



Dutch Burch in action in high school. (Photo contributed by Bill Hadley.)

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As far as I know, nobody from Venango County has ever played in the NBA, but the late Clarence "Dutch" Burch was drafted by the Ft. Wayne (now Detroit) Pistons after averaging 15.4 ppg his senior year at Pitt in 1954. Burch, instead, decided to attend grad school at Pitt, and spent his adult life quietly coaching hoops at Division III Lycoming in Williamsport.

Burch was also Pitt's MVP in 1952 and 1954 and was captain his senior year. (His NBA draft status in 2012 at the time of his death at age 80 was "unrestricted free agent.")

Burch played for Oil City around the same time as Ted Marchibroda played football at Franklin (1948-50). In fact, they played against each other in both sports. Burch didn't join the 1,000 point ranks in high school when scores were in the 32-18 range, but he did make first team all-state. Burch set a single-season scoring record his junior year in 1949 when he was second team all-state. He scored 230 points and dished 94 assists, believed to be a school record at the time.

His senior year, Burch scored 361 points and handed out 137 assists in 20 games. He finished his career as Oil City's all-time leading scorer with 682 points.

Both Bob Hartz (390 points) and Howdy Rose (366) broke Burch's single-season scoring record in 1956. No Oiler has ever scored 500 points in a season; Mike Emick apparently has come the closest with 494 in 1971.

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By Penny Weichel

He is probably the Greatest Oiler Ever.

He is also very modest, very low key.

But Rennie Schneider, former physical director at the Oil City YMCA, will tell you about Dutch Burch.

"I think he is the greatest athlete Oil City ever had. That's in all sports. He was tremendous even in ping-pong, swimming and track," said Schneider, who has seen everyone the city has had to offer in athletics since the 1930s.

But Burch is known mostly for basketball. He played for coach Hud Wells' 1948-50 teams, and is Oil City's only first-team all-stater. He starred at Pitt, and was the Panthers' captain and leading scorer (15.4 ppg) in 1954. Burch was taken in the NBA draft by the Ft. Wayne Pistons, but chose to attend graduate school at Pitt. After a stint in the Army, he returned to Oil City and coached the Oilers from 1960-62.

Then he moved on to Lycoming College in Williamsport, where he coached basketball at the NCAA Division III school until his retirement in 1994.

Oil City High School will honor Burch between the boys jayee and varsity games today against Franklin.

A presentation will be made to him. Athletic director Bob Taylor hopes to do this eventually for other Oil City all-staters and state champions.

"I think it's very nice," Burch said from his home in Williamsport where he is enjoying retirement with his wife, the former Georgia Sharp, another 1950 OCHS graduate.

The couple have four children - Sue, 36; Steve, 34; Sam, 32; and Seth, 30. All live in Williamsport, except Steve, who lives in New York.

"It's a different lifestyle, but it's a good one," Burch said of retirement. He's been doing a lot of traveling and fishing. "Right now, I'm shoveling."

Today, he'll head west and, perhaps, renew acquaintances with old friends and teammates. Not that that's anything new; Butch attends his class reunion every five years.

It's been some 40-45 years since Burch was wowing those same people with his basketball prowess. At 6-2, 180 pounds, Burch played forward in high school and then was a point guard at Pitt.

"He was like a (Bob) Cousy - a tremendous faker and passer," Schneider said. "He could equal Cousy in my estimation."

Recalling one game at Pitt, Schneider said, "He had two guys on him. He would dribble the ball back a little bit, they'd go after him, and he'd go right through them and make a layup. He'd have the fans going wild with some of the moves he made."

Burch got his start in basketball watching older kids in street corner games and at the YMCA. He started playing in the Gra-Y League when he was 9 or 10.

"Everybody used to go down to the Y and play," he said.

Burch said the game eventually became easy for him because of good coaching. He mentioned a Mrs. Ward, a grade school physical education teacher; Newt Houtz in junior high; and Ralph Jones and Wells in high school.

"I had some excellent coaches," he said. "They gave me good basics and it became easy after that."

Burch said there were no high school games that stood out. "We just had a good team and enjoyed playing."

Burch also played football and ran track for the Oilers. He played freshmen football at Pitt.

"I think he's the most outstanding athlete to come out of Oil City since 1930," Well said in 1971. "I don't care what that boy takes up. He'll excel in it. He's a natural."

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