

Thorp Boys Basketball Memorable Seasons

2013-2014 Season

Cardinal Basketball Team Makes History in 2014

By Annaka Isenberger
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The 2014 Thorp boys' basketball team was on quite the journey throughout the 2014 season, especially during the WIAA playoffs. After a challenging season, falling to some of the conference's leading opponents, the Cardinals were determined to find their voice on the court. As the season's final weeks neared, the team of six letter-winning veteran players began to feel the rhythm of each others' play—and that's when true music was created.

On Saturday, March 15, that memorable voyage from underdog to champion reached an unbelievable end, as the Cardinals claimed the title of Division 5 State Champions with a 49-42 victory over the Green Bay N.E.W Lutheran Blazers.

The School District of Thorp has been waiting for a moment like this one for decades. In 1982, under legendary Head Coach Jack Tetzner, the Cardinals earned their chance to the State tournament's championship game, but came home with a second place finish. Since then, Thorp has not had a team make it to the state tournament—until now. The 2013-2014 Thorp Cardinals made history, bringing home the school's very first gold ball for basketball, and the second state championship title in school history, following the 1993 State Champion football team.

The State tournament was not necessarily an entirely new experience for Thorp's Head Coach Rich Sonnentag, having been a part of the state bound team in 1982, but the experience was a completely different one coming back as a veteran head coach compared to arriving as a player. "As a player, you're too young to appreciate and understand how much work it is to get here. As a coach you understand how fortunate you are," Sonnentag commented.

For one player, senior Matt McCarter, the experience didn't begin and end with spending some time on the court. Matt got a once in a lifetime chance to sing the national anthem in front of thousands of people before the start of the championship game on Saturday. "Singing the national anthem was a lifetime opportunity that I'll never forget. I'm glad I got a chance to sing at the Kohl Center," he commented.

Going into the state championship, the boys knew they had some difficult games, beginning on Thursday against the 20-7 Cochrane-Fountain City Pirates. With a final score of 54-52, Thorp's boys edged out the competition for the chance to play the championship game on Saturday. Up against one of the top ranked teams in the state, the 18-9 Thorp Cardinals had many doubters in the stands, but the Cards proved their strength, resilience, and determination throughout the game.

Coming from behind, Thorp overturned the game, tying the game for the first time in the third quarter with a long distance three by Albi Maksuti—and from there, the fire was set ablaze. The team picked up speed and began using all areas of the court, hitting shot after shot as their defense pounded on the Blazer's heavy hitters. At one point in the fourth quarter, Thorp was able to expand their lead by seven points—giving them just enough of an edge to hold off GB N.E.W. Lutheran. Coming down to a couple last minute free throws, the buzzer rang and Thorp's dream officially came true, claiming the state championship title.

“We’ve had our upper-classmen mentoring our younger players since the beginning, and look where they are. They mentored them all the way to Madison,” said Sonnentag following the big win.

With six seniors on the varsity team, winning the championship was the ultimate sendoff.

“There’s no better way to go out than with a gold ball,” said 2014 senior forward Dakota Lindgren.

“It feels great to know your last game you took home the state championship ball,” added senior guard Albi Maksuti.

“This is the best group of guys I’ve ever been with and I’m glad we got it done,” added senior point guard Eric Lewandowski.



The 2013-2014 State Championship
Thorp High School Boys Basketball Team