

# Lack of competition gave false picture of IU team

"That the Indiana basketball team has not had strong enough opposition in the four preliminaries of games it has already played and so easily won was expressed by Coach George Levis today, and the mentor has arranged three other contests to be played before the opening of the Conference season."

Bloomington Evening World, Dec. 21, 1920.

Life was simpler in the Big Ten 75 years ago. When Indiana University's relatively-new basketball coach evaluated his team and found they did not meet his expectations, he simply scheduled some additional games with stiffer competition.

Avid IU basketball fans will smile at the names of some of the team's opponents in that 1920-21 season. In addition to the Big Ten games, IU played the Armour Institute, Indiana Dental College, Evansville Y.M.C.A. Kokomo Legion, and the Merchants Heat and Light (of Indianapolis).

The *Evening World* of Dec. 21 reported that the Hoosiers were supposed to play the "Bluffton Phi Deltas" before New Year's, but that team does not appear in the games listed in the 1920 *Arbutus* (IU's yearbook). The university had considered scheduling a game with Princeton University, but apparently couldn't fit it in, because IU Athletic Director Ewald



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

"Jumbo" Stiehm had promised to referee a basketball game between Princeton and the University of Cincinnati on New Year's Eve.

IU was undefeated going into the Big Ten season. The "warm-up" games had given Coach George Levis a pretty good idea of strengths and weaknesses. (IU 48, Armour Institute 16; IU 37, Indiana Dentals 13; IU 44, Evansville Y.M.C.A. 15; IU 44, Manchester College 12; IU 34, Kokomo Legion 18 and Merchants Heat and Light 34, IU 21.)

Levis may have had some doubts about the outcome of the Ohio State game, but his team upset that team on their home floor. Whoever wrote the wire story about the contest, which was printed in the Jan. 10, 1921, *Evening World*, was not enthusiastic about what he saw. "Ohio State dropped its first conference basketball game of the 1921 season to Indiana by a 29-21 score last night. The brand of basketball displayed by both fives was not particularly good."

IU's next opponent was Michigan in Ann Arbor. The *Evening World* ran another wire service article about the game on Jan. 11. "(Bobby) Marxson's great basket shooting proved too much for Michigan University last night, and Indiana won its second conference game, 30 to 21."

IU's first conference home game that season was against Northwestern. The newspaper predicted that there would be a crowd of 3,000 and Levis was undecided about one of the starting guards. His first choice had wrenched an ankle in practice. Despite the substitution of another player, IU beat Northwestern by a score of 31 to 10.

By the third week in January, IU was leading the Big Ten with four wins and no losses. Curiously, Purdue and Illinois each had played only one game up to Jan. 22. Only Michigan, sitting next to the bottom of the standings, had played four games.

Competition for the IU team began to stiffen with the Minnesota game on Jan. 21. The *Evening World* of Jan. 22 gave its readers some of the details of the game played at Minneapolis. "In a sensational basketball game here last night Indiana University defeated Minnesota by a score of 25 to 23 ... The Hoosiers trailed at the end of the first half by a score of 14 to 9."

IU was still leading the Big Ten on Jan.

25. University of Chicago fans were grumbling about the fact that IU and Purdue, the two teams with the best win-loss records that year, didn't have to play Chicago, Illinois or Wisconsin. IU had other non-conference games to play — Carleton College, the University of Louisville and DePauw University.

The Minnesota game was the turning point. The explanation was a summary of the season in the *Arbutus*. "The next game, although won from Minnesota at Minneapolis, was disastrous, for the team suffered injuries which handicapped their play for the rest of the year." One of the players twisted a knee and another caught a cold. Still a third player strained a tendon in his arm in practice the following week.

When all of the games had been played and the statistics analyzed, IU ended up in sixth place behind Purdue, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota. Three of the players on the IU team that year will be remembered by longtime Bloomingtonians — Bobby Marxson, who played on the Bloomington High School championship team of 1917; Everett Dean, who later became IU basketball coach; and Edward VonTress, who held posts at the university with the Alumni Association and the IU Foundation.

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