

Thorp Boys Basketball Memorable Seasons

1991-1992 Season

By Annaka Isenberger
Thorp Courier Reporter

In the late fall of 1991, Thorp High School's energy was still running high from the Lady Cardinals' third place finish at the State volleyball tournament, but it wasn't long before the attention was being turned to the upcoming boys' basketball season. Expectations were high in the opening weeks of practice for the Cardinals. Head Coach Roger Moe—who coached under Jack Tetzner—was set to welcome back a line-up full of veteran ball players, including Lance Olson, Corrie Roytek, Roger Kosik, Mike Maslowski, Greg Klapatauskas, Dan Lew, Dion Moskiewicz, and the Cardinals' leading scorer from the last two years, Tim Hackbarth. But the team was immediately faced with a major obstacle—losing Greg Klapatauskas and Mike Maslowski to football injuries. Luckily, Maslowski's broken wrist was healed by the start of the season, but a surgery was needed for further repairs, taking him out for the bulk of the later portion of the season. "Health is the key," Moe added in a pre-season interview.

As the season was set to kick off, Coach Moe was focusing on finding ways to utilize the team's speed—a skill that would be greatly needed. "The Eastern Cloverbelt Conference is one of the toughest we've seen in years," Moe commented before the Cards' opening game. With the Auburndale Apaches returning from State the season prior and set to be a favorite for a repeat showing, the Cardinals had some big competition in its future.

Despite the early setbacks and the exceedingly steep competition, the Cardinals came to play. The season opened in a big way for Thorp's boys. Tim Hackbarth led his team to victory in the season-opener against Stanley-Boyd, scoring 32 points in three quarters, making up practically half of Thorp's 65 points over the Orioles' 42. The Cardinals strung together a list of victories to follow, beating out Gilman (43-37), Neillsville (56-46), Edgar (44-33), and Loyal (64-44). With big wins, averaging 13-point differences, Thorp was able to add in liberal substitutions in many of the early-season games, giving their deep bench time on the court.

Even though the Cards were excited to earn their fifth straight win in their game against Loyal, the end of the game was bittersweet, as it was potentially the last game with senior Mike Maslowski, who was having surgery over the holiday respite. Maslowski's impact on the team was substantial, serving as a vital defensive player with an average of 11 rebounds per game, and a key player on the inside, averaging 12 points from the post per game. Coach Moe also expressed concern over the team's leading scorer, Tim Hackbarth, being double-teamed without Maslowski's protection.

But the team didn't have much time to dwell on the significant loss. They rallied, focusing on the challenge ahead of them—going up against the Colby Hornets, who was one of the conference's leading teams. The Cards picked up where they left off at the end of 1991, going after the full-court pressure and opening up their shooters. Tim Hackbarth had his best game of his high school career, coming up three points shy of breaking a school record by scoring 39 points, and helping Thorp claim the ten-point win over Colby, 70-60. "It was our first game without Mike, but it was when the boys realized they could still win," Coach Moe commented following the win.

By mid-January, Thorp was demanding attention for their ability to overcome and their balanced sense of play, polling as the seventh best basketball team in the state.

After claiming their seventh and eighth consecutive victories against Mosinee (62-44) and Flambeau (63-62), Thorp saw its first defeat, going up against the practically insurmountable defense of Auburndale. Thorp's shooters couldn't penetrate the perimeter, leading to the disappointing 32-51 loss.

But the Cards picked themselves back up in their next game against Augusta. The final score may have been close—59-54—but the stressors of the night were eclipsed by the celebration following Tim Hackbarth scoring his 1,000th point in his high school career.

To Thorp's surprise, the Cardinals were faced with a second defeat in their next game against Greenwood. A self-described "off" night, the Cards struggled to find their rhythm, especially in rebounds. In the following games, Thorp's boys had to really fight for their wins—unlike the uncomplicated victories they achieved early in the season—but they were still coming home with the wins. Thorp overturned Owen-Withee for "the can" (49-44), Neillsville (50-48), and Loyal (48-45).

It took an emotionally charged rematch against Colby for the Cards to get derailed—the Hornets, dedicating the game to a gym teacher who had passed away, and also fighting the tough battle for the Conference title just below Auburndale. In the end, Colby out shot the Cardinals, shooting 66% compared to Thorp's 36%.

The Cardinals earned three more wins: 44-42 over Mosinee, 53-32 over Neillsville, and 51-39 over Owen-Withee—before their highly-anticipated rematch against the Auburndale Apaches, which later became known as the most exciting game of the entire season. The entire game's excitement came to a head in the final minute with Thorp leading, 38-31, when Auburndale hit two three-pointers and the Cards fouled the Apache's star player, Dale Aue. Dale missed his shots, but his brother Robert Aue came up with the rebound, taking a two-point lead. A charge was called on Thorp with three seconds left. All Auburndale had to do was get the ball down the court, but Tim Hackbarth came in, batted the ball into the air, and launched it into the air with one second left. The ball grazed the glass and sank through for the win and the gym erupted.

"If we win the rest of our games and Colby beats Auburndale, we tie and play for second place," Moe commented the big win, but things didn't go according to plan. The Cardinals lost to Greenwood (61-70), and even with Mike Maslowski returning, Thorp fell to Owen-Withee (59-76). Because of the two losses, Thorp fell to tie for third place, but due to the Cloverbelt rules, Thorp was to play for fourth place because the Cards finished in better standing over Greenwood the year before. Thorp blew away their fourth-place pairing, Cornell, 81-40—setting the stage for the games to come in the WIAA playoffs.

Leaving the regular season's upsets and downfalls behind them, Thorp won the first two games of the Regional playoffs, beating Fall Creek 46-33 and taking down Altoona, 62-37, sending them to the Regional Championships against Bloomer. "If someone told me we'd win by 30 points, I'd have said they were crazy," Coach Roger Moe commented following the 57-27 blowout over Bloomer for the Regional title.

The 1991-1992 season reached a difficult end in the Sectional playoffs. In a match-up against Elk Mound, the Thorp Cardinals played a tough and very physical game, keeping a very tight score. But the Cards fell, their season ending with a controversial foul. The Cardinals held the lead in overtime, and as the clock wound down, out of desperation, a Mounder threw a half-court shot—but a Cardinal made contact, causing the foul with no time left on the clock and giving Elk Mound three free throws. This was the first time Thorp had been hit by a three-point foul all season and unfortunately, the deciding factor for the 59-60 loss.

At the end of the season, Thorp's Tim Hackbarth was not only named a member of the Cloverbelt All-Conference team with teammate Lance Olson, he was also named one of the top 20 players in the state that year, becoming a member of the Associated Press's All-State Team.

Even though the team's journey in the playoffs was cut short by a controversial call, the 1991-1992 Cardinals' season was considered to be one of the best seasons of Thorp basketball in the school's history.



Pictured: The 1991-1992 Thorp Cardinal Varsity basketball team. Front row (L-R): Quincy Paskert, David Mertens, Dan Lew, Jason Moe, and Shannon Broda. Middle row (L-R): Tim Hackbarth, Corrie Roytek, Mike Maslowski, and Dion Moskiewicz. Back row (L-R): Jason Grendzinski, Lance Olson, Mike Disher, Assistant Coach Kent Weiler, Head Coach Roger Moe, Roger Kosik, Kirby Buss, and Greg Klapatauskas.