

Thorp Boys Basketball Memorable Seasons

1962-1963 & 1963-1964 Seasons

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There are many highly successful and momentous seasons throughout the history of the boys' basketball program at Thorp High School, but in the 1960's, there was a two-year span that became known as the "golden age" for boys' basketball. From bringing home championship trophies and obtaining near perfect records to breaking personal records in scoring and leaving behind personal legacies—the 1962-1963 and 1963-1964 seasons might just be considered to be one of the best times in Thorp basketball history.

1962-1963 Season

Before the start of the 1962-1963 season, Class C of the Cloverbelt Conference was changing. Three area teams were joining the Eastern Division, including Loyal, Greenwood, and Dorchester-Abbotsford. It was also the season that Gilman, and Thorp's longstanding rival, Stanley, were shifted into the Western Division. Thorp would still face Stanley, but it would be a non-conference match-up.

In the 1962-1963 season, Coach Tetzner was beginning his ninth year as Head Coach. With a line-up of relatively short players, Tetzner recognized the handicap early on, but wasn't worried because he knew what the boys were capable of. Focusing on speed, articulate shooting, and a tight zone defense, the team knew they were more than able of overcoming one moderately significant shortcoming.

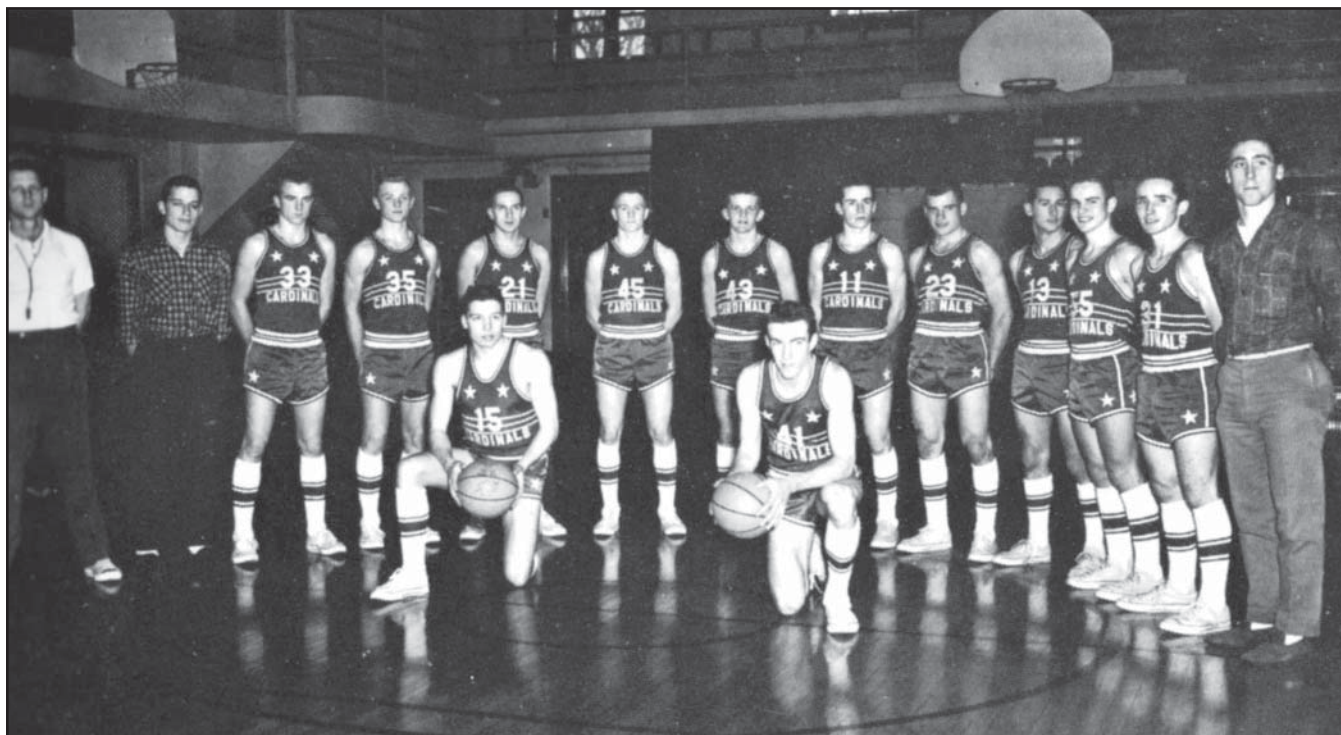
The season was off to an outstanding start as the Cardinals took down Neillsville (76-46), Greenwood (65-56), Regis (68-58), Colby (71-52), Owen-Withee (60-41), and Stanley (69-40). On December 21, 1962, the Cardinals gave Coach Tetzner a birthday gift—a seventh straight victory in their game against Loyal, 74-50. Thorp's string of triumphs was halted when the boys in red and white played Conference newcomers, Dorchester-Abbotsford. Dorchester-Abbotsford was, at the time, the home of Brian Brunkhorst, the 6'5" player who was rated as the most outstanding player in the league, averaging 20.2 points per game. Thorp held their own, only losing by two points, 53-55.

The Cards got right back into their usual rhythm of winning in the games that followed, taking down Neillsville (59-46), Regis (54-50), and Greenwood (79-55). In their next game against the Colby Hornets, Thorp's own George Lato made history, breaking the school's record of individual points in a game with a whopping 41 points. Lato's inclusion clinched another easy victory over the Hornets, 92-60. Coming off the big win, the team was riding high, and went on to produce another 90-plus point game against Owen-Withee (91-61).

Nearing the end of their season, the Cards managed to beat out Loyal (61-45) and Stanley (72-60) before coming back to Dorchester-Abbotsford for the final regular-season match-up. The Cards saw their second loss of the season—coming up short against the Falcons for the second time. But Thorp's boys rallied like heroes in the playoff game that followed, which was ironically against the only team to beat them—Dorchester-Abbotsford. After two losses against the Falcons, Thorp fought their way to the top, winning by nine points, 68-59. Thorp closed the Cloverbelt Conference, taking the championship over Cornell in the closest game of the season, 59-58.

The Cards began their journey into the WIAA playoffs by defeating Neillsville (79-59). Thorp's boys brought home the Regional Championship trophy for the first time since 1952 in their game against

Owen-Withee, grounding the Blackhawks by 32 points, 74-42. Thorp's fans made sure the small town's presence was known at the Sectional playoffs in Wausau. Going up against the Antigo Robins, who were standing with an 18-2 record and who were highly favored to win, the Cardinals served up a thick slice of humble pie—claiming the win 62-58. The Cards only had one more game to go to make it to Madison, but that final hurdle was just too much for the Cards to clear. Even with supporters from Thorp, Stanley, Owen, Curtiss, and Withee all there, filling the stands and pouring encouraging cheers into the gymnasium, the Clintonville Truckers ended the 1962-1963 season for the Cardinals with a final score of 71-87.



Pictured Above: The 1962-1963 varsity boys' basketball team. Back row (L-R): Coach Jack Tetzner, Dave Ryniec, Dennis Christopherson, Russ Boie, Tim Misfeldt, Tony Welgos, Don Nye, Terry Keating, George Lato, Bill Alger, Dennis Karnopp, Ron Sandel, and Jerry Asselin. Front row L-R): Gary Bandor and Joe Keating.

1963-1964 Season

After such a successful previous year, most coaches would be worried about the expectations of the following season, but Jack Tetzner knew his '64 team was just as strong as it was the year before—if not more so. Having only lost two players to graduation, Tetzner's bench was still deep with strong and speedy players. Comparatively, Thorp's boys were still smaller in stature than most teams in the conference, but their speed, agility, and experienced ball handling skills would do more than compensate for their lack of height.

Seven seniors, including Tom Misfeldt, Gary Bandor, Russ Boie, Don Nye, Ron Sandel, Terry Keating, and Frank Zarada, were back for the '63-'64 season, and they were ready to show their community what they were capable of. In preparation for a tough season, Coach Tetzner had the boys scrimmage against larger schools—not only to get them used to tough opponents, but to also teach them a life lesson—one Tom Misfeldt remembers well. In their scrimmages against higher division teams, Tetzner emphasized that it didn't matter that they were from a small school. There were still only five players on each side and they weren't disadvantaged in any way. That speech carried this team of hometown-proud boys throughout an unbelievable season.

Offensively, the Thorp Cardinals were in their prime, as Gary Bandor and Tom Misfeldt became the one-two scorers of the conference. With Misfeldt serving as point guard, he was able to find the open shooter, utilizing his speed and agility on the court, and becoming known as Thorp's "needle-threader." Even though the team had this extraordinary scoring duo, when the Cardinals played, it was obvious it was a team effort. Even though individual players had star quality, the team played as one.

Thorp's boys quickly began stringing together high-scoring, fast-paced games that left multiple opponents in their wake. The Cards took down Neillsville (84-48), Greenwood (70-53), Colby (93-71), Owen-Withee (81-58), Regis (81-60), Dorchester-Abbotsford (77-65), Loyal (80-46), Dorchester-Abbotsford (86-47), Stanley (83-67), Neillsville (76-63), Greenwood (81-68), and Colby (78-69). With twelve consecutive wins, the Cardinals were scoring an average of 81 points per game. Their defense was tough, only allowing an average of 60 points.

It wasn't until unlucky number 13, when the Cardinals faced their first defeat by their non-conference challenger, Frederic, 53-62. But the team shook it off and got right back into the swing of things, claiming second victories over Regis (52-45), and Owen-Withee (60-49).

In mid-February, Thorp hosted a game against their neighboring rivals, the Stanley Orioles—but this was no ordinary game. This was a banner moment for the boys and the community as the Cards christened their new school's home court with an 80-68 victory. In that game, Gary Bandor scored an outstanding 28 points and three other players were in the double digits. The Cardinals ended their regular season with one last win against the Loyal Greyhounds (85-51) before heading into the Conference Championships. Thorp was having a *deja vu* moment, returning to the Championships against the Cornell Chiefs. Knowing how close of a game it was in '63, the Cards fought hard, but the Chiefs had a score to settle after losing by a single point the previous year. In an unusually tight race, the game ended in overtime with the Chiefs on top, 66-68.

With a 16-2 record, the Cardinals kicked off their playoff journey with a win against the Owen-Withee Blackhawks, 68-62. In the second round of Regional play, the Cards were in for a tough battle against Neillsville. The game was neck-and-neck and with only seconds left and Thorp trailing, Thorp's hometown hero, Gary Bandor, sank one of his trademark 20-foot jump shots to claim the 63-62 win. Thorp earned their second consecutive Regional Championship trophy in their game against Greenwood (59-52), sending them to play Spencer for the first round of Sectionals. Once again, the Cards wound up on top, 58-46—which was a true test to their defensive strategy since Spencer was rated 11th in the state for shooting at the time.

In the Sectional semi-final, Thorp's strong group of seniors led the Cardinals to a 74-58 victory over Lena. Gary Bandor led in scoring with another 30-point game. Excitement was at an all-time high as the Cards traveled to their Sectional Championship game. Set up in a similar fashion as the previous year, the Cardinals were hoping to change the final result by earning a spot in the State tournament. Thorp gave their all, but their normally high accuracy shooting rate blew cold while their opponent, Merrill, couldn't seem to miss. Merrill stole Thorp's chance at State with a final score of 49-74.

By the end of the season, two Thorp High School seniors—Gary Bandor and Tom Misfeldt—had both broken the school's personal scoring for a single season record. Misfeldt finished with 465 points and Gary Bandor produced an unbelievable 535 points in 1964. Bandor also became one of the highest scoring individuals in the entire area, finishing his high school basketball career with an unprecedented 1,505 points.

Just shy of the State tournament two years running, holding a 20-3 and 21-3 records, and being the home to multiple record-breaking players, the back-to-back seasons of '63 and '64 truly were the golden age of boys' basketball at Thorp High School.

The class of 1964 ended their time at Thorp High School with immeasurable highs between athletics and moving into a new school, but shortly after, the class of 1964 also was faced with incredible tragedy. In the midst of the Vietnam war, the Thorp basketball team lost Ron Sandel—who served as a medic while stationed in Vietnam. Gary Bandor, who also served in the Vietnam War, was lucky enough to return home, but was killed shortly after in an automobile accident in Oklahoma.



Pictured Above: The 1963-1964 varsity boys' basketball team. Back row (L-R): Coach Jack Tetzner, team manager Bob Lato, Dan Welgos, Dennis Karnopp, Tony Welgos, Dennis Christopherson, Richard Swinotek, Bob Racisborski, Henry Budzinski, and Sam Borowski. Front row (L-R): Ron Sandel, Russ Boie, Gary Bandor, Tom Misfeldt, Terry Keating, Don Nye, and Frank Zarada.