



Eight college players from '79 East team: (front row) Tim Lunt (33), David Johnson (35), Rich Gremillion (34), Greg Grant (5) and Brad Boyle (42); (back row) Troy Powell (32), George Furgis (20) and Mike Matheson (right of Furgis).

'79 East players didn't win title, but they've succeeded since

By Mike Sorensen
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Utah has had its share of talented high school basketball teams over the years. How about those Provo High teams of 1973 and 1974 with the 54-game winning streak featuring Brett Vroman, Gifford Nielsen and the Law brothers? Or how about Neil Roberts' Skyline teams of 1976 and 1977 that won two state titles behind Danny Vranes, Steve Condie & Co.?

Those teams were great, no doubt, as were many other teams over the years — such as the 1962 and '63 Jordan teams, the 1965 and '66 Highland teams, the 1972 Kearns team or the 1977 and '78 Bingham teams, all winners of state crowns.

But as far as sheer talent goes, perhaps no team compares with the 1979 East High team. That team has produced no less than eight, count 'em eight, college players, including four major college players. There may not be another team in Utah prep history that has produced such a record. And get this, that '79 team never even won a state championship! It lost in the state 4-A finals to another great team, the Mike Maxwell-led Highland Rams. That Ram team produced just three college players.

The top player on that 1979 squad, Greg Grant, has turned out to be the top player of the bunch. Grant has averaged 15 points a game in his first year at Utah State after going on a two-year LDS mission and sitting out a year with a knee injury. In '79, Grant averaged 20.3 points a game in 16 games after sitting out nine games with a broken wrist. Grant was a first-team *Deseret News* all-state selection.

Another starter on that team, although he was just a sophomore at the time, was George Furgis, who has started more than half of his games in two years at the University of Utah. Furgis averaged 10 points a game in 1979.

"That was an awfully good team," recalls

retired coach Dick Milne, who also considers his 1964, 1970 and 1981 state championship squads in the same category. "That was a very talented team, a very good *big* team."

The Leopard starting lineup was big enough that many college coaches would have been envious. Besides 6-6 Grant at forward and 6-4 Furgis at guard, there was 6-7 David Johnson at center, 6-8 Rich Gremillion at forward and 6-6 Brad Boyle at guard-forward. In fact, one reason it may have lost to Highland in the finals was because it was *too* big to handle the full-court press employed by Larry Maxwell's smaller, yet quicker Rams.

"We had a very bad game that night, probably our worst of the season," remembers Milne.

Although the Leopards trounced Highland 96-81 once that year, the Rams were their nemesis all season. Of East's four losses in that 21-4 season, three came at the hands of Highland.

Besides Grant and Furgis, the other players who have played major college basketball are Johnson and Mike Matheson, a 6-6 reserve in '79.

Johnson just completed his final year at Northern Arizona University, where he started in 10 games during his two years. This season, he didn't see as much action, but according to NAU sports information director Wylie Smith, he played a key role in season-ending wins over Montana and Montana State.

Matheson, who started his career at the University of San Francisco, had to transfer to Oregon this year after USF dropped its basketball program. He has played the "sixth man" role for the Ducks, much like he did for the Leopards in 1979. He has averaged nearly five points a game and has started four of Oregon's 25 games. As a sophomore in '79 Matheson averaged three points per game in 21 games. Two years later he helped lead the Leopards to the state crown and was a first-

team all-state selection.

Two seniors from that '79 East team, who could possibly be playing major college ball next year are Boyle and Gremillion. In 1979, Gremillion, like Grant sat out several games with an injury (broken finger), but he still averaged 17 points in 17 games. Boyle played in all 25 games, averaging 15.7 points and leading the team with 189 rebounds.

After sitting out of organized basketball for a couple of years, Boyle had a fine season for the College of Eastern Utah, where he scored 15.1 points a game and set a school rebounding record while pulling down 11.4 per game. According to the CEU basketball office, Boyle has had "several" major schools looking at him. Gremillion, meanwhile, played down the road at Dixie, where he averaged nearly nine points and seven rebounds a game. He also has had major colleges looking at him.

The final two players from the '79 team are Tim Lunt and Troy Powell. Lunt, a 6-foot senior guard, was in and out of the starting lineup during that season, averaging four points a game. He also had the highest assist average on the team. Powell, a 6-4 sophomore at the time, could only break into 10 games in East's strong lineup. Lunt was a teammate of Boyle's at CEU this year, averaging 2.2 points in 18 games. Powell, who was also a key figure in East's 1981 championship squad, saw little action in his second season at BYU-Hawaii, an NAIA school.

Two other members of the '79 East squad who shouldn't be left out are Paul Schmutz and Nalin Maxfield. Schmutz, a senior, played in 24 games as a part-time starter, averaging 4 points, while Maxfield, a junior, played in 22 games. However, neither player continued his basketball career in college.

It may not have been the best high school team ever in Utah. But there aren't many, if any, teams that can compare with the collective college success of the 1979 East High basketball team.