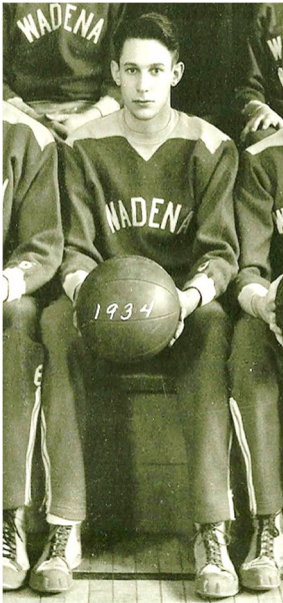


WPJ “The Time Machine” Article #6  
“Russ Askew, The Center of Attention”

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The decade of the 1930's was full of success for Wadena basketball. WHS participated in four consecutive District 24 title games from 1934 to 1937, resulting in two championships, a Region 6 title and runner up in the 1936 Minnesota high school state tournament. One of the senior leaders on the 1934 team was center Russ Askew. When compiling “The Scrapbook 1900-59” I noticed there was an Askew starting at center for five consecutive seasons from 1929-34. I could not confirm if it was Russ Askew alone or if there were other Askews involved. In those days, in the WPJ, players were generally referred to by last name only. During those five seasons an Askew was named to the 1931 All-District 25 honorable mention team and in 1934 Russ Askew was named to the All-District 24 first team, along with four other athletes. If Russ Askew was a five-year starter then he was named to the 1931 honorable mention team as a freshman. That would be very unlikely, especially since he had scored so few points in the games that had the box score printed in the newspaper. By the time he was a senior he was more of a scoring threat, sometimes tallying 7 or 8 points in a game. I might remind you that games were low scoring then, with teams averaging 20-30 points or so. Partly to blame for the low point totals was the fact that after each made basket there was a jump ball at center court.

Eventually something caught my eye that might explain how he may have earned honorable mention status as a ninth grader. In the box scores, below the player point and foul totals, there were usually a variety of other statistics. Shots and free throws missed, time outs and substitutions, etc. Then I noticed the stat, “tip-offs (jump balls) controlled.” This practice of a jump ball after each made basket was eliminated after the 1937 season. While I was aware of its use in the “old days” I never gave it much thought. Now I understand.



Let's look at Wadena's last 1937 regular season game that year and two of their district tournament games in Russ' senior season. On March 3<sup>rd</sup> Brainerd beat Wadena 31-28 in spite of Wadena controlling 20 of the 31 jump balls. On March 9<sup>th</sup> Wadena easily beat Aitkin 34-19 by controlling 36 of 41 jump balls. And finally in the District 24 title game, versus the Brainard team they had lost to nine days earlier, Wadena dominated 35-20 behind the control of 27 of 33 jump balls. Russ Askew was indeed “The Center of Attention” after every made basket. In those three games Askew gave his team 61 more possessions than their opponents.

Russ looked tall and lanky, and I would bet he had great timing and an impressive vertical jump. He was surely a top rebounder as well. Now I understand his contribution to the success of Wadena High School basketball and his selection to two all-district teams. I had a chance to talk with his niece, Teresa Askew ('76), who is well versed in the Askew family history, and she was sure that Russ was a 5-year starter.

After achieving the rank of Master Sargent in the U.S. Army Russ was a career salesman in Wisconsin and very active in fundraising for high school all-star basketball games. Russ died unexpectedly of a heart attack in February of 1990 while selling tickets for one of those all-star games. He was laid to rest in the Wadena cemetery.