

# Thorp Boys Basketball Memorable Seasons

## 1972-1973 Season

By Annaka Isenberger  
Thorp Courier Reporter

In the fall of 1972, the Thorp Cardinal basketball program was gearing up for another highly anticipated season under veteran coach of 19 years, Jack Tetzner. The Cardinals' program was on a real hot streak in the conference, having earned Conference titles in '69, '70, and '71 as well as a Regional title in 1970. Even before the season began, Coach Tetzner was making strong predictions for his boys in red and white, saying, "Thorp should be a contender along with Neillsville and Loyal for the Conference Championship."

Right out of the gate, the Cardinals began stringing together multiple victories, starting with wins over rival teams: the Stanley-Boyd Orioles (63-58) and the Owen-Withee Blackhawks (65-44). It wasn't long until the Cardinals were paired with another Conference leader—the Loyal Greyhounds. Up against an incredibly tall team, Thorp still wound up on top with a final score of 63-50, led by Randy Klapatauskas with 19 points. Thorp upheld their undefeated title, beating the Neillsville Warriors (79-53), who were described as Thorp's "chief rival for the Championship title." Jim Sarafin, the "big man in Thorp's lineup," had the best game of his season in the game against Neillsville, scoring 26 points.

In a non-conference match-up, Thorp saw their first defeat, being brought down by the Altoona Railroaders, who were also undefeated in their conference. The loss only strengthened the Cardinals' focus, as they went on to beat Greenwood, 60-37, before taking down the defending Conference Champions, the Colby Hornets (80-62), and Owen-Withee 68-50. These key victories led Coach Tetzner to make a public comment, saying, "This is one of the best seasons ever for this program." By late January, the Cardinals were standing with a 6-0 conference and 8-2 overall record, but it wasn't just the varsity team that was showing great strength. The junior varsity was undefeated (10-0) and even the freshmen team was holding firm at 5-2, giving the program an overall record of 23-4 halfway through the 1972-1973 season.

In late January, Thorp edged out Loyal once again (49-47), thanks to Dan Stroinski popping a 15-foot jump shot with only eight seconds left in the game. By February of 1973, the Cardinals were all lined up to take the Eastern Cloverbelt title with a 58-47 win over Neillsville, led by Bob Rubisch with 22 points. The title officially belonged to the Cardinals when they defeated Altoona, 63-57, after rallying in the second half. Coach Tetzner had lots to say about the game. "With 30 turnovers—15 by each team, it wasn't the kind of game coaches dream about, but it was exciting."

After beating Owen-Withee 64-53, the Cardinals earned the right to advance to the WIAA Regional playoffs in Spencer. Thorp's boys edged out Marathon by two points, 45-43, before claiming the Regional Championship against the Spencer Rockets, 76-61, in the finals. The excitement around the boys in red and white was mounting, as Thorp hit the road once again, but this time, to compete against the Crivitz Wolverines in the Sectional playoffs. Thorp held a 14-point lead at the half, but the Wolverines came back, changing to a man-on-man press defense, and nailing ten consecutive points to cut the lead to one point. Now with a razor thin margin between them, the teams traded buckets in the fourth quarter. With only 18 seconds left, Crivitz hit a final layup for the win.

Even though the Cardinals had just been defeated in the Sectional semi-final, Thorp's boys weren't done making a name for themselves just yet. The following night, Thorp played against Niagara in the consolation game, which turned out to be a game that nobody would soon forget. The Thorp Car-

dinals went on to win with the highest-scoring game in the team's history, 104-98. The extraordinary thing about that high score was that not a single three-point shot was hit that evening. Every basket that made up those final 104 points, came from field goals and free throw shots.

"It was one of the strangest games I've seen in a long time," Coach Tetzner commented about the evening's performance.

By the end of that game, Bob Rubisch had accumulated 34 points, Dan Stroinski with 22 points, and Randy Klapatauskas added 20.

In the end, the 1972-1973 Thorp Cardinals finished strong with a 20-4 overall record and four members of the team being named as members of the All-Conference lineup, including Bob Rubisch (First Team), Randy Klapatauskas (Second Team), Jim Sarafin (Second Team), and Mark LaVick (Honorable Mention).



**Pictured: Back row (L-R): Team manager Chet Przybylski, Dick Morgan, Dan Stroinski, Tim Ahles, Dave Bishop, Bob Rubisch, Jim Sarafin, Mark LaVick, Randy Klapatauskas, Gary Benzschawel, Loren Haas, Kurt Misfeldt, Tom Kotecki, and Manager Ron Oberle. Front row (L-R): Coach Jack Tetzner and Assistant Coach Mark Collins.**