



Front row: Steve "Cap" Flinchbaugh, Randy Fletcher, Ted Kaufman, Frank Clark, Bill King, Dick McIntyre and Dick Fornof. Managers Larry Foulds, Curt Rodgers, Mike Heffernan and Craig Weaver are pictured along with coach Bob Lynch in between the two rows of players. Second row: Bill Bechtel, George Sterner, Kike Barszcz, Lou Stack, Gary Davis, Ray Swacha, Kirk Frost and Tim Kelly.

Hard to believe, but it had been 50 years – *fifty* – since the Oil City boys qualified for interdistricts in the PIAA basketball playoffs. Until Tuesday night (March 1) when they beat Grove City, 57-49, to reach the District 10 4A finals and clinch a trip to the state tourney. In 1972, in what was the first year that teams could advance without winning a championship, the Oilers qualified for states as the “10-3” team after beating Erie Tech. They lost that first round game to Pittsburgh Westinghouse, 73-44, at Westminster College. Little did anyone think that that would be the last time Oil City would qualify for states again until – well, Tuesday night. Actually, the Oilers’ record in the PIAA tournament is, ahem, 0-2. Their first state-wide appearance was 101 years ago, in 1921, when they won the Northwestern Pa. “district” crown – their one and only – at Grove City College. (Districts weren’t numbered yet.) But then they lost in the first round of the state tourney to eventual champion McKeesport, 35-28. All that makes it sound like Oil City is “terrible” in basketball, but that is not the case – it’s just been a series of near misses and “woulda-coulda-shoulda’s” over the years. Case in point is the early 1970s when the Oilers won two straight Section 2 titles over vaunted Meadville before finishing second to the Bulldogs (remember Jeff Davern and Biff Kress?) in 1972.

Oil City was 18-5 under coach Bob Lynch that year and was led by all-league Lou Stack (14 ppg) and George Sterner who averaged 11 points and many, many assists per game. When Lynch was asked how many assists Sterner did average, he snapped, without a let-me-look-that-up, "14." In a Christmas tournament game against Iroquois, Sterner scored zero points, but issued 17 assists.

The recipient of many of those passes was Casimir "Kike" Barszcz, a big, burly tight end on the football team who was a pretty good outside shooter in basketball – although he didn't look the part. As soon as Sterner saw Barszcz alone at the top of the key, or thereabouts, he just handed him the ball. Swish. But he also made a fancy pass here and there.

Other players on that team included Steve Flinchbaugh, Gary Davis, Ray Swacha, Bill King, Randy Fletcher, who eventually would be head coach of the Oilers.

And here's another thing, Sterner's wife, Cinda, is the mother of four children: Zach Sterner, Angela Remmick and none other than Jason and Bundy Fulmer. Jason coaches this year's Franklin team while Bundy is head coach of the Oilers.

"George has had a huge impact in Bundy and myself. Both as players and coaches," Jason said. "I'm extremely lucky to have him (as a step father). So is Easton as his grandfather." He said George and Easton have worked out three times a week during the summer over the past two years.

Easton is now Franklin's all-time leading scorer, breaking the late Randy Lynch's record. And Lynch's dad is Bob Lynch -- the coach of the 1972 Oilers.

Small world.