

## Forty Years of Neenah Rocket Basketball Memories

### 1977

Coach Einerson had plenty of spots to fill on his roster heading into the 1977 campaign. He graduated out eight lettermen from the 1976 squad that ended their season 19-5, losing a close game to Madison West 61-59 in the WIAA State quarterfinals. However, the magic of Coach Einerson's program was the depth he developed and the ability to reload every year to compete for the FVA title. Neenah would win their third consecutive FVA title in 1977, albeit in a three way tie with Kimberly and Oshkosh West. The Rockets swept the Papermakers during the regular season and split with the Indians. However, Big Red won the rubber match in the WIAA Regional Final when they defeated the Indians 59-58. Neenah's inside duo of senior 6'5" Scott Voiss and junior 6'5" Tim Skalmoski were too much to handle as they combined for 39 points in the Rocket victory. One week later the Rockets defeated Beaver Dam 66-52 and Plymouth 61-51 to qualify for their 8th trip to the state tournament within a nine year span. Neenah crushed Janesville Craig 73-50 in the state quarterfinal before losing in the state semifinal 46-43 to the eventual state champions from Madison LaFollette. The Rockets ended the season 18-6. Rockets receiving all conference recognition in 1977 were Tim Skalmoski (1st team), Scott Voiss (honorable mention) and team MVP Greg Prichett (honorable mention).

### 1987

The "experts" thought Neenah would take a step back in 1987. To quote the 1987 Wisconsin Basketball Yearbook, "with only two returning lettermen, neither of which scored more than 42 points last season, the Rockets seem headed for the FVA's second division." What few outside Neenah knew was how talented the junior class was. Coach Einerson and the Rockets let the secret out within the first week of the 1986-87 season. Neenah blitzed Madison West 72-58 in the season opener and then defeated a very good SPASH team led by all state star Jay Schell 60-58 in overtime. The Red and White started the year 8-0 and was ranked #1 in the state until they lost to highly ranked Brookfield East during the Christmas holiday. Neenah rattled off five consecutive victories until they were upset by Oshkosh North 62-61 when Spartan junior Pat Ziebell hit a shot at the horn to defeat the Rockets. The Rockets would win their final five regular season games to clinch the FVA title with a 13-1 conference mark and overall regular season record of 18-2. Neenah handled Oshkosh West 67-54 in the regional semifinal to set up a meeting with Oshkosh North. In a game where Neenah dominated for three quarters the Spartans put together a furious rally in the fourth quarter to eliminate an 11 point deficit. However, a Jerry Curtin basket from the top of the key provided the winning margin as the Rockets marched on 52-49. At the Kolf Sports Center Neenah crushed Two Rivers 86-65 before losing a heart breaker in overtime to Fond du Lac 62-60. The Rockets ended their season 21-3. Rockets receiving all conference recognition in 1987 were Jerry Curtin (1st team), team MVP Craig Donaldson (1st team) and Paul Valentine (2nd team).

## 1997

Coach Tim Hopfensperger had a talented young core on his 1997 team with nine of his 15 players being underclassmen. Neenah won both of their non conference games over Plymouth 79-57 and Green Bay Notre Dame 60-55 to begin the season 2-0. The Rockets opened the FVA season with a 55-52 win over Appleton North at home. Neenah then lost a pair of close games to Kimberly 66-63 and eventual FVA co-champion Kaukauna 65-60. The Rockets would respond by winning six of their next eight games (including an impressive victory at eventual sectional champion Oshkosh North in late December) before losing to Kaukauna again in early February at home 81-61. From there, Neenah closed out the regular season going 4-2 down the stretch to finish 13-7 (11-7, 4th place in the FVA). The Rockets had a bye and then had the good fortune to host Menasha on Saturday afternoon, March 8th in the WIAA regional final. Big Red ended the Bluejay season 73-43. Six days later, the Rocket season would end at the hands of the Kaukauna Ghosts in the WIAA sectional semifinals 71-63. The Rockets ended their season 14-8. Rockets receiving all conference recognition in 1997 were team MVP Matt Hofkens (1st team) and Jon Fleming (2nd team).

## 2007

Coach Chas Pronschinske was beginning his second season at Neenah and had a nice mixture of veteran leadership and talented underclassmen in 2007. Neenah opened the season with a resounding 66-51 victory over Wausau East during Thanksgiving break. The Rockets won three out of their first five conference games. One of their two losses was a two point defeat in overtime 50-48 to the eventual WIAA state champion Oshkosh West Wildcats. Incredibly, Neenah would play in five conference games that would finish in overtime in the 2007 season. Following a 58-57 defeat to La Crosse Aquinas over the Christmas holiday, the Rockets would go 5-2 in FVA play in January. The first game in February may have been the most memorable game of the season, and the biggest win for the Neenah basketball program in years. On Friday night, February 2nd, the Neenah Rockets defeated Oshkosh West 43-42 in overtime at an electric Ron Einerson Fieldhouse. How impressive was that victory? Between the 2006 and 2007 seasons, Oshkosh West won consecutive state titles going 50-2. Following the win over the Wildcats, Neenah would finish their FVA season going 4-1 to conclude their conference mark at 14-4. The Rockets had a bye in the WIAA regional semifinal and defeated Sheboygan South 56-50 to earn their first WIAA regional title since 2003. At the UW- Oshkosh Kolf Sports Center, Sheboygan North scored late to defeat Neenah 54-53 in the WIAA sectional semifinal. The Rockets ended their season at 16-6. Rockets receiving all conference recognition in 2007 were Reed Becker (2nd team), Kahlil Trocme (honorable mention), David Goodman (honorable mention) and Justin Ziegler (honorable mention).