

## 1939 CHSAA Championship Basketball Team

Championship teams are often feted for their accomplishments even as the years pass. Stories of their success triumphantly repeated. They gain a sense of reverence in our collective consciousness for their achievement. Their names become a part of our mutual lexicon, even for casual observers. The team made a mark. It will stand for all time. We will remember it.

The 3-peat CHSAA Basketball Champions of 1963, 1964 and 1965, including the 'Team of the Century'. The famed 1970 team, who some say was even better. The champions of 1972, who overcame daunting adversity to win it all. And our last champs, who took the title in 1976, leaving humbled opponents in their wake enroute to winning their last 19 games in a row. Many of us can name a player or two or three who played on those teams. And the coaches. It's melded into our purple & gold DNA.

Alcindor (later Jabbar), Kenney, Bettridge, Toddman, Searcy, Elmore, Trimble, Donohue, Kuhnert, Misevicius, Rhaburn, Kolonics, Moss, Canning, DeMichele, Petty, Malone, et al. Their names synonymous with excellence on the basketball court. CHSAA City Champions all. And, of course, there is Toomb, McCabe, Courtney, Ezersky, Loftus. Wait, wut, who?? You know, the CHSAA Varsity Basketball City Champions of 1939.

Unfortunately, no yearbook was published that year to chronicle their achievement. No photographs of these champions has been available to memorialize their victory, to put faces to their names. Hold on one more second! We don't even know their names! There is no catalog of stories of their prowess because the events occurred so long ago. No witnesses available to share their accounts with us. But those eleven, and their coach, are ours. They will always be youthful, jubilant champions. And we will do our very best to remember them.

The 1939 Varsity Basketball Team was coached by Brother Arthur Loftus, who was no stranger to winning. A native New Yorker, Loftus had a deep love of sports from when he was young boy. When he was about 14, Loftus informed his mother he planned to become a Christian Brother. A stunned Mrs. Loftus reminded her son he enjoyed playing too much for that kind of life. His response guided his work ethic for the rest of his life, "When I play, I play. When I pray, I pray". In college, Br. Loftus took a special delight in athletics. He shunned tennis and golf but was quite at home in contact sports, utilizing a take-no-prisoners approach with flaying elbows and shoving hips. This suited him well in his first coaching stint at Leo High School in Chicago's Catholic League and then at Power Memorial where he was assigned to teach beginning in the fall of 1933.

Shortly after his arrival at Power, the school's sports programs developed a winning reputation. Accounts of the school's baseball and basketball games started to appear in local newspapers. The teams made playoff appearances. At Power it was well established that although Br. Loftus was a man of the cloth, he had little patience for the concept that you played for the love of the game. The only reason his team played with rivals was to win. He didn't favor moral victories, he wanted real ones. Brother Loftus coached the Power Memorial baseball team to New York City Catholic Championships in 1937 and 1939. His basketball teams were perennial championship contenders. With two-sport star Tom Gorman leading the way, they won the prestigious Knights of Columbus Tournament in 1937. Since Power did not have its own gym, Loftus rented one in the upper Manhattan neighborhood of Inwood. It was a narrow piece of hardwood, it wasn't even a regulation size court, but it was ideally suited for mastering a zone defense, which at the time was virtually unheard of in New York City. Opposing coaches howled in protest but could find nothing in the rulebook to prevent his employment of the stingy strategy.

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Taking runner-up honors in the 1938 Knights of Columbus basketball tournament, six underclassmen returned the following fall determined to put their hardwood floor experience to good use. The 1939 team had a big front line and, from the twenty-seven box scores we found, a balanced attack. Four different players enjoyed multiple double-digit games that season with the Panther offense averaging 36 points per game. At the other end of the court, they employed both zone and man-to-man defenses, with the latter more effective due to their player's speed. This allowed them to limit their opponents to an average of 23 points per game. Not too shabby.

Now let's meet the cagers who made up the team. With an average height of 6'-1" they were among the tallest starting five in the league, giving them a big advantage on the boards. At 5'-10", the team captain Ed McCabe, was the shortest starting player. McCabe was named an All-Metropolitan guard in '39 and led the team in scoring with 8.5 ppg. Sophomore sensation John Ezersky, a forward, was named to the All-Eastern Parochial 2<sup>nd</sup> Team, filling the cylinder with 8.2 ppg. After serving in World War II, Ezersky played professional basketball from 1945 to 1952 and was one of the original players for the NBA's Baltimore Bullets. Alternately known as Connie or Neil, junior Corneilius Toomb was a 6'-4" forward who dropped in 7.0 ppg. Toomb was named to the All-Eastern Parochial 1<sup>st</sup> Team, garnered All-ESCIT 1<sup>st</sup> Team honors, and would play professionally from 1946 to 1949. The starting center was 6'-2" senior Tom Courtney who deposited 6.7 ppg for Power. Completing the starting quintet was another senior, Walter "Bud" Conklin, a guard who averaged 3.7 ppg. Swingman Henry Barrett was the sixth man, playing up front or in the backcourt as needed. Rounding out the roster were seniors Dan Mangan, Ed Phillips, and Dan Barnwell along with juniors Tom Boland and Tom Donohue.

Going into the 1939 CHSAA finals, the Panthers had amassed twenty-two victories, including a 10-1 record over their previous eleven games. Their opponent, a tough St. John's Prep squad, was riding an impressive 16-game winning streak. The championship game was played in De Gray Gymnasium in Brooklyn before a capacity crowd of 1,200 spectators. It was Thursday, March 9<sup>th</sup>. With Toomb leading Power Memorial and Wilfred Goodwin the most consistent scorer for St. John's taking charge, the two teams waged a keen battle. Sneakers squealed, hoops clanged, backboards and bodies banged, nets swished, and the rhythms of a dribbled basketball were sounds heard throughout the gym. At times, players strained to hear shouted instructions from their coaches over the exhortations and cheers of the large crowd. This was for a championship in the city of New York. Victory would be hard earned. It would come from an earnest, honed team effort, focused desire, an execution of practiced, blended skills of talented athletes. The lead changed hands four times and was tied three times. Trailing 16 to 15 at the half, Power would gain the upper hand shortly after the start of the third period. At the end of three quarters Power held a 24-19 advantage. St. John's, however, rallied to score six unanswered points, taking a narrow 25-24 lead. Time was winding down. With twelve seconds remaining on the clock and possession of the ball, Connie Toombs scored from under the basket to give Power a one-point lead. St. John's quickly fouled. Tom Courtney converted his shot from the free throw line to give Power Memorial a two-point margin and as time ran out, a victory, for the school's first CHSAA City Championship title by a final score of 27 to 25.

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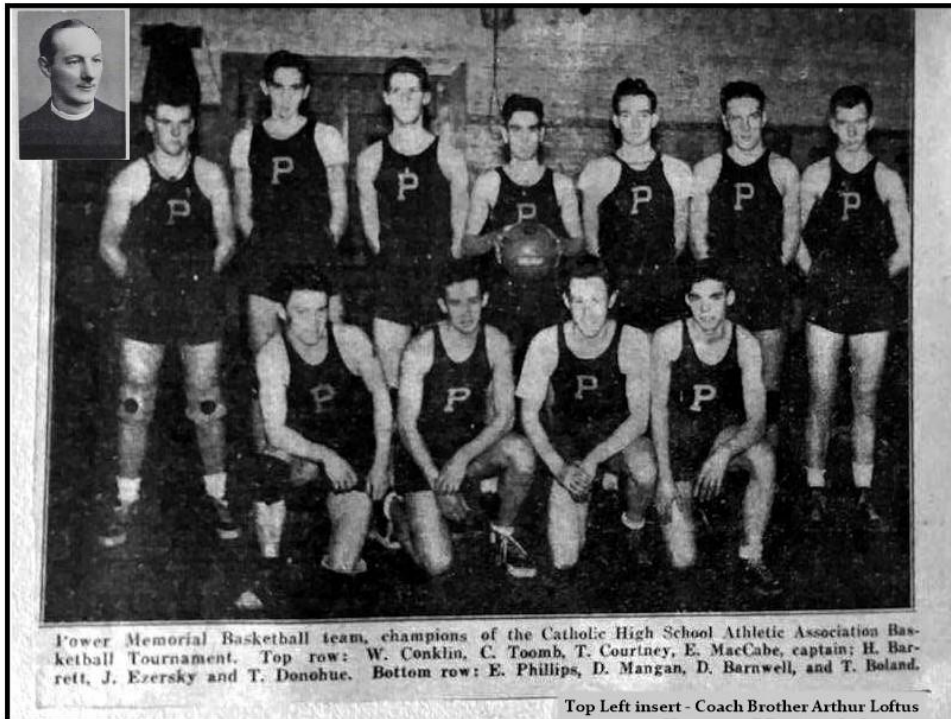
From four-score and nearly five years ago, we remember the 1939 CHSAA Varsity City Championship Basketball Team. Their identities were hidden for many years and their story remained untold. Today, we celebrate their remarkable achievement.

Coach - Brother Arthur A. Loftus

#15 - Dan Barnwell	# 7 - Henry Barrett
#16 - Tom Boland	#11 - Walter (Bud) Conklin
# 9 - Tom Courtney	#12 - Tom Donohue
#10 - John Ezersky	#14 - Dan Mangan
# 5 - Ed McCabe (Team Captain)	# 8 - Ed Phillips
# 6 - Cornelius Toomb	

# Power Memorial Academy

## 1939 Basketball Tournament Champions of the Catholic High School Athletic Association



A huge thank you to Steve Donohue's aunt who provided the only known picture of the 1939 CHSAA Championship Basketball Team.



## 1939 CHSAA Championship Basketball Team

Thank you to Joe Dombrowski, author of the "History of the CHSAA" sports series for providing the clip shown below.

### 1939 Power Quintet Wins C.H.S.A.A. Championship

Beats St. John's Prep, 27-25, on points by Toomb and Courtney in Last Minute

In a see-saw game that never saw the two teams separated by more than four points, Power Memorial High school's basketball team defeated St. John's Prep 27 to 25, and gained the Catholic High school's Athletic Association Championship last night before a capacity crowd at the DeGray gymnasium.

Trailing, 25 to 24 with only 20 seconds of play remaining, Power pulled the game out of the fire when Connie Toomb came through with a field goal and Tom Courtney sank a foul shot. The lead changed hands twice in the last two minutes and the crowd kept up a constant uproar.

Power, which earned it's play-off berth by winning the Manhattan-Richmond division title, put on display a virtually perfect zone defense that kept the St. John's attack from functioning smoothly through most of the game. St. John's got along all night until it started to move into scoring territory. Then the tall Power representatives covered their areas excellently and broke up the Redmen's attack time and again.

Power led at the end of the first quarter 6 to 4. St. John's moved out in front at half time, 16 to 15, and then Power regained the edge at the start of the last period 21 to 19. It kept this lead until Willie Goodwin, James Grubb and Ed Mitchell collaborated in putting the home five in front again 25 to 24. But Toomb and Courtney came through with the final three points for Power that meant victory.

Goodwin took the individual scoring honors with five field goals and three fouls for thirteen points. Toomb paced the Power attack with ten markers.

In a preliminary contest the St. John's junior Varsity stopped the Power junior varsity, 16 to 13.

By Leo Waldman herald - tribune 3/10/39



#### The line-up:

Power (27)				St. Johns (25)			
Brother Loftus				Herb Hess SJP'18			
	G.	F.	P.		G.	F.	P.
Toomb, lf....	5	0	10	Concagh, lf....	0	0	0
Ezersky, rf....	2	1	5	Mitchell.....	1	0	2
Phillips.....	0	0	0	Conway.....	0	0	0
Courtney, c....	0	1	1	Goodwin, rf....	5	3	13
McCabe, lg....	2	0	4	Grubb, c.....	4	0	8
Conklin, rg....	2	3	7	Gibbons, lg....	0	0	0
Donohue, c..	0	0	0	Mc Gorry, rg....	1	0	2
Totals.....	11	5	27	Totals.....	11	3	25

Officials- Flanagan and Begovich.

3/4/39 at Manhattan College  
Brooklyn Champ - St Johns Prep 42  
Bronx/Westchester Champ - Fordham Prep 20

1939 World Telegram All City Team  
F Frank King, LaSalle  
F Ed McLoughlin, All Hallows  
C Art Herbert, Brooklyn Prep  
G Jack Gibbons, St Johns Prep  
G Ed McCabe, Power Memorial

