dimensional outside game, more specifically the Vriga brothers, proved to be their downfall.

Another article from the Waterbury Republic, dated March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1951, titled, "Hot Off the Keys", by Hank O'Donnell, lends further insight to the thoughts held by those in the Connecticut high school basketball inner circle of the day.

*Tourtellotte High of North Grosvenordale is a big mouthful to say... the lightening-fast kids from the Northeastern corner of Connecticut are a different assignment... when Tourtellotte took the floor in defense of the championship it won the last two years, it looked every bit the champion and compared favorably with the past tourney teams. Coach Jim Canty sent an aggressive squad onto the court against Ellsworth, perennial contender for the crown, and you feared for the North Grosvenordale's representatives when you saw the taller and heavier South Windsor lads. But the speedy Tigers quickly removed those fears. They made up for their lack of height by giving a splendid exhibition of ball-handling, and their scrappy play sent them off to a flying start.*

The quarterfinal match was held on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1951. This was the same day as the first NBA All-Star game. The game was held in Boston Garden with the East eclipsing the West by a score of 111-94. The most valuable player was Ed Macauley who played guard for the local Boston Celtics. Only time would tell if the Tigers were as fortunate as the East and the Boston Celtics were in the NBA All-Star game.

This quarterfinal featured the Tourtellotte Tigers and the boys from the small coastal town of Old Saybrook. The Old Saybrook High School Rams were no strangers to the CIAC State Championships having won it three times (i.e., 1935, 1942, and 1947). Canty knew the small coastal school was not to be taken lightly. The boys, having learned their lesson against Bartlett, took no team for granted.

The game, like the previous rounds, was held at the State Teacher's College in New Britain and once again the Tigers packed the stands. People from all over Thompson, Connecticut made the one-hour trek to cheer on their athletes. Many hoped they were seeing history in the making – three state championships in a row. Although, some dare not to even think about it.

Canty went with his tried-and-true experienced lineup. Tasi Vriga and Nick Angelo were slotted in the forecourt, Ron Brayton was chosen as the pivot man, and Tom Hession and Joe Augustinski held down the backcourt. It proved successful during their Ellsworth match, and he saw no reason to change it.

The Tigers did not change their fast-paced strategy, which they had employed all season. Canty knew that if his boys could outrun and out-pass their opponents, as well as play the same brand of in-your-face tenacious defense they had throughout the season, they would simply get more opportunities to score than their opponents. From there, all the exhaustive training, the thousands of shooting and layup drills would take over.

When the first quarter buzzer sounded, the Tigers staggered the Old Saybrook quintet. They slapped the Rams squarely on the nose, bloodied them badly, and sent them reeling. It was a while before the Rams could regroup and adjust. Old Saybrook knew that Tourtellotte would be a considerable challenge, but no one expected a first quarter 20-5 deficit in favor of the Tigers. Every time the Rams adjusted to Brayton's inside attack, the Tigers simply moved to the perimeter players, primarily Angelo and Vriga, after great playmaking from Hession and Augustinski. Old Saybrook made some necessary adjustments in the second quarter, but they were once again outscored by the Tigers, 14-10. At the end of the first half of play, when both teams headed for the locker room, the Rams saw a 34-15 margin on the scoreboard. Canty nor the boys felt a 19-point lead was enough and neither used the lead as reason to rest.

The third quarter showed some promise for Old Saybrook. They outscored the Tigers, 15-12, but Canty and the Hilltoppers turned on the steam once again. The mighty Tigers pulled away in the fourth, putting any hopes of a comeback out of reach. By the end of the game, every Tiger on the bench saw action and they finished the game with a 61-40 quarterfinal victory. Like other previous playoff games where Canty went to his bench late in the game due to a large lead, many felt the potential score had he left his starters in could have easily exceeded 80-40. Canty always the gentleman, always the teacher, understood nothing was to be gained by beating to death a tired team. The Rams played hard and were simply outmatched. More could be accomplished by playing the Tourtellotte bench.

The Vriga boys ended the game with 26 points: Ted scored 18 and Tasi added 8. Ron Brayton scored 12 points and like most games, despite him being just a junior, he was an incredible force on the boards. One newspaper article stated, "Tourtellotte ran roughshod over Old Saybrook..." Many Tourtellotte fans, and Old Saybrook fans for that matter, who attended that game that evening agreed.

When the Tiger athletes arrived at school on Tuesday morning, there was a great deal of backslapping and handshaking. The classrooms had that little extra excitement in the air and the teachers had a difficult time keeping the players, their girlfriends, the cheerleaders, heck for that matter themselves focused on the matter of teaching. The boys were only two games away from yet another state title. Local newspapers also picked up on the excitement and local sports' wordsmiths from Worcester, Putnam, Norwich, and Middlebury set to the task of reporting the night's events. One article read:

*Tourtellotte, winner of the Class C crown in the past two years had an easy road into the next round, whipping Old Saybrook without too much trouble while holding the Shore Line outfit to single points until the second quarter was two and a half minutes old. The Little Rams got their first hoop with 5:37 to go, making the score 27-7. At half time the defending champions held a 34-15 edge and at three quarters were in front 46-30.*

#### **SMOOTHWORKING TEAM**

*The smooth working team from North Grosvenordale which had eliminated Ellsworth earlier never was extended and turned in another impressive performance with skillful ball handling sharp passing and a good shooting array. Old Saybrook was not able to show an effective attack until the third quarter when they outscored their foes 15-12 and, in this period, George O'Brien suffered a dislocated finger. He came back after treatment by Dr. David Waskowitz and scored three hoops with the taped finger.*

## The Cantymen

*Ted and Tasi Vriga collected a total of 26 points, the former getting 18, Ron Brayton getting 12, George O'Brien's 12 points topped the Little Rams and Bob Porter got 12.*

*In foul shooting Tourtellotte dropped in nine of 19 tries. Old Saybrook got 12 of 26 tries.*

Some of the Tourtellotte fans, and local sportswriters, felt quite surprised that the Tigers had such an easy time with Old Saybrook. At this point in the tournament, everyone expects each game to be an all-out battle. As the game progressed, however, it was clear that Old Saybrook was simply overmatched by the smaller, and more aggressive Hilltoppers. Understanding that the Old Saybrook game was now ancient and that the tide could turn quickly, Canty brought his team home and over the next two days prepared them for their next encounter against Terryville. This game was slated for Tuesday, March 6<sup>th</sup>.

March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1951, was another important day in history. On this day, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were to begin their trial. They had been accused of spying on American citizens on behalf of the Soviet Union. The couple would be convicted and later executed on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1953.

Returning to the Tigers, their next opponent, Terryville, was another team that had considerable State Championship experience and Coach Joe Jay was no slack when it came to managing his cagers' activities on the court. Canty knew that Terryville could be a much different story than Old Saybrook and he prepared his squad. In the back of his mind, though, he wondered who the player would be to take the leadership position in this upcoming game against Terryville's?

At the initial tip-off, the tone for the game was instantly set. Terryville took the quick lead with an outside set shot from their number six, Dzlenski, but Tommy Hession answered within seconds quickly letting Terryville know the Tigers were not easily impressed. Hession and Dzlenski suddenly became the main players throughout the first stanza exchanging blows. Fans, players, and coaches from both sides knew immediately it would be these two who would set the tone for the game. Canty had found his leader. Now the question was – could he outmatch Terryville's.

By the end of the first quarter, the score stood at 14 points apiece. The second quarter battle failed to tilt the score one way or another. The lead exchanged hands several times with neither team establishing a firm lead. The defense from both benches was outstanding and many wondered if the Tigers had finally met their match. At the end of the second quarter, both teams stood at 26 points.

The halftime strategy sessions in both locker rooms proved to be fruitless. Whatever defense or offense one team showed, the other team was able to counter with an equally effective adjustment. Both coaches tried a variety of plays and formations, but the other bench was able to quickly adjust. By the end of the third quarter, neither team had gained ground. The score was tied at thirty-seven. Each bench knew the fourth quarter would be just as hard-fought as the previous three quarters.

During the third quarter, though, Terryville saw a ray of hope with a Tommy Hession hand injury. In a particularly aggressive third-quarter defensive scuffle, Tom Hession was removed from the game with what some thought was a broken finger on his shooting hand. As a result of the scuffle, Tommy missed a good part of the third period and the Terryville bench, without Hession in the game, felt the fourth quarter belonged to them. Tommy Hession, not one to be left out of any action, no matter what his state of disrepair, made it back into the fourth quarter activity.

Terryville had reason for further hope when starting forward Nick Angelo fouled out of the game in the middle of the fourth quarter. But, like every game of the 1951 season, someone filled the void and the Tigers outscored Terryville 8-6 in a fourth-quarter defensive showdown for a 45-39 semifinal victory. When it was all said and done, Tom Hession, despite his injury and many minutes on the bench, outpaced all players with 24 points. Sports reporter Owen Griffith listed the action in an article he penned on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1951, titled, "Defending Champions Gain Class C Tournament Finals." It read:

*Tourtellotte Memorial High School's basketball team moved into familiar surroundings tonight when it raced into the final of the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference Class C tournament. The team from North Grosvenordale qualified for the right to defend its crown by defeating a fighting Terryville High Outfit, 45-39. In the semi-final thriller in which young Tommy Hession was able to keep the red and white shirted machine going at top speed in the game at the New Britain Teacher's College gymnasium.*

*Tourtellotte will now face Berlin High Thursday night in the tournament windup at the New Britain court. The starting time is 7:30 p.m.*

*Hession was the player in the clutch tonight and along with leading the teams in scoring spearheaded practically every drive of the defending champions. Hession turned in a superb game as he rifled 24 points to put Tourtellotte in the game where it has won the title five times, twice in the past few years.*

#### **TERRYVILLE TAKES THE LEAD**

*Terryville jumped in front on Dzlenski's long set shot but, Hession tied the score once again only to have Nicholls and Roland Hawksley put the Jay-coached team in front 32-28 one one-handers. Terryville, with their rushing style, boosted their margin to 36-32, but Hession got a jump shot through the hoop and then went out for repairs. Nicholls made it 37-34. Tasi Vriga's single and Stewart Joslin's layup hoop with seconds remaining squared the score again.*

*Then came the final quarter when Tourtellotte, mainly through Hession's return, sped out in front to victory.*

*Hession was the main cog in the Tourtellotte performance, Tasi Vriga collecting nine points and Brayton getting six to share the spotlight for the winners. Terryville's starting team played itself out, turning in an all-around brilliant effort with Dzlenski leading the scoring with 11 points, Kolakoski getting nine.*

*Terryville went out after a game display. Coach Joe Jay's outfit played its best game of the tournament. The orange and black clad outfit matched strides with Tourtellotte for three quarters of the struggle, and at times were a step ahead of their foes. But in the final quarter of the fire-horse battle, Tourtellotte was able to control the ball after they built up a substantial lead.*

*Tourtellotte led 11-5 for their biggest advantage of the struggle but Terryville with its effective checking came back to get within 9-11. Art Konopaske's foul toss 21 seconds before the period ended put the team's level. Terryville went into the lead for the first time when Phil Wojtusik got a two-pointer to make the score 21-20, but Tasi Vriga regained the lead. In the midst of the terrific pace with Tourtellotte ahead 26-22 Dick Dzlenski got a hoop on a rebound of a foul toss and Kolakoski and Wojtusik got the singles, to set the team even at the half, the latter's point coming at the buzzer.*

**NEAR PERFECT DISPLAY**

*Hession's performance was near perfect. The guard had to leave the court for about three minutes late in the third quarter to get repairs for an injured finger on his shooting hand, but he come back to take charge. Terryville held a 36-34 lead when Hession left the game. When he returned at the start of the fourth quarter the score was 37-37, Hession started things off by dropping in two foul shots and from then the champions were in front to stay. Ron Brayton got a field goal and foul, putting the score 42-37. Don Nicholls and Ed Kolakoski got singles for Terryville and Ted Vriga got two foul shots as Tourtellotte triumphed 42-39...*

The final game of the season was held on Thursday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1951, against Berlin High School. Berlin was a newcomer to the state tournament, and few knew much about the school or their team. What Canty did know was the fact that if they were here playing in this game, they ought not to be taken lightly. In other words, they were a formidable opponent to dutifully prepare against.

Coach Canty's game plan did not waver for the last game of the season, nor did his starting lineup. The boys, supplemented by Teddy Vriga, came out quick, hard, and immediately established a lead outscoring the Berlin team 16-7 in the first quarter. Berlin quickly pivoted and flip-flopped the situation on the Tigers outscoring them 15-7 in the second quarter. Both teams came out at the half with different plans that offset one another and tied the third quarter at 14 points each. By the end of the third quarter, the Tigers had a tenuous one-point lead. The score board showed the score at 37-36. It was anyone's game. In the end, defensive perseverance was what won the day. Berlin held Tourtellotte to a mere eight points in the fourth quarter, but Tourtellotte bested their opponents and held Berlin to a measly three points. At the final buzzer, Tourtellotte came out on top 45-39. Winning their third straight CIAC state championship. Tommy Hession was, once again, the high scorer with 13 points, Ronnie Brayton contributed 12, and senior Tasi Vriga added another 10 points.

A newspaper article from Nick Angelo's collection titled, "Tourtellotte Beats Berlin; Win 45-39 for 3<sup>rd</sup> Straight Title and 6<sup>th</sup> in History", summarizes the story.

*The lions may be the kings of the jungle, but the Tigers are kings of Class C basketball. Last night Tourtellotte's Tigers of North Grosvenordale captured their third straight CIAC Class C title by downing Berlin High 45-39, in a thrilling, hard fought contest at New Britain Teacher's College Gym.*

*In winning, Tourtellotte notched its sixth championship in the 28-year-old classic, which ties them with Ellsworth of South Windsor for the most*

*championships. The Upstaters also equaled the mark of winning three straight titles held by New Canaan and Ellsworth.*

*Tourtellotte's victory, witnessed by a sellout crowd of 1,500, came by way of the foul line. The champ, unimpressive at the free throw line in previous games, came through in fine fashion, dunking 15 of 22 tries while its opponents sank seven of 15 tosses.*

*The winners raced to an 8-3 lead after three minutes of play and increased it to 16-7 in the first quarter.*

*Berlin came back in the second period, paced by forward Bob Soroka who fired in eight points, to cut the lead 21-16 with 2:30 left. Tommy Hession sank a charity toss to send the champs out front by six, but Soroka came back with two singles and a long set, cutting the margin to two. In the dying seconds of the half, Brayton converted a foul shot; Kucharczyk followed up with a one-hander and the half ended with Tourtellotte out front, 23-22.*

*At the start of the second half, Tony Legnani sunk a layup to send Devlin out front for the first time since the opening seconds of the contest. They continued to wage a see-saw struggle with Tourtellotte holding a slim 37-36 margin at the end of the quarter.*

*Soroka, out of the game since the middle of the third period burdened with four personals, returned for the final eight minutes, and promptly sent his team out front with a driving layup. The score remained at 38-37 until 4:48 when Stewart Joslin dropped in a short one-hander and a free toss, as he was fouled in the act shooting. Barr sank a foul at 3:32 making the score 40-39. Hession tied the score with a free-throw conversion ten seconds later.*

*With two minutes left to play, Soroka committed his fifth personal trying to stop Tasi Vriga from going in for a shot. Vriga made the free toss, putting Tourtellotte out front by three. Vriga then put the game on ice as he hit the hoop with a layup with 1:50 left.*

*Tourtellotte showed the poise of the champions as they coolly worked the ball for the first three minutes of the last period when trailing by a point. Tommy Hession, standout guard, stole the show again with his brilliant floor game and scored 13 points, which was the top for his team, Soroka, who also played good ball, led all scorers with 14 points.*

The Tigers finished the 1951 season with a sports banquet sponsored by the Oscar Swanson, American Legion Post 67, "with assistance from other citizens" on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1951. The Evening Gazette reported that "...more than 250 persons turned out at Kelly's Danceland to pay tribute to the Tourtellotte Memorial High School basketball team...One of the highlights of the evening was presentation of the championship trophy by Alex McKinney of the Connecticut Interscholastic Conference to co-captains Tasi Vriga and Nicky Angelo."

The Webster Times selected Tom Hession as a 1950-1951 scholastic All-Star, quite an honor when one notes that Tom was not even from the Webster area. Another newspaper reported the CIAC's choice for the 1951 CIAC All-Tournament Class C first and second teams.

They included: Andy Kowalsky – Bloomfield, Bob Soroka – Berlin, John Louis – Abbott Tech, Tommy Hession – Tourtellotte, and Don Nichols – Terryville.

At the end of the 1951 season, annual rumors of Coach Canty leaving Tourtellotte for greener pastures once again sprang up. Many in the New England basketball circles felt he would be a shoo-in for several college posts. If, of course, he sought the greener pastures. In a local sports column called, Strictly Sports, the editorial “Will Canty Leave Tourtellotte?” showed up shortly after the end of the 1951 season. It read:

*For the past, several years the one outstanding question at the close of every successful campaign in North Grosvenordale has been, “Will Canty Leave Tourtellotte?”*

*Reference is made, naturally to the popular James “Jimmy” Canty, basketball coach for the Tigers who has fashioned for championship teams since 1944, including three straight the past successive seasons.*

*It is difficult to believe now that Jimmy will forsake his Alma Mater, although he certainly is deserving of an opportunity to work with possibly college freshman, and in a very short time later with college varsity cagers.*

*Jimmy has many qualities which compare him favorably with the highly respected Hugh Greer, boss at UConn. Hugh, incidentally, finished the regulation campaign with a 22-3 mark which was good enough to win a bid into the NCAA competition – an honor for the university, state, players, and coach. Greer graduated into collegiate ranks from Ellsworth High in South Windsor, where his boys fashioned numerous records only to have such achievements equaled this year by the Tigers of North Grosvenordale and Coach Jimmy Canty.*

*In all fairness to the modest Tourtellotte coach this corner believes that Jimmy sincerely and truthfully wants no credit for the job he has done at the school. He will tell you that he has an extraordinarily good group of boys with which to work. He will tell you that he has never encountered interference and at all times he has received wholehearted support and cooperation from school officials, including the school superintendent and members of the board of education.*

*Jimmy decides when and where his charges start preparations for the campaign each season. Usually, he gets away to a flying start in order that the annual Alumni tilt be played according to custom on Turkey Day eve. In short, basketball is probably a five-month sport at the school but as one astute fan aptly describes the situation “They never start at Tourtellotte, they are always playing basketball.*

*As many boys as possible are given an equal opportunity to play the game at TMHS. No less than four units are in operation every year at the school. These usually include varsity, junior varsity, junior high varsity, junior high junior varsity. This “feeder” system has paid dividends and will continue to produce champions in the area unless other schools in the area “do something about it.*

What the newspaper had wrong was that Jim Canty would surpass many of Hugh Greer's high school records and prove to be every bit as good as the fabled UConn coach. Many, to this day, including former Tourtellotte star George Dargati, believed not only could Canty have coached at the division-one level, but that he would have excelled. Canty for whatever reasons was content with teaching and coaching at Tourtellotte.

Another Massachusetts' newspaper supported the annual rumors and ran the following article. It read:

*Jimmy Canty, one of the better schoolboy hoop coaches and a basketball institution down at Tourtellotte High in North Grosvenordale, is being sought by larger schools, yet his heart still belongs to Tourtellotte. The former Holy Cross center-fielder luminary piloted the Nutmeg Staters to three state titles in as many seasons and now the Canty basketball name is finally a big time one. It's my guess that the man who develops more stars in one year that most coaches do in twenty will not move on to New Britain, Conn. or anywhere else. North Grosvenordale fans just wouldn't stand for it.*

1951 was a memorable year in one other aspect. It was the year that Mr. Canty uncharacteristically "blew his stack," if one could call it that. Mr. Canty, after the team committed a costly mistake, loudly said, "Gosh!" Some of the players recalled with a smile, "We all turned and looked at Mr. Canty and then we all laughed," recalled Tasi Vriga. "It was the maddest we ever saw Mr. Canty, and all he said was, gosh!"

In the three decades Mr. Canty coached at Tourtellotte, his quiet and calm demeanor earned him several nicknames from the local sports writers. They included, "Silent Man," "Mr. No Nerves," and "Mr. Iceberg," but from the boys it was always, Mr. Canty. Even to this day, men in their seventies and eighties affectionately refer to him as Mr. Canty. Bob Maitland's mom once said, "... the players thought so much of their coaching idol and respected his ability so highly that he was always Mr. Canty to them and will always be." According to the same newspaper article, "Mrs. Maitland went on to say Canty not only moulds together championship clubs at Tourtellotte but at the same time builds better citizens. A character builder from way back."

At the end of the 1951 season, Tourtellotte was back on top and was the undisputed champion of the Connecticut small schools. The reasons for their success would be argued for decades. One Ellsworth supporter said, "They should be good. They play basketball the year round in that town." A Tourtellotte supporter thought this not the case and responded with, "That isn't so... Our kids are better coached and are better players." Years later, the boys who played for Mr. Canty in that game would remember the game, the season, and their time at Tourtellotte much the same way as Hank O'Donnell. They were better players because they had a better coach.



## THE BOYS' BASKETBALL TEAM



First row, (seated left to right): Nevzat Ali, Ronald Brayton, Theodore Vriga, Nickolas Angelo, Tasi Vriga, Joseph Augustynski, Thomas Hession.

Second row: Mr. Canty, Wilfred Martin, Rudolph Almquist, Peter Bertschmann, Walter Elliott, Rudolph Chenette, Arthur Angelo, Manager.

## 1952

The Korean War was ongoing, and the draft loomed large for the graduating high school boys. There was no peace solution in sight, and many felt the Chinese entering the war two years earlier would quickly escalate into World War III. American President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, was doing everything he could to keep the war from escalating and keep Americans out of harm's way. As Supreme Commander of Allied Forces during the invasion of Normandy, he had seen his share of death and destruction.

Despite the grim events unfolding in Asia, and the prospects that many of the class of 1952 would be in harm's way in a year or so, life in most of America was going on as normal. Basketball in New England was becoming one of the most popular sports. The Boston Celtics were in their sixth year as a team and their second year in the recently formed National Basketball Association. Red Auerbach, the legendary Celtics coach, was in the middle of building what would become one of sport's most enduring dynasties. Bob Cousy, someone who Red Auerbach initially refused to draft, was in his second year as a Celtic and many could already see he would become one of the game's greatest. Like Jim Canty, Bob Cousy was a standout athlete at Holy Cross and left his mark on the school as well as the game of basketball.

According to the U.S. Census, there were approximately 5,600 people in the entire Town of Thompson. The Tourtellotte yearbook pictured 133 total high school students, 65 boys, and 27 of the students were seniors. Of all the boys at TMHS, 30% played basketball for Jim Canty. The class motto for the 1952 school year was, "We build the ladder by which we climb," wise words for the academic future of the students, and very applicable to the 1952 boys' basketball team. This ladder was already built on the backs of those Tigers who came before 1952, strengthened year-after-year with Mr. Canty's help. Many felt this year's ladder was stronger and higher than the last three.

As in all other years, basketball in Thompson commenced in mid-November. People from all over town were excited about the real possibility of setting a state record by winning four consecutive state championships. Last season, many skeptics felt the Canty boys had no chance of a hat trick, especially with the remanufactured lineup with which they had to deal. This season, with four returning starters, Augustinski, Brayton, Hession, and Vriga, most people felt if the boys could do it last year with new faces, this year would be a sure bet. The only seniors lost from last year's roster were Tasi Vriga, Wilfred Martin, and Nick Angelo. Going into the '52 season the Tigers had amassed an incredible 61-5 win/loss record that stretched back to the '49 season. No small high school in Connecticut had achieved such laurels.

Local newspapers began reporting on the 1952 high school basketball season in mid-November. Only Ellsworth had three consecutive state titles, and many felt it would be the little school in Thompson that would break that record. An article found in the Canty collection titled, "Tourtellotte High Hoopers List 25 Games"; Augustinski and Ali Co-Captains, stated:

*Tourtellotte Memorial High School cagers will play 25 games this coming season, according to an announcement released by coach Jim Canty. Starting his 10<sup>th</sup> year at the Tiger helm, coach Canty has a veteran cast of operatives. Only three performers... Nick Angelo Tasi Vriga and Wilfred Martin... are missing from last season's championship quintet.*

*The Red and Black will inaugurate activity on November 21, when they play host to their Alumni in the annual pre-Thanksgiving Day clash.*

## The Cantymen

*Having won the Connecticut State Class "S" Championship on three successive occasions, the North Grosvenordale cagers are able to establish a new tournament record. They and Ellsworth High of Windsor share the honor for having post-season event on three successive occasions.*

*Co-captains have been elected to head the Tiger quintet. They are Joseph Augustinski and Nevret Ali.*

*Candidates working out include Co-captains Joseph Augustinski and Nevret Ali, Ronald Brayton, Tommy Hession, Teddy Vriga, Stewart Joslin, Rudy Almquist, Rudy Chenette, Walter Elliot, Peter Bertschmann, John Naum. Also, Jerry Ryscavage, Louis Elliot, Lucien LaLiberte, Donald Suprenanunt, Bill Hession, Robert Aucoin, Jr., Ted Raska, Russell Bacon, Gerry Mulligan, Dick Lebeau, and Louis Kapatulik...*

In a sports editorial also found in the Canty collection, one writer noticed the fact that something special was happening on that 14-acre hilltop in North Grosvenordale and added his twist to the developing story.

*Despite the blandishments of various other institutions, offering grants on Fort Knox, Jim Canty remains at Tourtellotte Memorial High School. A cum laude graduate of the hoop ranks, Canty has erected a championship castle on the heights of North Grosvenordale. The approaching campaign will be one of significance for Tourtellotte High constituents. The soft-spoken Mr. Canty, an acknowledged maestro, inaugurates his 10<sup>th</sup> semester with a particular goal in sight. Should the Tigers manage another CIAC Class "S" Championship, they would, thereby, become the initial club, in Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Competition, to enter the throne room in four successive semesters. The '51 [1950-1951] club shapes up as a potent organization. Only Co-captains Nick Angelo and Tasi Vriga walked the graduation plank last June. Ron Brayton, who pin-wheels the Red and Black attack, returns to key-hole prominence. Guards Joe Augustynski and Tommy Hession are available for the back court duties with Sophomore Teddy Vriga expected to slacken the scoring gap thrust by the graduation of brother Tasi. We may be a bit premature, but a conference Kingship would add frosting to the extraordinary fancy cake ovened by the inimitable James Canty. The 1951-52 Tiger goal is one, I'm certain, every area fan prays they attain. It couldn't happen to a nicer fellow than James Canty.*

Another Massachusetts writer added the following to the pre-season fray.

*Our traditionally trigger-happy basketball folks are strangely gun shy this winter. Nominate Tourtellotte High to win the area crown and all you get is a "why not?" Even the most vociferous booster of Bartlett, St. Louis and other vicinity schools have pulled in their ears. For Mr. James Canty has made believers out of them. It was supposed to be luck in '48. The way the Tigers pulled every game out of the fire, but repeated in '49 and '50 in the same honest-to-Hollywood manner. As good as ever, maybe better,*

*where's the sound reason to predict that the Tiger string won't stretch through another campaign. Favorites have been known to get ganged, but good, and caution warns that the script may be re-written...*

Canty himself was getting noticed. After 11 years at the helm of the Tiger's squad Jim brought his squad to an unprecedented 10 CIAC State Tournaments, playing in five State Championship games, winning four of them. From a percentage basis, he made it to the state tournament 91% of the time, made the State Championship game 45% of the time, and won the state's most prestigious game 37% of the time, an incredible number when considering the fact that not one of all QVC rivals, Woodstock, Killingly, Griswold, Plainfield, Putnam High, and Putnam Tech ever made it to the final game. In fact, the only school in Connecticut that had a better State Championship appearance record was Ellsworth. Tourtellotte at that time in history was simply the best team east of the Connecticut River.

Jim Canty was being compared to some of New England's best to include UConn's Hugh Greer and he began to receive calls from larger high schools and colleges seeking basketball coaches for their programs. Those in the know recognized Jim as one of the game's best and he now had choices. Coaching basketball in college or the professional ranks were real possibilities for Jim and many in his shoes would have jumped at the opportunity, but he felt otherwise. Jim Canty Jr. stated five plus decades later, "dad had offers from all over, but he never considered leaving Tourtellotte." It is difficult to really know why he declined the offers, but based on stories from his family and players, it is not a stretch to imagine that he felt a strong connection to his teams and the school.

Three days after the 1952 tryouts began, the varsity roster was finalized, and 10 players selected. Many from the 1952 tryout squad were disappointed they did not make the varsity team, but that disappointment paled when compared against those who did not make the team. Even in a small school, the roster was limited and when you have more players trying out than you have spots on the roster, someone went home disappointed. The first game lineup card showed first-year student, Jerry Ryscavage, sophomore, Ted Vriga, juniors, Stewart Joslin, John Naum, Rudy Chenette, seniors, Walter Elliot, Rudy Almquist, Ron Brayton, Peter Bertschmann, Tommy Hession, and Joe Augustinski as the varsity squad. Canty would change this as the season progressed, but for now these would be his chosen few.

With another basketball season upon them, Thompson looked forward to another exciting year. To add to, and help with, this excitement there was another tryout taking place at the same time the basketball team was being selected. Cheerleaders in the 1950's were just that, cheerleaders. They were tasked with the exceedingly difficult job of creating excitement for the home team. Performing in front of a crowd as a young lady in those years was difficult at best. Since then, the role of cheerleader has evolved into a sport of its own, but back then, the participants were expected to act like ladies and raise the excitement level of the game, a task some of the day saw as unachievable. Stories from earlier years indicate that these young ladies did a wonderful job and truly became part of the whole Thompson basketball package. The cheerleaders who made the 1952 squad were: Gloria Nizamoff, Mary Hession, Betty Topliff, Pat Papierski, Barbara Groh, Pat Lachapelle, Janet Daniels, and Captain Mary Teguis.

The annual pre-Thanksgiving alumni tilt was held on November 21, 1951, at the Cluett Peabody Athletic Club. Few thought the young squad would be able to match-up against the old dogs. The Tourtellotte alumni sported a roster that many felt could rival many local college squads. It included Tasi Vriga, Jim Naum, Nick Angelo, Donald Garvais, George Dargati, Frank Ungerer, Richard Hagstrom, Jimmy Karapanos, Danny Almquist, and Tommy Tanacea. The 1952 bench was intimidated by the more experienced players. These were the giants that the 1952 guys watched and admired when they were youngsters. These were State Champions!

## The Cantymen

Seven minutes from the starting buzzer, at the end of the first quarter, the alumni were down 12–5. Jim Naum was the only alum hitting from the field. Tommy Hession, the senior from St. Joe's, had seven of twelve Tiger points. Fourteen minutes later, the first half score was 19-12 in favor of the younger squad. Some felt the older boys were taking it easy on their younger counterparts, but talking to the older players years later it is difficult to imagine these highly competitive athletes cutting anyone slack. The alumni poured it on in the last two stanzas, outscoring the junior team 31- 25 in the last two quarters, but it was not enough. Canty adjusted and the youngsters were able to hang on for the first victory of the season. George Dargati was the high scorer for the alumni hitting 16 points, closely followed by former teammate Jimmy Naum who netted 13 points. High scorers for the Tigers were Tom Hession and Stuart Joslin, who both finished with eight.

The first interscholastic game was held on Tuesday, December 4, 1951, at the CPAC against St Joe's of North Grosvenordale. The small Catholic school was no threat to the CIAC small school powerhouse. Even though Tourtellotte Memorial High School was one of the smallest high schools in the state, it was still larger than the diminutive Catholic school from North Grosvenordale.

By the end of the first quarter, it was apparent it would be an all-out rout. The Tigers outscored their opponents 21-3 and it seemed they could score at will. Canty used the balance of the game as an opportunity to see what the new guys could do against another varsity squad. By the end of the game, there were no surprises, Teddy Vriga scored 18 points, the guards Hession and Augustinski each scored sixteen. Ron Brayton started at center and contributed six and all could see he would be a dominating force in the paint. With a final score of 65-30, in favor of the Tigers, Canty was pleased with what he saw. He could see there was still work to be done as the Tigers committed 19 team fouls allowing 14 points from the foul line. This could be a problem for the better teams.

Game three, three days later against Stafford High School was a different affair. By the end of the first quarter, the Tigers only led by five points, 16-11, due to Ron Brayton's unstoppable first-quarter, nine-point performance. By the first half, they increased their five-point lead by one and led by six, 24-18. They maintained that lead going into the fourth quarter and finally wore down the tenacious Stafford crew, finishing the game 43-36. Brayton was the high scorer at 20. The sophomore Teddy Vriga contributed ten. Again, Canty saw some problems, but was generally pleased with what he viewed.

The next three games against Griswold, St. Louis, and Putnam Tech went in the Tigers favor. Tom Hession proved to be the largest Tiger contributor for the three-game series netting 41 total points. Vriga and Brayton were the next line, and Augustinski and Joslin contributed defensively. Later stories would make it difficult to determine who contributed more defensively. Brayton in the paint was simply overwhelming, and with Vriga and Joslin in forecourt and Hession and Augustinski in the backcourt, Canty knew with this lineup had a chance to go all the way. The key would be keeping everyone healthy and playing.

During the less challenging games, Canty used his entire bench to establish roles for all his players. He moved players around and tried different plays and formations to determine what worked and what did not with this group of players. He also knew you could never predict when you needed help from the pine and having them ready, understanding what it is they needed to do, was crucial to a successful season.

Six games into the season, after December 19<sup>th</sup>, 55-36 defeat of Putnam Tech, Canty and the Tigers settled into a rhythm that felt all too familiar. The new starting five performed as well as expected and the bench, especially Peter Bertschmann, contributed where and when they were needed.

Things were moving well for the Tigers and everyone who followed high school basketball could see that they, once again, were the standard by which all others would be measured for the 1952 season. Before game seven against Plainfield, Ed Patenaude, a long-time local sportswriter, penned an article that predicted yet another championship for the Tigers. His article, "Another Championship Banner Predicted for Tourtellotte Tigers," states:

*Tourtellotte Memorial High School basketball team is well on the way to another championship banner, says Ed Patenaude, Sport Roundup columnist for the Webster Times.*

*Discussing the basketball season of 1951 and 1952 in a recent issue, the Webster sportswriter, gives the following appraisal of the Tourtellotte Tigers: "Tourtellotte – This is practically the same club which pulled a flag sneaker last season. The graduation gun went boom two years ago and, when Jim Canty recovered, most of his varsity corps had departed. Undaunted, he started anew and, to make believers out of his critics, directed and produced his third consecutive Connecticut Class "S" Championship. Now with Tasi Vriga, Nick Angelo and Nevzut Ali listed as the only casualties; the Tigers are preparing to extend the feast. Ronnie Brayton, Teddy Vriga, Tommy Hession and Captain Joe Augustinski are veteran performers. Peppered with Canty fundamentals, they know when to give, go, break or whatever the situation may require. Sophomore Stuart Joslin fits into the scheme quite well and, once he accustoms himself to the fast-whirling antics of his confederates, the Red and Black forces should really have some wagon. Look at it from any angle, upside down, downside up or sideways, and you get the same all-pervading pictures... another championship banner for the Tigers of Tourtellotte Memorial High School.*

By the time December 21, 1951, rolled around, the boys were preparing for game seven against Plainfield High School. Christmas always brought with it an additional level of excitement not seen during the rest of the season. Maybe it was the Christmas holiday, a few days off from school, or knowing that a third of their season was behind them; whatever it was, the boys were ready for Plainfield.

Like all games, Canty and the boys dominated the game early. Canty ran his quintet hard and kept the opponents guessing and confused. He knew it was always harder to come from behind than it was to protect a lead, and he preferred the latter to the former, although the former was sometimes more exciting. This coaching mentality also motivated the bench, as no one wanted to be responsible for losing a hard-fought lead. This produced inspired plays from the bench players which in turn gave them more minutes on the floor. This kept the Tourtellotte starters healthy, rested, and ready to play. The well-oiled machine, once again, was working perfectly.

The Tigers led at the end of the first quarter 14-8, and 27-15 at the half. Canty used the bench through most of the second half of the game, noting they only contributed one point to the total score. This would have to be addressed at the next practice. Teddy Vriga and Tommy Hession were once again the star contributors, Teddy sinking 18 and Hession contributing eleven. Brayton, Augustinski and Joslin were the second line of contributors at six points apiece.

## The Cantymen

The sophomore Vriga had four personal fouls early in the game. His tenacious, sometime reckless, style of play had him in early foul trouble in many games. While some fans were concerned, Canty saw it for what it was; a talented young man who had a lot to learn.

At the end of the game, the Tigers came out on top and defeated Plainfield 49-40 in the preseason holiday tilt. Canty gave the boys the next four days off.

On December 26, 1951, the same day they squared off against Killingly High School, Al Todd weighed in with his opinion about the Tourtellotte season thus far, more specifically Jim Canty's outstanding ability as a coach. He penned an article, titled, "Jim Canty Guides Team to State Championship." Once again, Canty was compared to the UConn head mentor, Hugh Greer. Todd states:

*...the brilliant mind behind this successful team belongs to the popular Tiger mentor, James Canty. Coach Canty is undoubtedly one of the top men in his field and his records verify just that. Winning three successive state titles has only once been duplicated and that by Ellsworth High from South Windsor, with Hugh Greer, Connecticut University coach, as their leader.*

Todd, also noted later in that same article that Mr. Canty was "...always the perfect gentleman." Years later, few of the boys would remember what they received for Christmas that year, but all would remember Mr. Canty always being a gentleman, and most would remember the 80-60 shellacking they gave Killingly that day.

The following Friday, January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1952, the undefeated Tigers season continued with a 58-36 defeat over Wells. The Tigers led by two points at the end of the first quarter, but outscored the Southbridge team 20-11 in the second. This sealed their opponent's fate and once again most players saw action. Tom Hession was the high scorer with 17, followed closely by Ron Brayton with 15 points.

An article, found in the Canty Collection titled, "Tourtellotte High Cagers Top Wells 58-36; Undefeated Invaders Spoil Local Squad's 1952 Opener", states:

*Undefeated Tourtellotte High had too much speed, finesse, and individual brilliance for the Wells High cagers last night and handed the locals a 58-36 drubbing in the season's inaugural at West Street school gym...*

*The lads from Connecticut took command of the game in the second quarter, moved ahead 24-23 at halftime, boosted the advantage to 49-32 at the three-quarter mark and coasted home.*

The article goes on to say:

*At one point in the second chapter, Jim Canty's visitors were in the van, 27-23. Then they dumped seven points without an interruption before the halftime buzzer sounded, and that broke the Wells resistance.*

Games 10 and 11 saw the boys take two more games from St. Joes and Bartlett High School with great ease. While many writers and fans close to the Tigers knew long ago that Teddy Vriga would be an exceptional player, it was these two games that eliminated the final skeptics. Ted, in addition to his superb defensive play, scored an easy 39 points. Teammates 55 years later still believe that had Canty allowed Vriga to score at-will this tally could have easily topped the 70-point mark. In addition to Vriga's stunning performance, Brayton maintained his

own personal assault and finished games 10 and 11 with 35 points. As always, everyone on the bench contributed with eight players out of 11 suited up scoring in the St. Joe's tilt and seven out of nine scoring in the Bartlett match. In these two games the Turtles outscored their opponents 139-72, nearly doubling what St. Joes and Bartlett threw at them. Even the confines of the Bartlett 'swimming pool' could not hold the blazing hot youngsters from Thompson at bay.

A Webster Times article dated the day before the Bartlett game, titled, "Undefeated Tourtellotte Seeks 12<sup>th</sup> Win Against Bartlett High; Tigers listed as Heavy Pre-Game Favorites; Warrior Lineup With If Eggs; Visitors May Employ Zone", indicates what many in the area already knew. The Tigers had the arsenal it needed and could employ its weapons when required. It read:

*Bartlett High Redskins will swallow a concentrated dose of activity Friday evening when they play host to the Tigers of Tourtellotte Memorial High School.*

*The Warriors, incidentally, managed to stick an upset label on the Red and Black forces last season. Since that game, however, the Canty-coached wizards moved onto the Connecticut Interscholastic Class "S" Championship. In addition, they have erected an eleven-game victory streak.*

*Pre-game indications point-up a one-sided Tiger victory. Most of the best. Their lineup is set, reserves qualified, and attack varied.*

*Under the mastery of Jimmy Canty, the Red and Black have assumed the role of hardwood wonder workers. Senior Ronnie Brayton serves as the pinwheel of the Connecticut attack both offensively and defensively.*

#### **ZONE DEFENSE**

*In view of the limited confines of Bartlett's court, the visitors may resort to a zone defense. At St. Louis, they erected a smooth functioning alignment which virtually restricted the Cavaliers to outside and rushed corner shots.*

*Well versed in man-to-man work, the Tigers, however, are expected to stick to a sliding zone. Bartlett on the other hand, is expected to rely on man-to-man maneuvers. Ziggy Strzelecki's forces have experienced difficulty in functioning behind a zone. Fast breaking capers, such as Tourtellotte is capable of, forced them to abandon the stationary set-up in previous games.*

*While Tourtellotte lineup is a virtual certainty, the Green and White forecast is loaded with if-eggs, Coach Strzelecki resorted to checker maneuvers in recent practice sessions.*

*Three likely starters are forward Bob Jablonski, Guard Edwin Fiske, and Howard Mellen. Mellen, a junior class member, turned in a glittering board performance at Auburn Friday evening.*

*His work enabled Bartlett to attempt their share of floor goals. Defensively, the Warriors managed to glean their share of rebounds. A sub-par shooting performance can be attributed as the main reason for the Redskin reversal. They managed to sink but 16 out of 73 attempted shots.*



*Consequently, Mellen may be inserted at the pivot post with sophomores Ken Davis and Ellis Bateman held in reserve. Either Walter Splewakowski or Martin "Judge" Starosta will be at the vacated guard berth with Bob Therrien rated a slight edge to start ahead of southpaw Ralph Bresniak in the front court.*

*Several other combinations are possible and, according to coach Strselecki, the final starting quintet will not be determined until prior to Friday...*

Games 12-15, against Stafford, Putnam, Woodstock, and Plainfield, of the 1952 season surprised no one. The Tigers outscored their opponents 254-165, an 89 total point difference, or 22.25-point average per game. Teddy Vriga continued to improve, and his stellar play became routine. He averaged 15.75 in the last four games and 19 points in the last two. Ron Brayton also came off strong during the middle third of the season adding 14.75 points per game. These two along with Hession, Augustinski and Joslin supported by a strong bench, seem unstoppable and something disastrous would have to occur to upset what seems to be preordained, another QVC and State Championship season. With the end of January rapidly approaching and only five weeks remaining in the season, even the most skeptical of sports writers felt that by the second week of March, a new, four-in-a-row championship record, would belong to hilltoppers.

Like the New England weather, basketball, especially high school basketball, can change in a heartbeat. The Tigers 1952 team suffered a major blow when Teddy Vriga was declared ineligible by TMHS administration on January 28<sup>th</sup>. Canty saw it coming, but the boys did not and were deeply troubled with losing one of their star players. The guys lamented, but Canty knew that an effective team lies in the sum of its parts and not in the exceptional talents of a few. He also knew that Teddy, only a sophomore, would be back, but not right now.

Before practice at the CPAC began, on Monday the 28<sup>th</sup>, Canty called the team together. They had two days to prepare for the next game against Killingly and no amount of bellyaching over the current events was going to change the fact that Vriga would not finish the season. It was what it was. What mattered now was moving ahead.

When the Tigers entered the small sunken Killingly gymnasium, located in the large brick building on Broad Street, Danielson, they had a new starting lineup. Canty would still rely on his steady pivot man, Ron Brayton, but without Vriga, Bertschmann and Joslin would be assigned forecourt duty while the well-seasoned senior Hession, picked up the lead role in the backcourt along with fellow guard Joe Augustinski.

The Hilltoppers went out and like most games, established an early lead, 24-19 at the end of the second half. With a great deal of defensive effort, they kept the scrappy Red Men at bay for the entire game and defeated the Killingly quintet 46-36. Hession led all scorers with 15 points, Augustinski and Brayton added 12 and 10, respectively. The ten-point lead was enough to keep the undefeated season going, but it seemed a lot more difficult without Vriga in the lineup.

The following day at practice, Thursday, January 31, 1952, with a shaky Killingly victory behind them, the boys were uncertain about their prospects for the balance of the season without Vriga. Canty most likely saw it for what it was, a weaker lineup. The real test came the following day in Jewett City. Hession and Brayton each scored 13 and Augustinski eight points, the Tigers lost their first game of the season in a heartbreaker to Griswold 40-41. They trailed in the first quarter 8-10, 16-20, in the second, and 25-30 in the third. Led by Brayton who scored six points, the Tigers rallied in the fourth quarter outscoring the Griswold team 15-11, but it was too little too late.

## The Cantymen

The defeat was painful for the players. They were simply not used to losing. They had only lost one game in the last 24 and only two games in the last 70!

Canty and the boys had the weekend to think about the loss to Griswold. Their next game would not be until Thursday, February 7th, against Woodstock Academy. It is easy to imagine that the nature of the boys' thoughts was vastly different to that of Mr. Canty's. He had been around long enough to know that losing a heartbreaker was part of the game and there was much to learn from such a defeat. He took it in stride and looked at what it was he needed to do to fill the void left by Vriga's absence.

Canty rallied his team and like in every season, someone stepped up to fill the void. This time it was three seniors, Brayton, Hession, and Augustinski. Over the next six games the Tigers outscored their opponents 367-217, averaging 21 points per game more than their adversaries. For the remainder of the regular season, Brayton averaged 19.6 points, Hession 11.7 and Augustinski 8.6 points. Also, when needed, Stu Joslin and Pete Bertschmann made their contributions scoring as many as 12 and 14 points per game, respectively. The final games of the 1952 season went like this:

Game 18 – Woodstock, February 7, 1952, 66-23

Game 19 – Bartlett, February 8, 1952, 63-43

Game 20 – Wells, February 12, 1952, 71-53

Game 21 – Putnam, February 15, 1952, 37-32

Game 22 – Pomfret, February 20, 1952, 60-47

Game 23 – Putnam Tech, February 22, 1952, 70-42

By the time Monday, February 25<sup>th</sup> rolled around, the regular season was complete and the Hilltoppers, despite losing Vriga, once again, won the Quinebaug Valley Conference. With a 22-2 record, the squad from the small school in North Grosvenordale was still the top dog in Eastern Connecticut.

Basketball fans throughout the State of Connecticut were buzzing with talk of the State Championships and everyone in the State was looking at Tourtellotte to establish a new State record with an unprecedented four straight State Championships. No small school in the State had ever accomplished this unbelievable feat.

Two days before their final game against St. Louis, on February 29, which they unexpectedly lost 59-63, an article titled, "Tourtellotte Seeded No. 1 for Tourney: Records at Stake", states:

*With a season record of 22 wins and only one loss, Tourtellotte Memorial High School's basketball team was seeded No. 1 in the CIAC Class S Tournament which gets underway tomorrow night in New Britain.*

*As a result of their rating, they drew a bye in the first round and will not go into competition until 9 Monday night against the winner of the East Hampton-Guilford game Saturday.*

*Tourtellotte will have a chance to break two state records if they live up to expectations and win the tournament this year. They will then be the first team to win the tournament four years in a row and the first team to win seven tournaments in the 18 years it has operated.*

*In a poll of Connecticut sports writers last night in New Haven, Tourtellotte was unanimous choice to cop the title. Their only loss during the regular*

*season was to Griswold High School of Jewett City which is rated third by the CIAC.*

The first round of the 1952 State Championships was held before a packed house at the State Teachers College in New Britain, Connecticut. Tourtellotte drew East Hampton, and few felt East Hampton would present much of a problem for the Tigers. A newspaper article predicted, "Another Championship Banner Predicted for Tourtellotte Tigers," and many sportswriters who penned articles with titles like, "Canty After a State Record," felt Canty would become part of Connecticut high school history, but time would tell a different story. A March 3, 1952, article titled, "East Hampton Pulls Big Upset Stopping Tourtellotte, 29-26 – (Special Report)", reports the action.

*Hopes of a fourth straight Class S championship for Tourtellotte Memorial High School of North Grosvenordale went by the board tonight in sensational fashion as unheralded East Hampton turned back the Tigers 29-26 at the Teacher's college gym.*

*Playing a deliberate, possession type of ball rarely seen these days, East Hampton took charge late in the second quarter of the low scoring game to collect its second tourney victory. Play down activity on Saturday saw the conclave Cinderella Kids trim Guilford, 68-43.*

*Combined with the smooth ball handling game was a nearly impenetrable man to man defense that exhibit the art of switching to perfection. The defense kept the highly vaunted Tiger attack well bottled up and contained the big men outside of the danger zone.*

*In reality, East Hampton won the game at the foul line, building up a seven-point spread to overcome a two-goal differential. Tourtellotte hit for a dozen buckets but on only two of 12 fouls while the upsetters had ten double deckers and went nine for 18 on charity tosses.*

*All-stater Tommy Hession suffered an ankle injury late in the first period and although he returned in the third canto, he was not up to snuff to further impede the TMHS attack.*

*Ronnie Brayton, the game's high scorer with 11 points, meshed two quick hoops to start the game and the Tigers managed to hold a 9-7 quarter lead. East Hampton, with Phil Cone leading the way came back to go up, by a pair, 14-12 at the half and then was never headed.*

*Ken Lutton, Cone, and Ray Frostin combined to give East Hampton a 26-16 gap in the first six minutes left in the game, but Frostin went the length of the court for a hoop and verdict.*

*A pivot shot and a push by Hession with a tap by Brayton cut the gap to 27-24 with three minutes left in the game but Frostin went the length of the court for a hoop and the verdict.*

*East Hampton froze for most of the final two and a half minutes and waived seven fouls in the span.*

*In the first of the night's two games. Morgan of Clinton scored a 53-38 win over Terryville.*

By the end of the game the injured All-State Tom Hession was held to 6 points and Ron Brayton was held to eleven. Augustinski helped with six, and Joslin two baskets, but the boys from East Hampton bested the Thompson boys in what would become one of the greatest defensive battles of the game. For years, many speculated what could have occurred if Vriga played that game and Hession remained uninjured. Most agreed the Turtles would have come out on top.

Senior Ron Brayton led the team with 368 points in 1952, Tommy Hession piled up 255, Joe Augustinski 182, Stu Joslin 174, and Peter Bertschmann 106 points. In spite of only playing 15 of 25 games, Teddy Vriga finished the season with 222 points averaging 15.1 points per game in his last ten. Had he maintained that average, and the Tigers won the State Championship, as everyone expected, he would have compiled another 212 points making his total nearly 430 points, an unprecedented amount for a 15-year-old sophomore. Many basketball enthusiasts of the time and since felt Ted had not hit his stride and 500 points would not have been out of the question. This was a milestone no sophomore had ever hit. In 1953, Ted would prove to the skeptics that he was authentic.

There is no doubt the boys gave it their all in the 1952 State Championships. No one wanted to disappoint Mr. Canty and stories years later would indicate that Mr. Canty was pleased with the effort of his 1952 squad and looked ahead to the 1953 season. He later cautioned his students and players about remaining stagnant and sitting on your laurels. For every championship team, there were 20 who wanted to knock you off the pedestal and continuous improvement was the only preventative measure. He expected his players to play over the summer and improve their game. The 1952 season was behind them and the 1953 season only eight months away.

Three months later, Mr. Canty left this message to the seniors.

*Congratulations to the Class of 1952! Four long years of trials and tribulations have at least culminated in success. It must be with great joy and pride in accomplishment that you have reached this station in life.*

*However, boys and girls, success is but a transient thing in an ever-changing world. To remain static and self-satisfied is to be left by the wayside. Some of you will have an opportunity of furthering your education, and upon you will be thrust a great obligation – an obligation of fulfilling the trust, love and faith of your parents that you make the most of your talents and abilities. Most of you have reached the end of your formal education. Yet, education is an end, and the means to that end are always present. Yours also is a great responsibility – one of becoming true and loyal citizens and by your actions and leadership to make yours a better town in which to live. Yes, to each and every one of you is an obligation to your God, your parents, your school, and yourselves, to justify your existence by exemplary behavior before your fellow citizens.*

Nick Angelo joined the U.S. Navy. Other former hilltoppers would later join their former teammates to include George Dargati and Tom Hession. They would serve as their predecessors did during World War II. The Korean War would go on for another year, never formally being declared as over. Later the boys who served all agree it was a good part of their lives, a part that

helped them mature as men. They would also agree that basketball helped them get a start on their military lives. Working as a team and being physically fit were key to both.

Throughout the summer months, the best of the best honed their basketball skills at the Dressler Street Basketball Court located in Southbridge, Massachusetts. Several players played both baseball and basketball, while working full-time. Sax Fletcher, of the Southbridge Evening News, reported weekly on the Dressler Street gang. A July 2, 1952, article shows several Turtles, past and present playing in this invitation only league. It reads:

#### JUST TALKING IT OVER

With Sax Fletcher

*The twilight outdoor basketball battles on the new court at Dresser Street field are proving very popular with the fans, and are popular with the players, too, except on days when the thermometer soars upward like a balloon. Then the regulation-sized seems to be twice as long as it should be, and it takes 10 good men, working a platoon system, to stand up under the heat and humidity. So are the Webster clubs running wild. Only the Semi-Circles, of the five local entries, seem to have a chance to finish in the first division. The Webster Five are resting in three of the four top positions in the league. These outfits all make the trip over from Webster to play their games, and most of them are packed with products from Ziggy Streziecki's Bartlett High teams. They've rounded up the cream of basketball talent, have these three, and they're running the Southbridge quintets dizzy. It's early in the season and the situation could change, but right now Webster has a strangle hold on Southbridge's first underneath-the sky basketball circuit.*

*The Semi-Circles have by far the best chance to break up a Webster monopoly. And even the Circles are importing ball players. George Dargati, who burned up Southbridge courts during the past winter, and Ted Vriga, one of Jim Canty's stars at Tourtellotte, come up from North Grosvenordale to help Phil Morrill, Ernie Duquette, Pete Peterson, Bob Wallace, Angelo Monaco, and Charlie Venie in their outings. Dargati has one of the best shots of anyone in the area, and Vriga has been high scorer in most of the Semi-Circle victories. Together with the Southbridge Clientele, The Circles will stay in there with anything Webster has to show. The Stadium Five has Don Fiddes, who went wild every time St. Louis met Wells. They have Ralph Brezniak, Bob Miller, Joe Makarewicz and Harry Pappas all of whom attended Bartlett and Buzz Junket, who they tell me is a St. Louis High graduate. The Rockets have Bob and Charlie Cozzens and John Drobot, who went to Bartlett, and the famed Piper Coyle from St. Louis and Tom Hession from Tourtellotte. The Webster Five has Don Daviau, Howard Mellon, and Bob Jablonski, Bartlett products, and Piper's brother, Red Coyle, who performed with St. Louis. It's a notable array of talent.*

*Joe Theodoss has rounded up a good squad to represent Dery Steakhouse. Lefty Varin, Don Kowalski, Bill George, Dick Stir and George Theodoss all were on Paul Duhart's Wells high school team last fall. The*

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*Semi-Circle Juniors, who have forfeited one game, have a good part of next year's Wells team on their roster. Paul Kollios, Billy Welch, Jack Hamilton, Andy Perikli, Don Girard, and Ron Orłowski may not have the experience to win, but they should lay plenty of groundwork for next year's season. The Southbridge News team has been outclassed in three outings, but they've faced three of the top teams, the Circles, the Rockets, and the Stadium Five. Joe Capillo, who played ball down Gloucester way, Ray Derosiers, the Chief of Police's son, Jerry Smith and John DelVecchio from Wells, John Moriarty of St. Mary's, Butch Howarth, Bob Crawford, and Ernie Jewell hope for better days just around the corner. The AGR's has Chet Nightengale. one of the high scorers during the winter session and Keech Metro, Mike Ziu, Chiefy Costa, Steve Christo and George Kollios, but are looking for their first win also. The AGR's haven't got the club that battled the Semi-Circles down to the wire in the Community league. The season is only in the second of seven weeks, and most of the clubs will add strength. But the way it looks now only the Circles stand between one of the Webster teams and a summer (championship).*

## 1953-1971

Jim Canty would go on to coach basketball at Tourtellotte until 1971. This 19-year span featured many other accomplishments for Mr. Canty and his players. In 1953, the team would go 21-6 in another successful campaign, which resulted in a heartbreaking three-point CIAC Quarterfinal loss to Suffield High School. Ted Vriga continued to show great promise on the hardcourt, connecting for 699 total points. In 1954, Mr. Canty provided navigation to another strong season with a final record of 17-7 and a CIAC tournament invitation. Ted Vriga had his scoring production dip from a season prior, but still led the Tigers with 569 points. In 1955, the Tigers excelled once again despite losing the talented Ted Vriga to graduation. Jerry Ryscavage assumed the scoring lead by tallying 594 points. As in 1953, the team would be turned away from the CIAC with a quarterfinal loss. In 1956, the team showed great resolve despite losing Jerry Ryscavage to graduation. The final record read 14-10. A challenging season in which John Weiss led all Tigers with 340 points. Unfortunately, the Tigers fell to a strong Ellsworth team in the CIAC Quarterfinals by a score of 47-50.

In 1957, the team rebounded from the close loss in the prior season's CIAC Quarterfinal game and finished with an excellent 21-3 record. The CIAC Quarterfinal curse seemed to continue because the Tourtellotte team was once again bounced from the playoffs in the CIAC Quarterfinal game. In 1958, the team had another winning season finishing 17-6. Paul Ryscavage followed in his relative's shoes by leading the Tigers in tallies. He finished with 403 total points and the Tigers season ended in a first-round CIAC loss. The 1959 season was not a strong season for the Tigers and the team finished with a losing record of 10-12. It appears that scoring was an issue for this team because the leading scorer from the 1959 team notched 180 points, which was a modest amount when compared to Ted Vriga's 699 points in 1953.

The 1960 team was determined to show that the 1959 losing season was not going to turn into a trend. Merton Harvey led the Tigers in scoring with 265 total points and the team achieved a solid 15-8 record. The team could not accelerate in the playoffs, losing in the first-round of the CIAC tournament. Merton's brother, Dennis, would take the scoring lead in 1961 with Merton providing strong scoring assistance. The team finished 18-5 and were invited to the CIAC tournament. Dennis Harvey continued his frenetic scoring pace in 1962 by tallying 440 points. The team notched an excellent record of 24-2, but the second loss came in the CIAC Quarterfinal game. In 1963, Gene Austin would score 371 points to pace the pouncing 22-3 Tigers. Another early exit from the CIAC tourney resulted though. In 1964, Louis Leo provided the scoring punch for the Tigers by totaling 446 points. The Tigers finished with a .750 winning percentage on the season and a record of 18-6, but the CIAC tournament was not favorable to the Tigers as they were eliminated in the first-round.

As in 1964, Louis Leo led the 1965 team in scoring with 527 points. The team would lose in the first-round, but that should take nothing away from their 17-7 record. In 1966, the team struggled to maintain consistent play, finishing with a record of 11-10. The Tigers regained their true form in 1967 by winning 13 games and losing just 5. The 1968 team was an incredibly successful team. This team achieved another successful season for Mr. Canty by posting a final record of 21-1. The team won every regular season game, but could not come out on top in the CIAC Semifinal game. The towering William Pederson led the charge with 573 total points. The success from the 1968 campaign transferred to 1969, where the Tigers won 17 games and lost 5. As was the case in numerous seasons, the Tigers failed to come out on the winning side in a CIAC Quarterfinal tilt. The final two seasons, 1970 and 1971, of Mr. Canty's high school coaching career were two losing seasons with a combined record of 14-21. Not the story book ending to a

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remarkably fruitful high school coaching career for Mr. Canty. Mr. Canty must have read this as a suitable time for transition.

The 19-year span, 1953-1971, did feature some excellent teams. Many accomplishments were achieved in this timespan. One such accomplishment was 16 winning seasons, a challenging task for a small Connecticut school. A second accomplishment was five 20+ win seasons, and a record of 306-123 during the 19-years. The winning percentage was just north of 71%. A final accomplishment for Mr. Canty was to positively influence so many Tourtellotte students on and off the court, in ways that would only become apparent years later to some of the players.

Mr. Canty truly left his mark on Tourtellotte Memorial High School and the ten mill and farming villages of Thompson. In total, Mr. Canty coached Tourtellotte basketball for 30 years. He taught a core set of values to countless Tigers. Values that would never be forgotten.



## James Canty Accolades

Coach Canty was never one for self-promotion and with him it was all about the players. Despite this fact, Mr. Canty achieved a great deal in his 30 years of coaching at Tourtellotte Memorial High School. Mr. Canty coached basketball and baseball at TMHS from 1941 -1971. While he is best known for basketball he was equally accomplished as a baseball coach.

Jim's overall basketball record as a coach was 508 wins and 149 losses or 71%. If baseball was included, his total coaching wins would total to more than 750. The baseball records are difficult to confirm, which means the total coaching wins cannot be verified.

As a basketball coach he brought TMHS to the CIAC tournament 24 times in 30 years, making it to the State Championship game five times and winning four - 1944, 1949, 1950, and 1951. During his tenure at TMHS, they were among the most feared teams in the state.

What is most important about Mr. Canty was his demeanor. He always wore a suit jacket and tie, never swore, never got angry, never yelled at a player, and never argued with a referee or umpire. He epitomized the word "gentleman" and that is what his players, opponents, students, and friends remember and respect most.

The following is from Jim's induction into the TMHS Athletic Hall of Fame:

### James Canty '29

The next inductee received the most votes and is arguably one of the best athletes ever to play at Tourtellotte Memorial. He played basketball and baseball 1926-1929 and captained both teams in 1929. He led the basketball team to two State Championships in 1927 and 1929 and an unprecedented 45-0 winning streak. He was the first Tiger to be selected as an All-State player in 1927.

After high school and a year at St. John's, a prep school in Massachusetts, he tried out for and made one of the best college programs of the 1920's and 1930's, The College of the Holy Cross, in Worcester, Massachusetts. His uncanny ability to roam the outfield grass at Holy Cross was only surpassed by his ability as a hitter. He signed with the Washington Senators in 1937 and played professional baseball in the Piedmont League from 1937 to 1939.

After professional baseball, he returned to Tourtellotte as a teacher and coach, coaching basketball, and baseball for 30 years (1941-1971). During that time, he won five State Championships in basketball in 1941, 1944, 1949, 1950, and 1951 and became the first coach to win more than 500 games. With his success on the baseball diamond, it is estimated that he won, as a coach, more than 750 games.

He was inducted into the New England Basketball Hall of Fame in 2006 and was selected for the Connecticut High School Coaches' Association Hall of Fame.

His Holy Cross yearbook captured what many of his players and students felt about Mr. Canty then and now. It reads:

Quinebaug's favorite son came to us four years ago and appeared at first glance, to be [a] quiet, unassuming type of fellow. Taking all that came along with the same characteristic ease of spirit and tranquility of mind. Jim has been a soothing influence on us[all]...

By all accounts Mr. Canty was epitomized by the words friend, mentor, athlete, and coach.

Mr. Canty married Adel, a woman who also put a great deal of time into the athletes and students of Tourtellotte. He has one son, James Junior.

Mr. Canty was born on January 15, 1912, and passed away at the age of 92 on August 2, 2004.

His Hall of Fame plaque at TMHS reads:

James Canty '29

Baseball – 1926, 1927, 1928, 1929 (Captain)  
Basketball – 1926, 1927, 1928, 1929 (Captain)  
State Championship (Basketball) – 1927, 1929  
Connecticut All-State (Basketball) – 1927  
TMHS Basketball Coach – 1941-1971  
State Championships (Basketball), 1941, 1944, 1949, 1950, 1951  
TMHS Baseball Coach 1941-1971  
First TMHS Coach to Win More than 500 Games (508)  
Fifth All-time Connecticut Winningest Basketball Coach  
22-Game Consecutive Hitting Record – Holy Cross College, Worcester, MA  
Signed Washington Senators – 1937  
Professional Baseball – Piedmont League – 1937, 1938, 1939  
New England Coaches' Hall of Fame – 2006  
Connecticut High School Coaches' Association Hall of Fame – 2011

## Season-by-Season Summary

Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1941	<b>Mr. Canty's First Season 16-9</b>	Maurice Negip 193 Bob Blanchette - 165 Joe Fitzgibbons-Captain - 158 Tom Fatsi 135 Frank Goloskie – 93 Walter Johnson – 27 Isadore Viens – 22 Walter Modleski – 6 Merrill Johnson - 2 Everett Shepard – Andrew Vogel Henry Beaulac  Head Coach Selig  OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE	Nichols 25-45 Plainfield 36-24 Bartlett 31-38 Cole Trade 38-17 Stafford 30-34 Putnam Trade 26-24 Northbridge 25-26 Killingly 35-21 Wells 22-27 Woodstock 28-27 Stafford 29-28 Putnam 31-22 St. Louis 24-31 Woodstock 38-27 Pomfret 37-20 Killingly 36-25 Putnam 41-16 Wells 28-37 Plainfield 38-44 Northbridge 49-20 St. Louis 32-23 Putnam Trade 29-27 Bartlett 18-23 Berlin 45-25 CIAC Tournament Portland 30-37 CIAC Quarter Finals	CIAC State Tournament  (Source: TMHS Official Scorebook)

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1942	16-7	<p>Maurice Negip – 241 Tom Fatsi (Captain) – 167 John Ungerer – 104 George Bessette – 91 Merrill Johnson – 82 Walter Modleski* -54 Henry Beaulac – 34 Everett Sheppard - 11 Russell Gleason – 8 Andrew Vogel – 7 Roland Blain – 6 Edgar Johnson – 6 Edward Babula – 2 Roland Dery (Manager)</p> <p>(Source: 1942 TMHS Official Scorebook. NOTE: Above scores may not include play-off games)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p> <p>*Walter's name may have been spelled differently and abbreviated in the score books</p>	<p>Alumni 36-35 Stafford 39-28 Plainfield 40-27 St. Louis 51-44 Putnam Trade (Tech) 21-26 Wells 15-27 (*18-27) St. Louis 29-23 Northbridge 37-43 Killingly 37-45 Putnam Trade 29-41 Wells 21-23 Putnam 46-41 Woodstock 45-20 Woodstock 65-25 Bartlett 32-28 Putnam 38-18 Northbridge 39-32 Stafford 24-22 Pomfret 32-31* Plainfield QVC 39-31 Killingly QVC 60-42 Stafford QVC36-33 Old Saybrook CIAC Tournament 32-39</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report) (Source: 1942 TMHS Official Scorebook except where noted by "**")</p>	<p>CIAC State Tournament (Source – unknown newspaper article compliments of Betty (Willet) LeClair)</p> <p>QVC Champions (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p> <p>Eastern Basketball Champions (Source: 1942 Eastern Basketball Champions)</p> <p>10 straight wins</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1943	20-1	<p>Maurice Negip – 254                      John Ungerer - 230                      Tom Fatsi (Captain) - 217                      George Bessette – 141                      Leo Beaulac - 102                      Walter Modilszewski - 43                      Merrill Johnson – 34                      Edward Babula - 20                      Russell Gleason – 13                      Murolo – 10                      Robbins - 4                      Evert Sheppard - 1                      Andrew Vogel - 0                      Roland Blain – 0</p> <p>(Score: 1943 TMHS Official Scorebook)                      OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 35-34                      Putnam Trade 35-26                      St. Louis 54-35 (56-34*)                      Wells 50-26                      Bartlett 42-25                      Killingly 55-27 (39-25*)                      Cole Trade 55-27                      Oxford 54-36                      Bartlett 48-29                      Putnam High* 36-20                      St. Louis 40-28                      Oxford 57-26                      Wells 42-33                      Putnam 53-34                      Killingly 38-30                      Putnam Trade 51-32                      CPAC 49-36                      Glastonbury CIAC Tournament 40-30                      Bloomfield CIAC Quarter Finals 50-34                      Guilford CIAC Semi-Finals 31-24                      Ellsworth CIAC Finals 22-34</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)                      (Source: 1943 TMHS official scorebook. Score the same except where noted by “*”)</p>	<p>QVC Champs                      CIAC State Finals</p> <p>(Source – unknown newspaper article compliments of Betty (Willet) LeClair)</p> <p>Undefeated regular season                      20 straight wins</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1944	18-6  (Note: Three losses were by one point)	<p>Walter Modilszewski - 358                      Ted Fatsi - 252                      Ed Babula - 89                      Bill Bates - 88                      Burt Elliot - 77                      Donald Maitland - 71                      Vangel Tanacea - 47                      Donald Gleason - 33                      Bob Willett - 30                      Paul Azud - 9                      Swede Constantine - 5                      Leo Courtemanche - 3                      Leo Beaulac - 2                      Dick Mead - 0</p> <p>(Source: 1944 State Championship picture. Players identified by Betty Willet LeClair '47)                      (Source: 1944 TMHS Official Scorebook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p> <p>NOTE: Season started 3-6</p>	<p>Alumni 54-41                      St. Louis 34-54                      Putnam Trade 41-27                      Wells 21-22                      Killingly 32-26                      Bartlett 33-50                      St. Louis 26-44                      Putnam 33-34                      Bartlett 55- 56                      Woodstock 56-21                      Killingly 56-33                      Cole Trade 76-33                      Putnam 44-27                      Wells 46-27                      Plainfield 36-35                      Woodstock 67-15                      Putnam Trade 56-23                      Cole Trade 93-36                      Plainfield 53-23 (43-23*)                      CPAC (Arrows) 31-18                      Terryville CIAC Tournament 52-33                      Plainfield CIAC Quarter Finals 55-30                      Ellsworth CIAC Semi-Finals 29-27                      Bloomfield CIAC Finals 28-27</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)                      (Source: 1944 TMHS Official Scorebook. Scores the same except where noted by "**")</p>	<p>CIAC State Champions                      (Source: Ed Devlin Report – CIAC Site)</p> <p>15 straight wins</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1945	15-6	<p>Ted Fatsi (Captain) – 273                      William Bates - 120                      Donald Maitland - 99                      Robert Willett - 74                      Paul Azud - 37                      Donald Gleason -                      “Swede” Constantine -                      Robert Rivers -                      Leo Beaulac -                      Maurice Negip -</p> <p>(Source: 1954 TMHS Official Scorebook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 50-39                      Marianapolis 44-26                      Griswold 37-31                      Killingly 49-19                      Putnam Tech 33-27                      Putnam 23-29 (25-34 Scorebook)                      St. Louis 23-41 (33-41*)                      Bartlett 25-33                      Woodstock 39-7                      Bartlett 30-50 (31-51 Scorebook)                      Pomfret 26-57 (27-59 Scorebook)                      Griswold 50-30                      Woodstock 54-15                      Wells 50-28                      CPAC (Arrows) 50-33                      Putnam Tech 46-22                      Wells 42-22                      St. Louis 38-47                      Putnam 42-31                      CIAC - Win                      CIAC Quarter Finals                      Simsbury 36-33                      CIAC Semi-Finals – Lost - Bethal</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)                      (Source: 1945 TMHS Official Scorebook except where noted by “**”)</p>	<p>CIAC Semi Finals                      (Source – March 6, 1945 CIAC Tournament handout)</p> <p>Missing CIAC Scores                      (Source:/4 and semi-finals – Tournament handout from the Jewell family)</p> <p>NOTE: MISSING CIAC SCORES</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1946	22-1 NOTE: Undefeated regular season 17-0	William Bates - 252 Donald Maitland (Captain) - 230 Rene Blanchette - 182 Swede Constantine - 83 Paul Azud - 78 Robert Rivers - 59 Rich Thomas - 24 Donald Peterson - 17 Danny Almquist - 11 Mathew Pieper - 8 Joseph Rogalski - 8 James E. Mack (Manager)  (Source: 1946 TMHS Yearbook)	Alumni 42-31 Plainfield 49-27 St. Louis 38-20 Killingly 57-34 Bartlett 37-28 Woodstock 48-23 St. Louis 48-45 Marianapolis 41-27 Pomfret 45-30 Putnam Tech 27-25 Killingly 43-33 Putnam 33-31 Wells 42-32 Bartlett 51-30 Putnam 43-34 Plainfield 46-39 Cluett Arrows 37-35 Wells 38-21 Putnam Tech 38-34 Thomaston CIAC Tournament 34-28 Killingly CIAC ¼-Finals 41-33 Bloomfield CIAC Semi-Finals 29-36 Shamrock Bay 45-44  (Source: 1946 TMHS Yearbook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report)	QVC Champions CIAC Semi-Finals  (Source: 1946 TMHS Yearbook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report)  Undefeated regular season 21 straight wins



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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1947	9-10	<p>Andrew Ducharme - 126  Rene Blanchette (Captain) – 111  Robert Rivers - 84  Danny Almquist - 40  Tommy Tanacea - 32  Donald Peterson – 52  Joseph Rogalski – 15  Christy Carabina – 11  James Karanpanos - 9  George Dargati – 7  Jim Naum - 6  Rich Laflamme – 1  Mathew Pieper – 1  Francis Ungerer - 0  Vangel Angelo – 0  Stanley Jezierski - 0  Benny Wrubleski – 0</p> <p>(Source: 1947 TMHS Yearbook)  (NOTE: Score book was missing several games to include both Killingly games)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni - Won  Putnam Tech 40-44  Plainfield 43-34  Wells 26-56  Bartlett 35-28  Woodstock 48-37  Griswold 36-53  Pomfret 30-33  Marianapolis 39-35  St. Louis 29-36  Griswold 24-47  Killingly 44-33  Putnam Tech 49-51  Putnam 18-45  Plainfield 46-45  Bartlett 47-46*  St. Louis 51-53*  Killingly Won**  Wells 30 - 43*</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)  (Source: 1947 TMHS Official Scorebook)  (Source: "*" Newspaper article)  ("**" Unable to verify this game)</p>	

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1948	15-7	<p>George Dargati – 253  Tommy Tanaces – 208  Danny Almquist (Captain)– 183  Vangel Angelo – 95  Stanley Jezerski – 53  James Karapanos – 48  Benny Wrubleski – 37  Richard Laflamme (Captain) – 33  James Naum – 25  Christy Carabina – 18  Francis Ungerer – 13  Donald Garvais – 9  Richard Vrabel (Manager)</p> <p>(Source: 1948 TMHS Yearbook)</p>	<p>Alumni 37-34  Lyman 51-27  Griswold 36-38  Plainfield 40-31  St. Louis 43-51  Putnam Tech 34-29  Bartlett 42-39  Wells 32-39  Woodstock 47-26  Plainfield 54-52  St. Joseph 54-22  Pomfret 36-29  Griswold 42-26  Woodstock 37-26  Killingly 38-53  Putnam High 42-36  Putnam Tech. 48-39  St. Louis 38-42  Putnam High 36-42  Wells 43-35  Bartlett 24-32  Bacon CIAC Tournament 40-38  Morgan CIAC Quarter Finals 40-42</p> <p>(Source: 1948 TMHS Yearbook)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p>	<p>CIAC States- Quarterfinals</p> <p>(Source: 1948 TMHS Yearbook)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1949	19-4	<p>George Dargati – 436  Thomas Tanacea - 269  Francis Ungerer (Captain) - 152  Christy Carabina - 135  James Naum - 133  James Karapanos - 93  Donald Gervais - 45  Benny Wrubleski – 45  Richard Hagstrom - 34  Tasi Vriga - 28  Nick Angelo – 30  Joseph Augustynski - 15  Jim Sali – 2  Pat Forgit (Manager)</p> <p>(Source: 1949 TMHS Yearbook)</p>	<p>Alumni (Win)  Woodstock 66-35  Stafford 56-36  St. Louis 41-38  Plainfield 54-26  St. Louis 31-35  St. Joes 59-28  Killingly 42-55  Putnam Tech 41-37  Bartlett 57-36  Griswold 33-25  Killingly 44-41  Putnam 37-41  Pomfret 31-34  Plainfield 69-41  Wells 40-24  Putnam 41-40  Putnam Tech 35-33  Hawley CIAC 76-31  Portland CIAC 1/4-Finals 44-38  Berlin CIAC Semi-Finals 38-36  Morgan CIAC Finals 62-31  Sacred Heart (NE Championship) 41-48</p> <p>(Source: 1949 TMHS Yearbook)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p>	<p>CIAC State Champions  (Source: 1949 TMHS Yearbook)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p> <p>QVC Champions  (Source: Trophy – Trophy Case)</p> <p>New England Championships</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1950	28-0	<p>George Dargati - 529  Thomas Tanacea - 264  Francis Ungerer - 183  Jim Naum - 159  Christy Carabina - 123  James Karapanos - 104  Tasi Vriga - 94  Richard Hagstrom - 46  Nick Angelo - 38  Joseph Augustynski - 37  Marvin Babbitt - 2  Benny Wrubleski - 0</p> <p><b>Tournament Points</b>  George Dargati - 74  Thomas Tanacea - 33  Francis Ungerer - 22  Jim Naum - 25  Christy Carabina - 12  James Karapanos - 11  Tasi Vriga - 2  Richard Hagstrom - 2  Nick Angelo - 7  Joseph Augustynski - 2  Marvin Babbitt -  Nevret Ali - 1  Manager: Robert Forgit  (Source: Norwich Bulletin article March 17, 1950)</p> <p>(Source: Copy of tournament summery compliments of Ed Devlin)</p>	<p>Alumni 41-39  <b>(START OF 46 GAME WINNING STREAK)</b>  St. Louis 38-20  Griswold 66-35  Plainfield 60-28 (Devlin: 60-48)  Killingly 90-32  Putnam Tech. 53-35  Plainfield 67-41  Wells 45-26 (Devlin: 45-28)  Woodstock 67-28 (Devlin: 67-47)  Bartlett 49-46  Woodstock 71-42 (Devlin: 72-41)  Stafford 49-37  Killingly 64-41  Putnam 54-36  St. Joes 57-37  Pomfret School 60-31  Stafford 49-37 (Devlin: 47-34)  Wells 59-32  Bartlett 43-31  St. Joes 63-37  Putnam 48-37  Griswold 67-59 (Devlin: 67-50)  St. Louis 55-30  Putnam Tech 81-45  Simsbury CIAC  Tournament 46-44  Suffield CIAC 1/4 –Finals 46-40  Farmington CIAC Semi-Finals 59-31  Ellsworth CIAC Finals 40-26</p> <p>(Source: Norwich Bulletin article March 17, 1950)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p>	<p>CIAC State Champions</p> <p>QVC Champions  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p> <p>QVC Champions  (Source: Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)</p> <p>Undefeated Season 28-0 (First in State history)  Scored 1587 to 915 (56.7 vs 32.7)</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1951	25-1	<p>Ron Brayton - 390  Tom Hession - 287  Ted Vriga - 286  Tasi Vriga - 245  Nick Angelo - 152  Joseph Augustynski - 128  Stuart Joslin - 47  Rudy Chenette - 18  Nevret Ali - 17  Danny Almquist - 13  Walter Elliot - 7  Martin - 7  Peter Bertschmann - 4</p> <p>(Source: 1951 TMHS Official Scorebook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 47-50  Stafford 36-35  St. Louis 40-27  Griswold 53-32  Plainfield 61-40  Putnam Tech 49-42  Killingly 46-36  Plainfield 55-43  Southbridge 42-30  Bartlett 40-31  Putnam Tech 43-36  Putnam 60-38  Woodstock 91-65  Stafford 59-33  Killingly 87-57  Griswold 62-45  St. Joes 68-35  Woodstock 70-20  Bartlett 50-53  <b>(End of 46-game winning streak)</b>  Wells 62-56  Putnam 53-40  Pomfret 40-31  St. Louis 62-41  Ellsworth CIAC Tourney 52-43  Old Say. CIAC Quarter Finals 61-40  Terryville CIAC Semi-finals 45-39  Berlin CIAC Finals 45-39</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)  (Source: 1951 TMHS Official Scorebook)</p>	<p>CIAC State Champions  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)  (Source: 1951 TMHS Official Scorebook)</p> <p>QVC Champions  (Source: Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)</p> <p>17 straight wins</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1952	22-3	Ronald Brayton - 368 Tommy Hession - 255 Ted Vriga - 222 Joe Augustynski - 182 Stewart Joslin - 174 Peter Bertschmann - 106 Walter Elliot - 39 Rudy Almquist - 30 Rudy Chenette - 26 Nevzat Ail - 22 Jerry Ryscavage - 18 Johnny Naum - 8  (Source: 1952 TMHS Yearbook)  OFFICIAL TMHS J.V. SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE	Alumni 44-43 St Joes 65-30 Stafford 43-36 Griswold 59-42 St. Louis 45-40 Putnam Tech. 55-36 Plainfield 49-40 Killingly 80-60 Wells 58-36 St. Joes 71-24 Bartlett 68-48 Stafford 69-47 Putnam 59-44 Woodstock 60-43 Plainfield 66-31 Killingly 46-43 Griswold 40-41 Woodstock 66-23 Bartlett 63-43 Wells 71-53 Putnam High 37-32 Putnam Tech. 70-42 Pomfret 60-47 St. Louis 59-63 East Hampton CIAC Tournament 26-29  (Source: Ed Devlin Report) (Source: 1952 TMHS Yearbook)	CIAC State Tournament (Source: Ed Devlin Report) (Source: 1952 TMHS Yearbook)  QVC Champions (Source: Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)  16 straight wins

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1953	21-6	<p>Ted Vriga - 699                      Jerry Ryscavage - 260                      Bobby Aucoin - 234                      Stewart Joslin - 190                      Rudy Chenette - 157                      John Naum - 133                      Gerry Mulligan - 26                      Billy Hession - 19                      Jimmy Watters - 14                      Lewis Elliot - 9                      Arlen Collins - 4                      Herbert Eskelson -                      Manager</p> <p>(Source – Article                      compliments of Jim Sali)</p>	<p>Alumni 64-62                      St. Joseph 76-46                      Putnam Tech 77-33                      Griswold 40-53                      Marianapolis 55-31                      Woodstock 82-63                      Killingly 42-70                      St. Louis 49-40                      Plainfield 46-45                      St. Joseph 75-48                      Stratford 47-53                      Wells 59-72                      Marianapolis 69-38                      Woodstock 85-46                      Putnam 56-60                      Stafford 53-38                      Griswold 54-47                      Plainfield 69-51                      Bartlett 60-49                      Wells 63-58                      Bartlett 70-53                      Putnam Tech 102-46                      Putnam 64-53                      Pomfret 58-43                      St. Louis 68-42                      Litchfield CIAC Tournament                      61-57                      Suffield CIAC Quarter                      Finals 62-65</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)                      (Source: 1953 TMHS Official                      Scorebook)</p>	<p>CIAC Quarterfinals                      (Source: Ed Devlin Report)                      (Source: 1953 TMHS Official                      Scorebook)</p> <p>12 straight wins</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1954	17-7	<p>Ted Vriga - 569  Jerome Ryscavage - 385  Gerry Mulligan - 99  Bob Aucoin - 94  Arlen Collins - 85  Paul Karanpanos - 61  Irving Gibson - 42  Billy Hession - 31  Vangel Thomas - 26  Cliff Jennings - 15  Jimmy Panu - 11  John Cudworth - 9</p> <p>(Source: 1954 Official TMHS Score Book)  (Source: 1954 TMHS Yearbook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 60-51  Putnam Tech 81-44  Putnam Tech 79-58  Griswold 43-52  Plainfield 57-43  Woodstock 73-47  St. Joes 73-52  Stafford 44-57  St. Louis 71-56  Plainfield 67-50  Bartlett 41-48  Stafford 47-59  Wells 52-43  Woodstock 59-50  Putnam 61-40  Griswold 47-53  St. Joes 64-43  St. Louis 78-42  Wells 79-56  Bartlett 57-35  Putnam 63-53  Killingly 40-61  Pomfret 65-56  Ellsworth CIAC Tournament 33-53</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)  (Source: 1954 Yearbook)  (Source: 1954 Official TMHS Score Book)</p>	<p>CIAC State Tournament</p> <p>(Source: 1955 TMHS Yearbook)  (Source: 1954 Official TMHS Score Book)</p>



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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1955	16-6	<p>Jerry Ryscavage - 594                      Jim Panu - 250                      John Cudworth - 185                      William Naum - 87                      Paul Morway - 82                      Paul Karapanos - 68                      John Weiss - 50                      Bill Hession - 29                      Bob Aucoin - 18                      Arlen Collins - 15                      Van Thomas - 2                      Ken Olson - 0</p> <p>(Source: 1955 TMHS Official Score Book)                      (Source: 1955 TMHS Yearbook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 53-46                      Marianapolis 90-28                      Putnam Tech 78-43                      Putnam Tech 88-43                      Griswold 64-41                      Plainfield 59-43                      Woodstock 69-49                      Woodstock 66-30 *                      St. Louis 54-59                      Plainfield 66-47                      Wells 53-38                      Stafford 49-57*                      Putnam 44-41                      Bartlett 72-61                      Griswold 57-50*                      Marianapolis 84-36                      St. Louis 60-50                      Wells 68-47                      Bartlett 46-54                      Strafford 59-63                      Putnam 56-62                      Pomfret 42-44                      New Canaan CIAC Tournament 64-48                      Stafford CIAC Quarter Finals 50-57</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)                      (Source: 1955 TMHS Official Score Book)                      Note: "*" Individual Score sheets missing. Summary in back of scorebook.</p>	<p>CIAC Quarterfinals</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)                      (Source: 1955 TMHS Yearbook)</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1956	14-10	<p>John Weiss - 340  James Panu - 223  Richard Nelson - 208  Joseph Valade - 160  Willie Naum 108  Paul Ryscavage -100  Paul Karapanos - 96  Bernard Mulligan - 76  Christy Constantine - 54  Harvey Thompson - 30  William Leveille - 24  David Babbitt - 10  Daniel Worthington (Manager)</p> <p>(Source: 1956 TMHS Official Scorebook)  (Source: 1956 TMHS Yearbook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 58-62  Marianapolis 69-68  Putnam Tech 59-34  Griswold 55-41  Plainfield 93-74  Woodstock 62-61  Putnam Tech 86-30  Stafford 59-60  St. Louis 73-46  Plainfield 70-56  Wells 58-62  Stafford 60-55  Bartlett 54-60  Woodstock 72-60  Putnam 63-70  Griswold 66-36  Marianapolis 50-56  (Team not listed) 36-37  St. Louis 65-38  Southbridge 48-55  Bartlett 51-47  Putnam 42-63  Ridgefield CIAC Tournament 41-40  Ellsworth CIAC Quarter Finals 47-50</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)  (Source: 1956 TMHS Official Scorebook)</p>	<p>CIAC Quarterfinals</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)  (Source: 1956 TMHS Yearbook)</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1957	21-3	Edward Negip Ronnie Chennette David Babbitt Richard Nelson Joseph Valade Bernard Mulligan Chris Constatntine Paul Ryscavage William Boles Harvey Thompson William Naum Clifford Svenning (Manager)  (Source: 1957 TMHS Yearbook)	Alumni 61-63 Marianapolis 71-35 Griswold 70-37 Windham Tech 68-40 St. Joes 71-42 Woodstock 65-31 Stafford 50-45 St. Louis 57-47 Plainfield 60-38 Wells 67-50 Stafford 69-35 Bartlett 52-57 Woodstock 90-56 Putnam 67-58 Griswold 77-43 Pomfret 62-48 St. Louis 60-47 Wells 69-61 Bartlett 59-49 Windham Tech 72-46 Putnam 74-48 Marianapolis 71-25 Granby CIAC Tournament 57-55 Morgan CIAC Quarter Finals 42-54  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)	CIAC Quarterfinals (Source: Ed Devlin Report)  QVC Champions (Source: Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)  11 Straight Wins

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1958	17-6	<p>Paul Ryscavage (Captain) - 403 William Leveille - 306 Bernard Mulligan (Captain) - 300 Christy Constantine - 253 Harvey Thompson - 110 Wade Chubbuck - 68 Richard Garvais - 15 Edward Negip - 14 Ronnie Chenette - 13 Merton Harvey - 10 Duarte Cabrel - 5</p> <p>Bruce Bodreau (Manger)</p> <p>(Source: 1958 TMHS Yearbook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL J.V. TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 43-53 Marianapolis 42-41 Griswold 57-30 Windham Tech 54-50 Plainfield 84-54 Woodstock 83-48 Plainfield 73-36 St. Louis 67-35 Wells 59-53 Stafford 56-38 Bartlett 56-57 Woodstock 55-38 Putnam 73-42 (* 75-41) Pomfret 72-76 Griswold 84-30 St. Louis 82-46 Wells 79-84 Bartlett 69-48 Marianapolis 51-60 Windham Tech 79-54 Stafford 67-51 Putnam 59-45 Bloomfield CIAC 50-53</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report) (*Source: 1958 TMHS Yearbook – All other data agrees)</p>	<p>CIAC State Tournament (Source: Ed Devlin Report) (Source: 1958 TMHS Yearbook)</p> <p>QVC Champions (Undefeated Season) (Source: Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1959	10-12	<p>Wade Chubbuck - 180  Edward Negip - 174  Duarte Cabrel - 174  Merton Harvey - 168  Dennis Harvey - 136  Richard Garvais - 73  Anthony Vigue - 47  Nedjat Ali - 44  Lloyd Sharples - 44  Edward Luther - 11  Edward Quinn - 7  Dennis Bayer - 0</p> <p>(Source: 1959 TMHS Official Scorebook)  (Source: 1959 TMHS Yearbook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 35-50  Marianapolis 52-45  Griswold 40-53  Marianapolis 48-39  St. Joes 77-23  Plainfield 45-43  Woodstock 35-37  Plainfield 44-38  Windham Tech 40-49  St. Louis 40-41  Bartlett 48-50  Wells 43-52  (Note: Above 4 games indicate the longest losing streak in school history to date)  Woodstock 59-46  Putnam 34-41  Windham Tech 71-55  Griswold 37-41  St. Louis 44-33  St. Joes 64-34  Bartlett 45-71  Wells 71-53  Pomfret 34-59  Putnam 65-70</p> <p>(Source: 1959 TMHS Official Scorebook)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p>	<p>Did not make the State Tournament per TMHS scorebook and confirmed by Ed Negip '59</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1960	15-8	<p>Merton Harvey - 265  Wade Chubbuck (Captain) - 219  Dennis Harvey - 218  Duarte Cabrel (Captain) - 188  Lloyd Sharples - 124  Alan Chubbuck - 91  Eddie Luther - 83  Nedjat Ali - 48  Edward Quinn - 32  William Chvirko - 12  Charles Panu - 9  Chester Chwalek - 0  Davis Burton - Manager</p> <p>(Source: 1960 TMHS Official Scorebook)  (Source: 1960 TMHS Yearbook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 39-46  Ellis 51-21  Griswold 41-62  Woodstock 53-45  Plainfield 51-52 (First loss ever against Plainfield)  Pomfret 59-51  Plainfield 65-52  Windham Tech 65-64  St. Louis 59-46  Bartlett 50-69  Wells 47-46  Woodstock 62-50  St. Joes 56-45  Putnam 42-64  Griswold 48-43  St. Joes 79-35  Bartlett 35-68  Wells 69-40  Windham Tech 76-67  St. Louis 66-40  Ellis 82-41  Putnam 45-61  Valley Regional CIAC Tournament 49-69</p> <p>(Source: 1960 TMHS Official Scorebook)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)  (Source: 1960 TMHS Yearbook)</p>	<p>CIAC State Tournament</p> <p>(Source: Ed Devlin Report)  (Source: 1960 TMHS Yearbook)</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1961	18-5 Canty 374- 118	Dennis Harvey – 414* Merton Harvey – 368* Edward Luther – 218* Edward Quinn Peter Vangel William Chvirko William Eddy Alan Chubbuck Charles Panu George Carabina Kenneth Bicki Paul Morin Chester Chwalek Victor Nizamoff (Manager)  (Source: 1961 TMHS yearbook) “**” Based averages reported in a year-end newspaper article.	Alumni 42-29 Woodstock 56-33 Griswold 49-28 Plainfield 49-37 Plainfield 64-60 St. Louis 47-38 Ellis Tech 60-38 Woodstock 48-46 Wells 56-44 Bartlett 31-43 St. Joseph 65-50 Griswold 34-36 St. Joseph 71-48 Bartlett 60-64 Putnam 50-48 Wells 61-33 St. Louis 61-46 Ellis Tech 53-27 Putnam 57-39 Marianapolis 64-48 Pomfret 59-64 CIAC Tournament –Old Saybrook 51-43 CIAC ¼ Finals – Windsor Locks 52-73  (Source: 1961 TMHS yearbook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report, except above) (* - Per Ed Luther)	CIAC State Tournament  QVC Champions (Source: Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1962	24-2	<p>Dennis Harvey (Captain) - 440 Paul Morin (Captain) - 260 Bill Chvirko - 175 Alan Chubuck - 169 Gene Austin - 96 Peter Vanghel - 81 Eddie Quinn - 45 Bob Wojciechski - 20 Peter Ward - 18 Bill Eddy - 15 Louis Leo - 11 Victor Nizamoff (Manager)</p> <p>(Source: 1962 TMHS Yearbook)</p>	<p>Alumni 63-45 Woodstock 75-20 St. Joseph 71-38 Ellis Tech 81-36 Pomfret 36-52 Plainfield 52-49 St. Louis 83-50 Woodstock 82-36 Southbridge 42-30 Plainfield 50-45 Bartlett 43-30 Griswold 69-50 Putnam 51-29 Griswold 53-44 St. Joseph 83-53 (Devlin: 88-53) Bartlett 61-45 Southbridge (Wells) 84-44 St. Louis 52-48 Elis Tech 69-46 Putnam 76-52 Marianapolis 71-47 Lyman – QVC Tourney - Won Windham Tech – QVC ¼ Finals – Won Griswold – QVC Championship – 52-43</p> <p>CIAC Tournament – St. Anthony's 61-60 CIAC Quarter Finals – Rocky Hill 52-53</p> <p>(Source: 1962 TMHS Yearbook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p>	<p>CIAC State Tournament</p> <p>QVC Champions (Source: 1967 TMHS Yearbook)</p> <p>("2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Tournament Champions 1962 – Source – Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)</p> <p>20 straight wins</p>



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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1963	22-3	<p>Gene Austin - 371  Paul Piette (Captain) - 326  Peter Vanghel-Captain - 247  Michael Molinaro - 227  Louis Leo – 176  Robert Wojciechowski - 91  Dana VaderSwaagh - 53  Peter Ward - 23  Alan Chandler - 11  Robert Hopgood - 5  David Wojciechowski - 4  Robert Svenning (Manager)</p> <p>(Source: 1963 TMHS yearbook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 51-40  St. Joseph 65-40 (Devlin: 67-40)  Ellis Tech 71-46  Pomfret 61-52  Plainfield 76-17  Marianapolis 68-54  Woodstock 83-41  St. Louis 64-42  Woodstock 80-24  Southbridge 66-50  Plainfield 64-53  Bartlett 37-42  Griswold 64-46  Putnam 37-41  Griswold 60-59  St. Joseph 44-28  Bartlett 49-40  Southbridge 52-34  St Louis 75-33  Ellis Tech 79-37  (Devlin/Scorebook: 79-38)  Putnam 46-44  Windham QVC Quarter finals 89-46  Griswold QVC Semi Finals 48-42  Putnam QVC Finals 67-59  St. Anthony CIAC Tournament 44-54</p> <p>(Source: 1963 TMHS yearbook)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p>	<p>QVC Champions  (Source: Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)</p> <p>CIAC State Tournament  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)  (Source: 1963 TMHS yearbook)</p> <p>11 straight wins</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1964	18-6	Louis Leo - 446 Michael Molinaro (Captain) - 370 Allan Chandler - 263 Dana VanderSwaagh - 220 Gene Austin (Captain) - 186 Peter Ward - 92 Eric Johnson - 25 Peter Langer - 10 Clifton Thompson - 10 Price VanderSwaagh - 0 James Kerwin - 0 Justin White (Manager)  (Source: 1964 TMHS yearbook) (Source: 1964 TMHS Official Scorebook)  OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE	Alumni 74-55 St Joe's 79-48 Ellis 93-43 St. Louis 49-68 Pomfret 76-30 Marianapolis 99-69 Woodstock 69-41 St. Louis 75-45 Southbridge 46-55 Plainfield 69-40 Bartlett 69-64 Griswold 70-49 Putnam 76-53 St. Joseph 58-40 Plainfield 47-49 Bartlett 55-69 Southbridge 60-61 Ellis 77-53 Putnam 62-61 Lyman QVC Quarter Finals 68-56 Plainfield QVC Semi-Finals 68-64 Griswold QVC Finals 53-59 Old Saybrook CIAC Tournament 57-61  (Source: 1964 TMHS Official Scorebook)	QVC Finalists (Source: 1964 TMHS Official Scorebook) (Source: Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)  CIAC State Tournament (Source: Ed Devlin Report) (Source: TMHS 1964 Yearbook) (Source: 1964 TMHS Official Scorebook)

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1965	17-7	<p>Louis Leo (Captain) - 527  Allan Chandler (Captain) - 431  Eric Johnson - 204  Price VanderSwaagh - 138  Robert Blake - 107  Bruce Leveille - 44  William Pederson - 32  Robert Putnam - 26  Bernard Langevin - 10  Richard Willis - 7  Robert Feige - 2  Justin White (Manager)</p> <p>(Source: 1965 TMHS Yearbook)  (Source: 1965 TMHS Official Scorebook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Alumni 80-64  St. Joseph 72-48  Ellis Tech 83-47  Plainfield 65-61  Southbridge 71-70  Woodstock 59-45  St. Louis 72-64  Woodstock 62-37  Griswold 64-65  Bartlett 44-42  Griswold 58-49  Marianapolis 52-39  Southbridge 57-59  Putnam 62-72  St. Joseph 72-52  Bartlett 57-71  Plainfield 57-70  Ellis Tech 72-45  St. Louis 52-58  Putnam 71-68  Wheeler QVC 73-52  Lyman QVC 64-51  Plainfield QVC65-55  Portland CIAC Tournament 70-71</p> <p>(Source: 1965 TMHS Official Scorebook)  (Source: 1965 TMHS yearbook)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p>	<p>QVC Champions  (Source: Trophy – Trophy Case)</p> <p>CIAC State Tournament  (Source: 1965 TMHS Official Scorebook)  (Source: 1965 TMHS yearbook)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p> <p>Graduated 58 students  (Source: Webster Times June 17, 1965)</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1966	11-10	Philip Charbonneau Robert Feige Price VanderSwaagh Robert Putnam (Captain) Bruce Leveille (Captain) Kenneth Bates Peter Lachapelle Gary Hendrix (Manager) Paul Martel Robert Blake William Pederson Robert Pederson Earl Norman Richard Crough Edward Asikainen (Assistant Manager)  (Source: 1966 TMHS Official Scorebook) (Source: 1966 TMHS Yearbook)  OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE	Ellis Tech 61-13 Southbridge 46-47 Woodstock 70-44 St. Joseph 62-45 Alumni 50-51 Woodstock 81-55 Griswold 49-37 Plainfield 40-41 Bartlett 41-44 St. Louis 54-56 Southbridge 69-54 Putnam 57-58 St. Joseph 67-31 Bartlett 50-66 Plainfield 53-57 St. Louis 57-50 St. Joe's 69-27 Ellis Won – Forfeit Putnam 52-44 Plainfield QVC 41-49 Canton CIAC Tournament 40-45  (Source: 1966 TMHS Official Scorebook) (Source: 1966 TMHS Yearbook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report)	QVC Champions (Source: Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)  CIAC state tournament (Source: 1966 TMHS Official Scorebook) (Source: 1966 TMHS Yearbook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report)

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1967	13-5	Robert Blake (Captain) Barry Kitka Gregory Bates Gary Courtemanche Earl Norman John Martland William Pederson Robert Pederson John Lenky Gregory Pederson Michael Guile Alan Messier  (Source: 1967 TMHS Yearbook)	Ellis Tech 75-22 St. Louis 72-66 Southbridge 64-60 Woodstock 88-51 St. Joseph 57-45 Alumni 64-51 Woodstock 65-34 Griswold 67-41 Plainfield 78-31 Bartlett 64-67 Southbridge 61-65 St. Joseph 58-32 Putnam 63-61 Marianhill 67-56 Bartlett 37-71 Plainfield 74-64 St. Louis 77-83 Putnam 60-62  (Source: 1967 TMHS yearbook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report)	QVC Champions (Source: Trophy - TMHS Trophy Case)

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1968	21-1	<p>William Pederson (Captain) - 573  Greg Bates - 312  John Lenky - 276  Alan Messier - 141  John Martel (Captain) - 125  Greg Pederson - 93  Dennis Surprenant - 32  Barry Kitka - 15  Paul Lenky - 8  Charles Valade - 7  Gary Courtemanche - 6  Michael Guile - 3  Jeffrey Schwend - 0  Gregory Kneeland - 0  Kirk VanderSwaagh (Manager)  Kevin Rothwell (Scorer)  George Arsenault (Asst. Manager)</p> <p>(Source: 1968 TMHS Official Scorebook)  (Source: 1968 TMHS Yearbook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Woodstock 68-50  Ellis Tech 83-42  Plainfield 73-47  Alumni 72-51  Southbridge 69-52  Griswold 69-53  Southbridge 78-61  Bartlett 74-58  Putnam 66-51  St. Joseph 57-35  Woodstock 91-49  Ellis Tech 80-23  Marianapolis 70-43  Bartlett 85-71  Plainfield 77-65  Putnam 79-57  Ledyard QVC Quarter Finals 96-63  Griswold QVC Semi Finals 69-50  Norwich Tech QVC Finals Tech 54-45  Somers CIAC Tournament 77-60  Woodstock CIAC Quarter Finals 56-39  Litchfield CIAC Semi-Finals 48-52</p>	<p>QVC Champions  (Source: Trophy –TMHS Trophy Case)</p> <p>CIAC Semi-Finals</p> <p>Undefeated regular season  21 straight wins</p> <p>(Source: 1968 TMHS Official Scorebook)  (Source: Ed Devlin Report)  (Source: 1968 TMHS Yearbook)</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1969	17-5	<p>R. Blain Merrill Robbins Charles Aucoin R Morrill Forrest Temple James Siekierski K. Schempp Al Woodward M. Welch James Rice Michael Masley Robert Guillette John Eddy Rene Dumas William Salvas</p> <p>(Source: 1969 TMHS yearbook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Woodstock 71-62 Ellis Tech 101-56 Plainfield 45-38 Alumni 61-52 Griswold 54-51 Griswold 47-54 Parish Hill 63-37 Putnam 68-69 Bartlett 58-65 Woodstock 75-41 Ellis Tech 87-44 Southbridge 75-58 (Devlin: 75-38) Bartlett 57-41 (Devlin: 55-41) Plainfield 77-49 (Devlin: 79:49) Parish Hill 78-29 Southbridge 63-51 Putnam 75-41 Ledyard QVC 61-34 Woodstock QVC 72-49 Griswold QVC Finals 46-55 Northwestern Regional CIAC 48-46 Woodbury CIAC 40-61</p> <p>(Source: 1969 TMHS Official Scorebook) (Source: 1969 TMHS Yearbook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p>	<p>QVC Regular Season Champions (Source: Norwich Bulletin Feb. 21, 1969) (Source: Trophy – TMHS Trophy Case)</p> <p>QVC Tournament Semi Finalist (Source: 1969 TMHS Yearbook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report) (Source: Trophy – Trophy Case)</p> <p>CIAC State Tournament  (Source: 1969 TMHS Official Scorebook) (Source: 1969 TMHS Yearbook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report)</p> <p>10 straight wins</p>

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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
1970	6-11	<p>Mike Bellasario (Captain) Pat Bellasario (Captain) Paul Dery R Bergeron Charles Aucoin R Dumas James Rice Raymond Sierkierski Michael Masley Robert Guilette John Eddy James Sierkierski G Champion – Manager</p> <p>(Source: 1970 TMHS yearbook)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p> <p>NOTE: Individual scores not listed but available.</p>	<p>Alumni 54-77 (* 54-97) Woodstock 56-48 Ellis 72-42 (Scorebook – 82-42) Plainfield 76-95 Parish Hill 76-54 Putnam 56-55 Bartlett 47-73 Woodstock 68-78 Ellis 72-58 Southbridge 43-71 Bartlett 57-65 Plainfield 56-62 Parish Hill 72-58 Southbridge 77-89 Putnam 68-80 Griswold 70-81 Lyman QVC 62-69</p> <p>(Source: 1970 TMHS Official Scorebook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report) (Source: 1970 TMHS Yearbook. Scores match except where noted “**”)</p>	<p>QVC Tournament</p> <p>(Source: 1970 TMHS Official Scorebook) (Source: Ed Devlin Report) (Source: 1970 TMHS Yearbook)</p>



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Year	Record	Team/Individual Scoring	Scores	Finish
<p><b>1971 Mr. Canty's final season</b></p>	<p>8-10</p>	<p>Rene Dumas (Captain) Robert Guilette (Captain) Charles Aucoin John Eddy Forrest Temple James Siekierski Robert Shepard James Greenlee G. Champion James Rice John Peters Michael Masley Al Woodward Merrill Robbins</p> <p>(Source: 1971 TMHS Yearbook) (Source: 1971 TMHS Official Score Book)</p> <p>OFFICIAL TMHS SCORE BOOK AVAILABLE</p>	<p>Woodstock 51-39 Ellis 68-37 Plainfield 43-59 Alumni Griswold 52-62 Putnam 58-72 Bartlett 52-94 Woodstock 48-41 Ellis 78-49 Southbridge 60-70 Bartlett 49-80 Plainfield 71-54 Parish Hill 57-59 Griswold 60-73 Putnam 75-76 Parish Hill 69-59 Wheeler QVC ¼-Finals 54-40 Griswold QVC Semi- Finals 57-77 Woodstock QVC Finals 58-47</p> <p>(Source: 1971 TMHS Official Score Book)</p>	<p>QVC North Finalists (Source: 1971 TMHS Official Score Book) (Source: 1971 TMHS Yearbook)</p> <p><b>(NOTE: Evening Gazette on 1/8/71 recorded the record at 496-155)</b></p>

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