

The Time Machine

Dynamic Duos

1950's

In 1966 I was 10 years old, and all fired up over a new TV show starring Adam West and Burt Ward as Batman and Robin. POW! They were indeed a dynamic duo fighting crime as they worked with Gotham City PD Commissioner Gordon.

As I have researched and documented WHS basketball sports history it occurred to me early on that Wadena basketball has had its fair share of dynamic duos, BAM! This first article will examine the 1950s. We shall visit three sets of dynamic duos, one set at the beginning, one in the middle and one set at the end of the decade....SWISH!

WHS Mid-State All-Conference

1955 Dick Shearer Dale Skalisky

1956 Dick Shearer

1957 None

1958 Bill Gaslin Sam Phillips

1959 Bill Gaslin Sam Phillips



1950 – Bob Hedstrom and Maurice (Pat) Merickel Jr.

Coach Shirley “Whitey” Held 1945-50

Our first duo will probably seem familiar to you. Bob Hedstrom was featured in Article #7, in the March 16, 2023, WPJ. Pat Merickel, and his family were featured in articles #10, published last May 18, and article #11, published June 15.

Hedstrom and Merickel experienced a change that most high school athletes don't experience. The school colors were orange and white when their sophomore school year started in 1947. Often referred to as the “Orangemen” that was about to change due to a shortage of the color orange (red and yellow required). My thought is that the needs of our military had something to do with that. Starting in 1948 the blue and gold was born. But first we must complete the 1947-48 season in orange and white. Four wins and 18 losses later the season was done as were the old uniforms. With a full season of varsity experience these two sophomores were ready to be dynamic.

Both were 3-year starters. Hedstrom earned all-district 24 honors twice and as a junior was named to the 5-man all Central 10 conference team. He was the 2nd leading scorer in the conference, averaging almost 16 ppg. Consider these opponents: Aitkin, Alexandria, Bemidji, Brainerd, Crosby-Ironton, Detroit Lakes, Little Falls, St. Cloud Tech, and Staples.

In their junior year they finished 12-8 with a 9-6 record (3rd (t)) vs Central 10 conference opponents and a 7-3 (2nd) record vs District 24 opponents.

As seniors Wadena finished 17-6 overall and went 8-2 (2nd) vs District 24 opponents. Highlights include a big win over Brainerd 61-54, with Hedstrom scoring 37, while Merickel added 15. For Brainerd this would be their only loss of the regular season, finishing 22-1.

In the District 24 tournament the dynamic duo was on full display. Going into the tournament the individual scoring record for three games was 54 points. Merickel scored 59 points to break the record. However, his teammate dropped in 64 points to establish a new record. Hedstrom also broke the single game record when he put up 31 points against Pillager.

In the first two games of the district tourney Hedstrom scored 18 and 31 points. Merickel scored 18 and 17 points. In the title game, against Brainerd, this was the rubber match. Unfortunately for Wadena Bob Hedstrom got into early foul trouble and played only about half of the game. He scored 15 points in the 50-47 nail biter loss. How did Merickel do you ask? He did what any good half of a dynamic duo would do when his buddy is down. Pat Merickel flipped a switch and was able to keep Wadena in the game. He scored 24 points and was almost able to pull off the upset. HOLY CLOSE CALL!



1955 – Dale Skalisky (Sr) and Dick Shearer (Jr)

Coach Ed Hasbrouck 1953-55

This dynamic duo played together the previous year and wins were hard to come by. This 1955 team would be different with the junior Shearer and the senior Skalisky ready to lead the charge. Their 14-7 record was respectable and impressive considering their first five games against district opponents resulted in losses. They managed to beat five district opponents and went 4-4 in the conference, good for two third place finishes.

Shearer led the Mid-State in scoring with an average of 13.9 ppg while teammate Skalisky came in a close second at 13.8 ppg. Both players earned all-conference awards and I believe all-district as well.

Upon graduation Skalisky went to Moorhead State University to play football. He eventually transferred to Central Washington College where he enjoyed much success on the gridiron.

Dick Shearer had one more year of WHS basketball ahead of him. He ended up as the leading scorer in both the Mid-State conference and District 24 with 19.1 and 20.2 ppg respectively. In Shearer's last 5 games he averaged 26 ppg, made 87% of 77 free throw attempts, including a 19/20 clinic against the Rangers of Crosby-Ironton.

1959 Bill Gaslin and Sam Phillips

Coach Harold Willis 1955-64



As sophomores Bill and Sam endured a 3-18 season. No conference or district wins. However, Sam averaged 10 ppg, with high games of 25 vs Perham and 22 vs Brainerd. Bill averaged 7 ppg, with a high game of 19 vs Brainerd.

The 1958 season was much better. Two conference wins, three district victories and an overall winning record of 10-9. Sam averaged 17 ppg, and Bill averaged 16 ppg. Wadena finished strong by beating C-I (only conference loss), Staples, Verndale, and Little Falls

The 1958-59 season brought high expectations with it. The Indians started the season among the favorites to win District 24 and Region 6. They began with a twelve-game winning streak; however, they were unable to sustain that momentum for the balance of the season. They did end up in a tie for the Mid-State Conference title. In the District 24 title game Wadena lost to Aitkin, a team they had beaten twice in the regular season.

Both Bill Gaslin and Sam Phillips had great careers. Both were named to numerous WCCO all-state teams of the week. Gaslin made the 12-man WCCO all-state team selected at the end of the season. Phillips and Gaslin each earned Mid-State all conference honors and both were selected for the all-region 6 team. That team was chosen by Verndale native, and Fargo Forum sports reporter, Dick Seal.

Gaslin was the leading scorer in the conference and in district 24, averaging over 20 ppg, while Phillips was right behind him at 17 ppg.

That was a quick trip down memory lane to check out some of Wadena's dynamic duos. I think I shall do the 1960s next, before the pre-1950 duos.

See you next time.