

With a reunion set for the weekend of February 24-25 at Massari Arena featuring the final junior college team (1962-1963) and a NCAA post-season qualifying squad (1972-1973), the golden era of men's basketball at CSU Pueblo continues to be recognized.

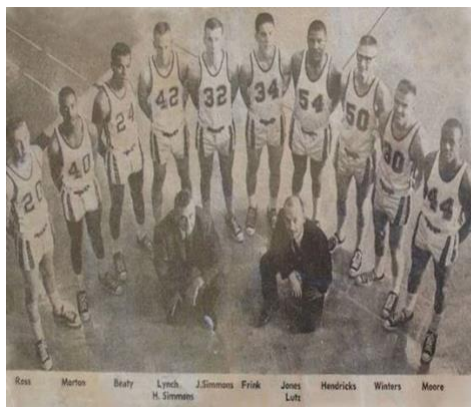
The "golden era" in men's basketball at CSU Pueblo spanned a 20-year period from the 1954-1955 season through the 1973-1974 campaign when the then-Indians posted a 416-152 record (73.2%) record.

Coached by CSUP Hall of Famer Harry Simmons, the 20 squads competed in 10 national tournaments, and four JUCO and one NAIA regionals. The first then-Southern Colorado State College team in 1964 had the region's best record among area schools, but could not qualify for the playoffs due to transition to a four-year school.

The first nine seasons in the "golden era" featured nine Pueblo Junior College teams that captured five Region IX titles (1955, 1956, 1957, 1960 and 1961), two runner-up finishes (1958 and 1959) and two regional semi-final appearances (1962 and 1963).

During this period, the Indians posted a 225-57 record (79.8%) highlighted by a national title in 1961 along with a third (1957), a sixth (1956) and an eighth (1956) at the junior college tournament in Hutchinson, Kan. Overall, PJC posted a 12-7 record in five national appearances.

Despite being eliminated in the regional semi-finals in 1963, the then-Pueblo College squad was voted the No. 1 team in junior college team in the country in mid-January before losing a pair of road games at Mesa College (now Colorado Mesa). The season ended with a series of injuries that carried over into the regionals.



The 1962-1963 Indians posted a 24-7 record and were led by sophomores Sam Batey (Denver East High, 19.0 points and 19.4 rebounds per game), Mike Frink (Wheat Ridge, 19.5 points) and Jim Simmons (Pueblo South, 10.3 points), and freshmen Sam Moore (Muskegon, Mich., 20.4 points per game) and Mike Lynch (Pueblo South, 8.3 points and 10.0 rebounds).

The top reserves were sophomore Scott Hendricks (Manitou Springs, 4.0 points and 5.0 rebounds), Gary Lyons (Salida, 1.8 points), Tony Jones (Texas, 1.5 points and 5.1 rebounds), and freshmen Robert Morton (Kentucky, 3.2 points), Joe Ross (Pueblo Centennial, 2.7 points) and Ron Winters (Pueblo South, 1.3 points).

Two Pueblo College players - Eugene Poston (1956) and Bob Warlick (1961) - were selected as the most valuable players at the national tournament with Harry "The Chief" Simmons being honored as the 1961 national coach of the year.

During the "golden era", six of Simmons players earned junior college All-American honors led by Poston, who was the national tournament's MVP despite playing on a sixth-place team. Poston was honorable mention in 1955 before being named to the first team in 1956. Other all-Americans were Ken Anderson (1957, second team), Al Roots (1958, third team), Curtis Jimerson (1960, second team), Les Pollack (1960, honorable mention) and Sam Smith (1961, first team).

In a book written by Michael L. Johnson entitled "THE JUCO CLASSIC", he wrote the following about Poston (Pueblo Centennial product) and his play in the 1956 national tournament.



"The preeminent performance of the day came in the evening's first quarter-final contest as (Poston) took the ballgame in hand, engineering an 86-77 upset of Cameron State. Though small for a center, the 6-4 sophomore possessed superior leaping ability, quickness, and timing and was a master of positioning under the basket where he completely commanded play. His game-high 39 points was not the top tally for the day, but it would have been higher, had he not missed nine free throws, and been less unselfish. Though giving away five inches, the Pueblo leader outscored and outrebounded day (Hannibal's 6-9 center Art Day). Poston was a wizard under the basket, amazing everyone with his fluid ability."

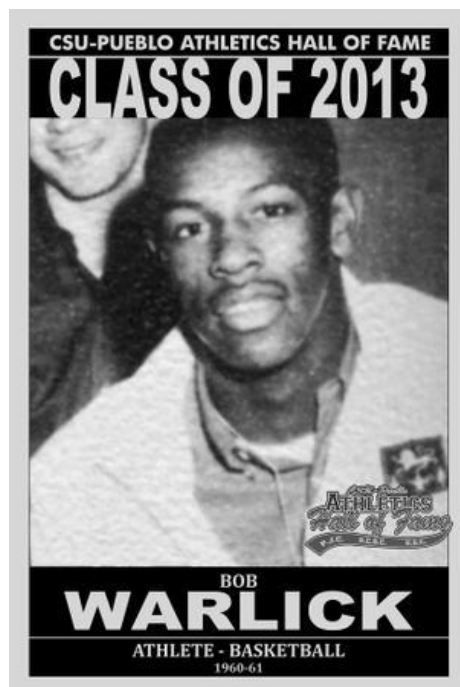
It should be noted at Day was the player that replaced Bill Russell as the center at the University of San Francisco. In a footnote, an opposing player said Poston "was about the smoothest ballplayer I ever saw in junior college. He was like a well-oiled ball bearing. If the ball hung on the rim, he got it."



In a 2001 article in the Pueblo Chieftain by CSU Pueblo Athletics Hall of Famer David Socier, Poston teammate Dewey Thornton said "Gene was unstoppable. He tore up that tournament. He had Adolph Rupp talking to Harry about him. Gene was a quiet, modest guy, but he took on the tallest and best center in junior college basketball and dominated them.

In the same article, Poston "praised" Simmons offensive system. "The tournament was fun because we all gelled at the right time. We came so close to winning it all (that one-point loss in the semifinals). Give Harry credit, Those teams had never seen anything like the offense we ran with all the screens, and options off them. Junior college basketball was mostly run and gun in those days."

The 1957 and 1960 NJCAA qualifying teams were led by All-Americans Anderson, Roots and Jimerson, who was one of the first black athletes to play at Wyoming and was one of the first African-Americans to serve in the FBI. Roots also starred in track and field where he placed nationally in the javelin for PJC before finishing his career at Nebraska.



But the crowning jewel of JUCO run at Pueblo College was the 1961 championship team led by Warlick, first-team All-American center Sam Smith and Norm Colglazier. All three finished their collegiate careers as NCAA Division I schools – Warlick at Pepperdine, Smith at Wichita State and Colglazier at North Texas.

At Pepperdine, Warlick led the Wave to a NCAA "Sweet 16" finish when he averaged 16.4 points and 9.6 rebounds per game in 1962. He played the NBA and ABA as a member of the Detroit Pistons, San Francisco Warriors, Milwaukee Bucks, Phoenix Suns, and Los Angeles Stars. He averaged 7.9 points per game in his professional career which was cut short by a knee injury.

In the national championships game, the Indians defeated Tyler of Texas 79-66 in the March 19 finale as Warlick scored 26 points enroute to being named MVP. A Hickory, N. C., product, Warlick (No. 50 in photo below) scored 86 points in four games.

PJC advanced to the national finals by defeating Snead Parsons (Boaz, Ala.) 80-64, Broome Tech (Binghamton, N.Y.) 69-64 and Eastern A&M (Wilburton, Okla.) as Warlick scored 27, 13 and 20 points in the first three games.

Three other Indians averaged in double-figures in the 1961 NJCAA tournament with guards Colglazier (42, Pueblo Centennial) and Gregg Smith (30, Canon City) adding 51 and 47 points, respectively. The 6-8 Smith (54, a University of New Mexico transfer) scored 45 points.

Waymond Dean (10, Denver Manual) missed scoring in double-figures by a point with 39 tallies for the four games. Reserves (Ron DeLeon (34, Pueblo Central) and Lenny Roybal (22, Santa Fe, N. M.) contributed 26 and 25 points, respectively.

Other members of the 10-man squad for the Hutchinson event were Chuck Williams (14, Denver Manual), Tony Hegler (52, Pueblo Central) and Jack Milam (4, Pueblo Central). Due to the roster limits for the national tournament, Jerry Hummitsch (20, Sheboygan, Wis.) and Isaac Pope (40, Tennessee) did not dress for the Hutchinson games.

In Johnson's "THE JUCO CLASSIC", he wrote the following - "Everyone was smiling. Since the school (Pueblo College) had a long tournament heritage and was long overdue, the Indians' championships was a popular one. Pueblo had been one of the first non-California participants in the Western States Tournament at Compton, the forerunner of the present national event. The Indians were a Midwest regional favorite in 1948, the national tournament's first year, before a snowstorm stranded them in Greensburg, Kansas, forcing them to forfeit a first-round game. Four subsequent trips to Hutchinson produced three consolation trophies, and a strong desire to attain the summit. It was fitting that the school earned the top prize in its last tourney appearance."

