

# Thorp Boys Basketball Memorable Seasons

## 1969-1970 Season

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As the 1969-1970 Thorp Cardinals' basketball season was about to commence, there were plenty of predictions already being made about the starting lineup, which also produced a fair amount of excitement in the school and around the community. With famed basketball Coach Jack Tetzner returning for his 16th season, and six returning veteran players, the season was expected to produce some real buzz-worthy moments. Tetzner himself commented that the '69-'70 team was expected to be one of the toughest teams with good shooting on the outside and the inside, as well as four experienced players.

According to some of the season's players, Tetzner was one of the toughest coaches around, but he knew the game. Focused on discipline and holding very high expectations of his players, Coach Tetzner became known for producing men out on the court—and his expectations were definitely met in the 1969-1970 season.

The team, made up of Dennis Klick, Rich Wyczawski, Arlan Klapatauskas, Louis Bielecki, Dave Rubisch, Rick Kuester, Randy Boardman, Dave Keating, Scott Seaholm, Mark Boettcher, Ron Tetzner, John Nied, and Dave Morgan, quickly began putting together a string of uninterrupted victories. Six games into the season and described as "bigger than they have been in years," the Cardinals were averaging a 28-point lead over every opponent. It wasn't until game two of the Osseo-Fairchild holiday tournament that Thorp met their first defeat of the season, losing to Osseo-Fairchild, 84-66. But Thorp got right back into the swing of things, winning over Colby 52-51 thanks to last second baskets thrown by Rick Kuester—who totaled 25 points that night.

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Members of the 1969-1970 Thorp High School basketball team in the locker room.

The mighty Cardinals were flying high as the season continued, beating Neillsville and Altoona. In their victory on the road over Loyal, Kuester hit another personal high, scoring 27 of Thorp's 69 points. Holding a record of 14-1 and remaining undefeated in the conference, Thorp was a force to be reckoned with. The team went on to beat Colby, Stanley-Boyd, and Greenwood, finishing off the regular season still holding firm to the undefeated in the conference title. But one of Thorp's biggest hurdles was ahead of them: facing the undefeated Fall Creek Crickets in the east versus west Cloverbelt Championships. One of Fall Creek's players at the time—Steve Wilhelm—even went on to become one of the most decorated players in the history of boys' basketball in the State of Wisconsin. Wilhelm became the second-highest scoring player of the time with 2,235 career points. Pitted against such a tough team, led by such a precision shooter, Thorp was brought down with a score of 68-56, but the Cardinals were determined to give it their all in the WIAA playoffs.

Thorp swiftly swept the Regional playoffs, taking down Abbotsford (67-59), Gilman (87-55), and Granton (54-41), before claiming the Regional Champion title with the win over Cadott with a score of 55-40. One of the team's most memorable moments—according to the players—was walking into the newly constructed field house in Marshfield for the first round of Sectional playoffs to be played against Wausau. Unfortunately, the Cardinals met an uncommon end—defeat. Losing by only three points, Thorp went on to play their final game against Waupaca for third place in the Sectionals, where they were brought down by a turnaround jump shot at the buzzer—ending the game with a 53-51 loss.

Even though the team's season ended just shy of the state tournament, their 20-4 overall record and notoriously even-scoring offense put them in the ranks as one of Thorp's finest in the list of most celebrated teams.