

Two things: Jack Eckert (1,000 points) and Fred Young (state champion) with a lot of Bob Foggan and Chuck Snell mixed in.

First Thing

About a month ago I was all excited because I thought I unearthed the Discovery of the Century, at least locally.

And that was Cranberry's Foggan and Franklin's Snell, believed to be the first in Venango County to score 1,000 points in boys basketball, accomplishing the feat in the *same* game. I. Was. Gobsnacked.

I knew they reached the milestone in the same year, but I didn't know who got there first. I also knew how many points they had going into the 1956-57 season, and, obviously, how many they ended up with – Foggan 1,200 and Snell, 1,053. (Snell's scholastic eligibility would end a few weeks later. He missed practically an entire season earlier due to a skin condition.)

Anyhow, after some figuring, finagling and working backward and forward, I was 99 percent sure I had the answer: Foggan. But that wasn't the big deal anymore.

Now the big deal was they did it in the *same* game – Jan. 15, 1957, an 81-77 Cranberry victory at Franklin. Who knew? There were no balloons, no posters, no mentions in the newspaper – either in the headlines or the stories of the game. That's the way it was in 1957.

I asked Jim Borchert, who played alongside Foggan for Cranberry that night, if he remembers any hoopla being made. "Oh, no, no, no..," said the 6-3 Borchert, who contributed 12 points to the Cranberry cause. "I don't think they even had a PA system."

The 6-7 Foggan netted 36 points that night; the 5-7 Snell countered with 31 for Franklin, which had upset the Berries by the same score earlier in the season.

So, there you have it. Mission accomplished. Well, not so fast.

Somehow, I came across a fellow named Tom "Dino" Carroll who played for Oil City St. Joe around the same time. Actually, he was a year behind Foggan and Snell.

Turns out Carroll – just a year later – scored 1,323 points in his career, including 706 his senior season. That makes Carroll No. 2 behind VC's Dave Lynch (749 in 1968) on the county single-season scoring list, and No. 6 all-time with a 49-point game against Tidioute.

Carroll's 28.2 average was fifth in the state that season. Tops was future NBA star Len Chappell of Portage who scored 977 and averaged 37.7.

After that close call, I got to thinking: how many other guys are out there, from the 1950s, especially, whose records have been lost in the Big Black Hole of Yesteryear? Especially players from St. Joe. Their records weren't carried over when St. Joe closed and Venango Christian opened in 1962.

So I thought of/ looked for some of the Hilltoppers who played back then. And one guy who came to mind was Jack Eckert.

He played for St. Joe from 1950-52. Now this is the deal. Only regular season games were counted in the point totals of players back then – and not the Erie Diocesan playoffs.

If only regular season games are counted – and that's the way the newspapers, and maybe schools, did it – Eckert had 961 points. If his playoff games are counted, he has 1,027 – and that's with one of his games missing. Can't find it anywhere.

When asked, Jack Eckert said he couldn't think of any reason why those Diocesan playoff points weren't counted, and seemed very happy to accept them. Fits nicely with his third team all-state status.

So, that would make Eckert the first player in Venango County history to score 1,000 points. At least, *apparently*.

And, what's more, a grandfather-father-son combo to score 1,000. Jack's late son, Scott Eckert (1982), tallied 1,408 points and his grandson, Alex Eckert (2008), bucketed 1,156, both for Venango Christian.

Sadly, both Bob Foggan and Chuck Snell are gone, too. But theirs is still an astonishing story.

Second Thing

And speaking of *apparently*. It was believed that Charlie Winger was the first in Oil City history to win a state title.

Winger won the mile in 1954 in the PIAA track and field meet, skipped the half-mile to give someone else a chance of winning something, and then claimed both events as a senior in 1955.

But, it turns out Fred "Fritz" Young won the rope climb in the 1940 PIAA gymnastics meet. He was clocked in a record 4.9 seconds, which was smashed two years later by Mike Trynosky of Frackville. His time was 4.1.

Warren won its third straight team title in 1942. That's what caught my eye when I came across the article in the paper.

Who knew that Oil City even had a gymnastics team back then? The Oilers began fielding a squad in 1939. Oscar Collins served as coach until he left for the Army and World War II about four years later. And that was that for gymnastics at OCHS.

Young went to Penn State and lettered two years under famed gymnastics coach Gene Wettstone who won a record nine NCAA team titles from 1939-76, the first coming in 1948.

So Young, and not Winger, was Oil City's first state champ – apparently. And Franklin's Barrett Melvin was Venango County's first state champion after claiming back-to-back golf crowns in 1935 and 1936. Again, apparently.

Who knows what's buried in those old newspapers?