

Excerpts from an article appearing in the Sunday, March 12, 1995 Parkersburg News written by Dan Hose entitled, "Normantown Celebrates 50th Anniversary of Title."

"It was one of those once-in-a-lifetime things."

That's how Eugene "Bootjack" Williams describes the accomplishment of his basketball team at little Normantown High School which won the West Virginia state championship 50 years ago.

The Vikings edged undefeated Logan 50-49 in the finals at Morgantown. What a story!

But a bigger story is how it all came about. World War II played a key role. Most young men were called to military service by Eugene Williams was kept home because of a physical impairment and drafted into coaching.

The four juniors who teamed with a little freshman guard were to be part of the Gilmer County high school's largest graduating class up to that time – 33.

The 25-year old coach had to finagle gasoline rationing stamps so he could get enough gasoline to get his team out of Normantown and into Morgantown.

After Normantown's opening victory in the state tournament, a farmer tossed a canvas over his cattle truck and hauled a load of students on Saturday the 90 miles up U.S. 119 to Morgantown so they could root on their Vikings in the semifinals and finals.

Normantown, which finished 25-1, won eight tournament games. The streak included four one-point victories, one two-point and three in the range of nine to fourteen points.

Two of those one-point squeakers came on the same day in the sectional over Glenville and Spencer. The Vikings beat Morgantown by two points and the same day stopped Logan by one point for the championship.

"It wasn't easy to day," says Williams. Those boys I had didn't know when to quit."

Eugene Bennett of Spencer, one of two surviving members of the starting five, offers similar sentiments about the Vikings' gritty steering on the title wave."

"It showed me through the years that if you have the desire, you could do anything you want to do," says Bennett. "I think determination did it. We all worked for the gas company and we were raised to work hard." Glennard Vannoy, the other surviving starter... also did some coaching, according to Williams.

The Vikings were a good-sized crew for their era. Bennett, Vannoy, and Earl "Tex" Gainer were all 6-foot-2. Ernest Duskey was 5-foot-11. Those four were juniors. The other starter was Blain Wright, a 5-foot-8 freshman who was killed in a car wreck his junior year.

Gainer and Vannoy made the all-state tournament team. After military service, they helped Glenville State College win the West Virginia Conference championship in 1951. Gainer became a successful high school coach – at Normantown.

The Vikings' lone loss came 38-35 to Spencer when Gainer and Wright were absent because of the flu. (Editorial Note: Other sources claim that Gainer's absence for this game was owing to a sprained ankle.)

In the sectional at Glenville, recalls Williams, the Vikings beat Tanner "maybe 13 or 14 points," followed by the one-point verdicts over Glenville and Spencer. In the regional at Clarksburg, the coach says there was "a relatively easy nine or ten point win over Cairo, then the one-point nod over Clarksburg Washington-Irving.

The first victory in the state tournament came 42-33 over Bluefield. Other first round scores were: Morgantown 42, Kinwood 31; Logan 44, Charleston Stonewall Jackson 42; Beckley 76, Warwood 54.

In the first semifinal contest Saturday afternoon, Normantown nipped Morgantown 37-35. Logan stayed undefeated in its favorite role, downing Beckley, 54-49.

About 4,500 fans packed the old West Virginia University Fieldhouse just hours later for the final chapter of Normantown's stunning saga. The highly heralded big school led 28-24 at the half, and 37-28 midway of the third quarter. The little school of Gilmer County made the winning move, outscoring the Wildcats 16-1 to capture a 44-38 lead early in the fourth period.

But, it was far from over. Logan made four foul shots and a field goal to catch up at 44 with 4:45 remaining. In the next two minutes, Normantown scored its final six points on two baskets by Gainer and one by Bennett for a 50-44 margin with 2:15 left.

A Logan free throw and two baskets by Charlie Porter cut Normantown's lead to 50-49 but only 15 seconds remained after Porter's 27th point. The Vikings held the ball and the state championship belonged to the smallest of them all.

Normantown had fought off a similar comeback by Morgantown in the semifinals earlier that day. Vannoy's free throw lifted the lead to 37-32 with about a minute left. Zeke Sine sank a foul shot, then hit a long field goal to pull Morgantown within 37-35 with 15 seconds left.

A foul was called on Normantown and the trailing team elected to take the ball out of bounds rather than go to the foul line. A quick pass went to Lefty Vanderfort underneath and his shot looked like the tying basket. But it missed. In the rebound scramble, Morgantown put up three more shots but didn't connect. The game belonged to the underdogs, and the storybook ended.

Even reaching the tournament site presented another problem for the rural school 10 miles from Glenville on U.S. 33. There was a war on.

"I even had to beg gasoline to get to Morgantown," Williams says. "I even went to the rationing board down there and they wouldn't let me have it."

Williams turned to his Troy High School coach's father, Howard Westfall of Letter Gap, who had some trucks and a supply of rationing stamps.

“He didn’t have a car. He said, ‘I’ll take you in my truck.’ I said no to that. He filled up our cars and gave me enough stamps to get home on.”

Williams had sat out one year of college due to a mastoid which left him with one ear. That’s what kept him out of the Army and forced him into coaching.

His first year out of college, he was principal and taught at Cedarville School.

“After one year, they sent me to Normantown. Frank Martino had gone into the Navy, Arthur Moore went into the service. There was nobody to coach the team. They sent me over there and said, “Do it.”

Normantown went 17-3 his first season. Then came the stupendous championship. After two more seasons Williams decided he’s had enough of coaching.

“It just got to me. It was playing on my nerves so I got out of it. The competition in that county was very, very keen, and you won or else. I took it for a while but I decided not to take it anymore.

Banquets and accolades were showered upon the Normantown conquerors in the ensuing weeks. They were honored at the 1962 and 1985 state tournaments.

The national press took note of Normantown’s feat.

“The New York Times had an editorial noting how a little town from the hills of West Virginia could do that. It wasn’t very long, but it was nice.”

In the Coaches’ own words on the Gold Anniversary, “ It was one of those once-in-a-lifetime things.”

Selected notes from the program of the Thirteenth Annual Little Kanawha Valley Sectional Tournament, Friday and Saturday, March 9 and 10, 1945, Glenville State College Gymnasium.

Director of Tournament	Earl R. Boggs
Treasurer	Gilbert Reed
Tournament Referee	O. B. Ffarren
Score Keeper	Harold Everly
Time Keeper	L. H. Gibson

Coaches:

Walton	Ted Garrett
Troy	Jesse Bell, Jr.
Tanner	Lynn Holstein
Spencer	Richard Simmons
Sand Fork	Alton Peters
Normantown	Eugene Williams
Glenville	“Joe” Hall

Overview written by Don “Fultonivick” Shreve and entitled, “Fultonivick’s Feudidn’s:

The Normantown Vikings are undoubtedly the best team in the Tournament. The Normantown lads have only lost one game and that was because their great offensive star, Earl Gainer, could not play because of a sprained ankle. The Normantown team has one of the best guards in the state in the person of Glennard Vannoy. The Vikings, provided they play their usual brand of ball, should have little trouble in sailing through the Tournament.

In the lower bracket the favorite team is the Spencer Yellow Jackets. The Yellow Jackets can make it tough on any team they play. The Spencer five are led by Mace, Brannon and Hall. They are the only team to hold a victory over Normantown and when these teams meet in the finals, it promises to be a real game.

The dark horse of the Tournament is Sand Fork. The Lions are lead by the best left-handed shot in the Valley in the person of “Mossy” Garrett. Sand Fork has the fightingest team in the Tournament and should not be counted out until the final whistle has blown.

The Glenville Red Terrors seem to be fourth choice as the 1944 Tournament Champions. They are rather unfortunate in being in the same bracket with Normantown and shall probably lose out in the semifinals to that team. The Terrors have no outstanding players but instead have ten boys of practically the same caliber.

The remaining three teams are considered to have a very slim chance of winning the Tournament. One should remember, however, that it is hard to predict what will happen in a Tournament because when the final whistle has blown the new champion might well be Troy, Tanner or Walton.

All of the coaches are veterans of past Tournaments except one, Lynn Holstein, present coach of Tanner. The remaining coaches had teams in last year’s Tournament.

The prize for the hard-luck player of the Tournament should go to Junior Boggs of Tanner. Boggs will be 20 years old the first day of the Tournament and thus becomes ineligible to

participate. His high school career was interrupted to serve in the armed services. Boggs was honorably discharged the past year after serving on the Anzio Beachhead in Italy. He is back in school now, finishing his senior year.

First Round:

Normantown defeated Tanner

Glenville defeated Walton

Spencer defeated Troy

Sand Fork defeated Redrawn (Tanner)?

Second Round:

Normantown defeated Glenville

Spencer defeated Sand Fork

Third Round:

Normantown defeated Spencer

Normantown roster:

Coach: Eugene Williams

Manager: Douglas Carpenter

Cheerleaders: Jean Roberts and Betty Whitesel

Players and Numbers:

Gainer	20
Vannoy	15
Duskey	21
Bennett	16
Wright	19
Conrad	17
Boggs	14

Roberts	18
Turner	12
Brown	13
Marks	33

All-Tournament First Team

F	Mace	Spencer
F	Brannon	Spencer
C	Gainer	Normantown
G	Vannoy	Normantown
G	Hupp	Glenville

All-Tournament Second Team

F	Hall	Spencer
F	Garrett	Sand Fork
C	Skinner	Sand Fork
G	Fultineer	Glenville
G	Marshall	Sand Fork

Best Appearing Team: Walton High School (20 tickets to Pictureland donated by C. W. Marsh)

Player Making Longest Shot: Horton (box of candy donated by Campbell's Service Station)

High Scorer: Gainer (tie donated by McCullough's Dept. Store)

High Scoring Substitute: Conrad (unknown donated by O. R. Griffith)

Best Cheerleader: Whitesel (jar of handcream donated by Pritt's Beauty Salon)

Best All-Around Player: Brannon (box of stationary donated by the Glenville Democrat)

Best Left-Handed Shot: Garrett (free meal donated by Conrad's Restaurant)

Hard Luck Player: Boggs (unknown donated by Kanawha Bakery)

Best Sport of Tournament: Horton (\$3.00 donated by "Coon" Davis)

Most Valuable Player to Winning Team: Vannoy (tie donated by Hub Clothing Company)

Most Valuable Player to Runners-Up: Horton (belt donated by Calhoun Super Service)

Best Passer: Mace (\$1.00 donated by the A & P Tea Company)

(Note: there were other awards for which my records are incomplete)

Just a couple of notes regarding my uncle, Earl "Tex" Gainer:

In 1963, he was named to the All-Centennial Team of West Virginia that was made up of high school and college players and included such luminaries as Jerry West, Rod Thorn, and Mike Barrett.

After a tour in the service, he received college basketball offers from Long Island University, the University of Kentucky, and West Virginia University, but decided to stay home and play at Glenville.

He started on the Normantown High School team for four years. During that time the team's regular season records were: 13-5, 13-5, 17-1, and 17-3. For his high school career, he averaged 18 points a game.

(Sorry that I do not have similar information for the other players on the team.)

A personal anecdote or two:

In the late 1960's, I was attending a WV high school boys' basketball state tournament with my uncle as I had done several times over the years. Between sessions, we went to a nearby restaurant to eat. Apparently, several people had the same idea and we had to wait in a long line before we could be seated. During the wait, a small group of people in front of us began talking about the 1945 state basketball tournament and their memories of the same having been there in Morgantown. After some time, my uncle excused himself for interrupting, and told the group that he was the center on that team. They immediately knew his name and the state of disbelief and shared memories were unbelievable. I think this was the most enjoyable waiting line that I have ever experienced.

When I was growing up about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the Normantown High School, our only neighbors were an older couple, he a farmer, and she a cook at the school. They used to tell

me how the people for miles came to the school during the night after the championship game and paraded up and down 33/119 yelling and celebrating until the wee hours of the next morning.