

Larry Gent and Jack Biery -- two pre-World War II Franklin High School graduates once were starters for Penn State basketball teams.

Both led the old Section 2 league in scoring – Gent in 1939 with a then-record 14 points per game average and Biery in 1941 at 12.1.

Gent, a 5-11 sophomore forward for PSU, was a regular for coach John Lawther's 1942 18-3 squad, which lost to Dartmouth in the first round of the Eastern regional of the NCAA tournament but upset Illinois in the consolation. Gent scored 21 in that game. The Nittany Lions were No. 10 in the final Dunkel Index.

Lawther formerly coached at Westminster and was a close friend of Jo Jo White, a Franklin High School teacher. White once told Joe Szafran, sports writer for the old Oil City Blizzard, that Gent, then known as "Mr. Basketball" in Franklin, was the best all-around player he ever coached. Szafran had that item in a 1943 column.

Meanwhile, Biery met Gent while playing for the CPT company team in Franklin and through him became interested in playing for Penn State, too. A Senatorial scholarship from Venango County sealed that deal. Gent and Biery were among the top six scorers for Penn State's 15-4 team in 1943. Gent was No. 2 on the team with 138 points, and Biery, the first freshman ever to play for the Nittany Lions, tallied 110.

Biery even set a Rec Hall record with 22 points, first against Susquehanna and then matching that output against Carnegie Tech.

After returning to Penn State from military service in 1946, Biery became a scoring machine. He broke his Rec Hall record with 25 against Susquehanna, although teammate Nick Diettrick broke that mark later in the season.

But Biery led the Lions in scoring two straight seasons – he had 218 on the 10-8 team in 1947 and 260 for the 9-10 squad in 1948.

Biery told the Daily Collegian, the student newspaper at Penn State, that the two things he had the most difficulty with in playing college ball was Lawther's sliding zone system and performing in front of large crowds at venues like Convention Hall in Philadelphia and Madison Square Garden in New York.

"It was kind of awing the first time I ran out on the court in New York," Biery said at the time. "It seemed like I could look straight up through the smoky haze and see a man lighting up a cigarette."

Times have changed.

Marchibroda starred in hoops, too

Another Franklin basketball player to make his mark in the days of yesteryear was none other than Ted Marchibroda, who would go on to NFL fame as a quarterback and head coach.

He was so good that he was a first team All-State selection by the Associated Press in 1949 as a 5-10, 165-pound senior guard. (Oil City junior Dutch Burch was second team that season and Rocky Grove's Corky Hunter received an honorable mention. Burch would make first team in 1950).

Back in those days, sports writers who covered schools from Districts 9 and 10 picked an All-Northwestern Pennsylvania team, which you would think would be dominated by Erie, Meadville and Mercer County players. Nope. The 1949 first team consisted of Marchibroda, Burch, two guys from Warren and another from Bradford.

You didn't see an Erie guy until the second team, one from Strong Vincent and the other from Cathedral Prep. The others were from Sharpsville and Kane along with Rocky Grove's Hunter.

The next year, 1950, it was more the same. Burch and teammate Lou Kraft were on the first team and another Oiler, Jim Blaney, was third team along with Rocky Grove's Bob McClimans. The only Erie players picked, from Vincent and Tech, were on the second team along with Meadville's Orval Jenkins.