

(This story first appeared in The Derrick and The News-Herald on April 16, 2020.)

I stand corrected.

Remember a while back I told you that Linesville's Dick Fox was the first basketball player from District 10 to score 1,000 points?

He wasn't.

And the guy I'm about to tell you about might not be either, but the 1,071 points Bruce Wagner scored for Cochran from 1943-46 came earlier than the 1,020 Fox tallied for Linesville from 1948-51.

What happened? Well, I was looking at a list of 1,000-point scorers from District 10 in a 2015 story from the Erie paper. Didn't see Wagner. Later on, when I found out about Wagner, I went back and checked that story. No Wagner.

Loren Shaffer of Cochran told sports editor Ed Brannon about Wagner, and he relayed the information to me. Shaffer is Wagner's cousin. I wasted little time getting on my laptop and finding a treasure trove of tidbits about the Cochran scoring machine and then had a nice chat with Shaffer the next day.

Wagner feasted on Rocky Grove and Cranberry in the old Bi-County League in the late 1940s. (Teams played each other four times a year back then.) Shaffer remembers a game (Jan. 16, 1946) in which Wagner netted a career high 35 against a pretty good Rocky Grove team that had a formidable player of its own -- stocky Fred Fetterolf who played the "1" in coach Vince Curran's 1-2-2 zone.

Wagner and Fetterolf would later become teammates on the CPT scholastics team after the high school season ended.

But it was Wagner who was such a sensation that he became known throughout the state -- at least to those who read the "Sports Across Pennsylvania," column penned by Associated Press writer Tom Shriver.

"Against Corry," Shriver wrote, "he had 19 points to astound the Beaver rooters. (Yeah, he actually wrote that.) Earlier, against Linesville, he rang the bell with 13 field goals and six fouls for a total of 32 points. Here is a lad who will bear watching."

The 6-1, 180-pound Wagner played center and guard for the Cardinals -- and it was said he could play any position on the baseball field, but was ideally built for football.

The Cochran yearbook had him down for 1,071 career points, including 499 his senior season, setting a basketball scoring record at his school "that may last for years," the aforementioned Shriver said.

The Cardinals' 1,000-point list has since grown to the teens, and Wagner is now in the middle of the pack. Interestingly, for years, a father-daughter combo held the school scoring records, Jim Patterson with 1,347 in 1961 for the boys and Jenni Patterson with 1,751 in 1986 for the girls. Kohl Bernarding has since broken Jim Patterson's record with 1,563 in 2019.

I did ask Loren Shaffer, whose father took him to Cochran games, if there was any hoopla made when Wagner reached 1,000. As expected, he said no. (Getting that impression because I see no big headlines or even a mention in the story when someone from "back in the day" reaches that milestone.) And whether he is the first in D-10 to score 1,000, who knows? There could be some long-forgotten soul out there...

Wagner, the valedictorian of his class, went to Westminster, majoring in industrial engineering. He played basketball for the Titans for four years, and was inducted into the college's Hall of Fame in 1992.

Then he worked for Goodyear Tire in Akron for 42 years and logged 15,000 miles on his bike – some of them the day before he died in 2007.

As for Fox: Born in Tionesta and played college ball at Clarion. He coached Cathedral Prep to PCIAA state championships in 1968 and 1971. He also coached at Gannon and was coach and athletic director at Mercyhurst before his death in 1997. He's buried in Tionesta.